

**Iowa State University**

---

**From the Selected Works of Abby Dubisar**

---

April, 2010

# Palin/Pathos/Peter Griffin: Political Video Remix and Composition Pedagogy

Abby Dubisar, *Miami University*

Jason Palmeri, *Miami University*



Available at: [https://works.bepress.com/abby\\_dubisar/2/](https://works.bepress.com/abby_dubisar/2/)

Palin / Pathos / Peter Griffin: Political Video Remix and Composition Pedagogy

Abby M. Dubisar

Jason Palmeri

Miami University

Abstract: Political video remix has emerged as an important form of civic action, especially during the recent 2008 election season. Seeking to explore the ways in which political video remix can be integrated into rhetorically-based writing classes, we present three qualitative case studies of students' composing of video remixes in a fall 2008 course on "Political Rhetoric and New Media." Drawing on interview data and analyses of student work, we argue that political video remix assignments can potentially 1) enable students to compose activist texts for wide public audiences; 2) heighten students' understanding and application of key rhetorical concepts; 3) offer an opportunity for students and teachers to explore the delivery and circulation of digital texts; 4) highlight the important roles that parody and popular culture references can play in activist rhetoric; 5) encourage students and teachers to question the conventional privileging of 'originality' in composition classrooms. We also analyze how students' composing of remixes is influenced by the activist, technological and popular culture literacies they bring to the classroom. Keywords: remix; composition pedagogy; political rhetoric; multimodal composing; digital video; YouTube; civic participation; popular culture; technological literacy; delivery; parody

## **1. Introduction: Political Rhetoric in the Age of YouTube**

If the U.S. 2004 presidential election was the year of the blog (Lee, 2004; Rainie, 2005), the 2008 election was clearly the year of YouTube (Burgess & Green, 2009; Dietel-McLaughlin, 2009; Jenkins, 2008). Many of the candidates posted videos to YouTube, and these videos were responded to by numerous video bloggers (Vargas, 2007). As part of a presidential debate jointly sponsored by CNN and YouTube, users of the site submitted video questions—both ‘serious’ and ‘parodic’ in nature (Dietel-McLaughlin, 2009; Jenkins, 2008). In addition to crafting their own video content, YouTube users also often posted edited clips of media footage of the campaign, seeking to employ digital video tools to compose, amplify, and circulate a particular view of a candidate (Burgess & Green, 2009). Furthermore, many YouTube users have created complex remixes that combine clips of candidates with numerous popular culture references. For example, the democratic presidential primary was invigorated by a parodic remix of Apple’s 1984 advertisement that positioned Hillary Clinton as the Orwellian PC and Obama as the radical Macintosh (de Vellis, 2007). Later in the campaign, voters circulated the “Yes We Can” remix in which the hip-hop artist, will.i.am, collaborated with others to transform Obama’s Iowa primary victory speech into a catchy song (WeCan08, 2008). This video was then transformed again to create a “John.he.is” remix that presented McCain as being highly negative and committed to the status quo (Election08, 2008).

Beyond these well-known, “professional” remixes, YouTube has also hosted numerous remixes composed by seemingly amateur or “prosumer” (Anderson, 2003) composers: George W. Bush singing the U2 song, “Sunday Bloody Sunday” (rx2008, 2006); John McCain singing an old school rap song (headzup, 2008); Hillary Clinton dodging obviously fake bombs in Kosovo (unak78, 2008); and many more. Despite the fact that many of the political remixes

found on YouTube and other digital spaces are often quite humorous and/or irreverent in nature, they also can have a substantial influence on how candidates and issues are viewed (Dietel-McLaughlin, 2009; Warnick, 2007). In this sense, the digital political remix is an important form of citizen action that should be of interest to composition scholars and teachers. If political video remix is one way in which young people participate in public civic discourse, then it makes sense for us to engage students in both analyzing and *producing* these kinds of texts (Dietel-McLaughlin, 2009).

Although scholars have called for compositionists to attend to the implications of political remix, there has been very little research that focuses on *students'* composing of remixed activist videos. To this end, we present three case studies of students who composed political video remixes during Fall 2008 in a first-year, honors writing class on "Political Rhetoric and New Media."

In seeking to analyze students' composing of political video remixes, we were particularly interested in engaging the following three questions:

- 1) How are students' remixes influenced by the cultural ecologies (Selfe & Hawisher, 2004) in which they are produced?
- 2) What kinds of rhetorical work do students' remixes accomplish and what kinds of rhetorical choices contribute to making a remix effective in reaching, engaging, and persuading its audience?
- 3) What do students report learning from the process of composing and distributing remixes?

## **2. Literature Review: Remix Composing as Multimodal Literacy Practice**

With the rise of contemporary digital technologies that transform words, images, and sounds into numeric representations (Manovich, 2001), it becomes increasingly possible and common for everyday composers to craft remixes or assemblages by editing and rearranging existing texts. In light of the rising prevalence of remix as a form of composing in which youth engage (Jenkins, 2008; Lessig, 2008a; Miller, 2004), numerous compositionists have called for us to teach students to craft remixed texts that creatively recombine existing audio, video, and alphabetic elements (Brooks, 2006; DeVoss & Webb, 2008; Dietel-McLaughlin, 2009; Digirhet, 2008; Johnson-Eilola & Selber, 2007; Reid, 2007; Rice, 2006; Ridolfo & DeVoss, 2009; Sirc, 2004). Although these scholars often point to digital technologies as a key impetus for valuing remixed composing, it is important to note that conventional print writing often relies as well on the re-arrangement of existing quotations and concepts (Hess, 2006; Johnson-Eilola & Selber, 2007; Lessig, 2008). Furthermore, we should remember that contemporary digital remix artists regularly draw upon and extend the practices of past avant-garde artists and writers who composed well before the digital age (Delagrange, 2009; Rice, 2007; Sirc, 2004; Ulmer, 1994).

In articulating the value of teaching students to compose digital remixes, scholars have argued that experience with remixed composition can: encourage students to develop a critical understanding of issues of intellectual property and fair use (DeVoss & Webb, 2008; Johnson-Eilola & Selber, 2007); offer students a powerful method of invention (Delagrange, 2009; Rice, 2006; Sirc, 2004); provide a relatively accessible way for students to begin experimenting with digital multimodal composing (Anderson, 2008; Brooks, 2006); and prepare students for composing the kinds of remixed texts that are increasingly common in workplace and civic realms (Dietel-McLaughlin, 2009; Johnson-Eilola, 2005; Ridolfo & DeVoss, 2009). In this study, we seek to extend this work by offering qualitative evidence of what students can learn

about political rhetoric and activism by crafting video remixes.

In addition to drawing on scholarship about remix specifically, we also have been influenced by numerous scholars who have advocated that compositionists engage students in composing multimodal texts that blend images, words, and sounds (Diogenes & Lunsford, 2006; Hocks, 2003; Journet, 2007; McKee, 2006; New London Group, 2002; Selfe, 2007; Shipka, 2005; WIDE, 2005; Wysocki, Johnson-Eilola, Selfe, & Sirc, 2004; Yancey, 2004). In particular, we have been inspired by scholarship that has offered case studies of students' composing of multimodal texts, showing: that many students find multimodal projects engaging (Anderson, 2008; Ellertson, 2003; Ross, 2003); that students often arrive in our classes with strong multimodal literacies (George, 2002; Selfe, 2004; Selfe & Hawisher, 2004); and that students can learn transferable rhetorical concepts through the composing of multimodal texts (Braun, McCorkle & Wolf, 2007; Comstock & Hocks, 2006; Ellertson, 2003; Keller, 2007; Ross, 2003; Takayoshi & Selfe, 2007). In presenting our own analyses of student-produced remix videos, we seek to extend this literature by demonstrating ways that multimodal composing can both enable students to reach wide public audiences and deepen students' ability to analyze political oratory.

In addition to investigating the multimodal texts that students compose, we also think it important to elucidate the technological (Kirtley, 2005; Selfe & Hawisher, 2004), activist (Alexander, 2006; Blackburn, 2003; Goncalves, 2005), and popular culture (Dyson, 2003; Williams, 2008) literacies that students bring to our classrooms. Rather than making broad claims about the entire generation of "digital natives" (Palfrey & Gasser, 2008), we seek instead to construct more nuanced portraits of the diverse "cultural ecologies" (Selfe & Hawisher, 2004) that influence students' digital multimodal composing. To this end, we present three case studies that articulate how students' past experiences with technology, activism, and popular culture

informed their production and distribution of multimodal texts.

Finally, we seek in this study to contribute to the wider scholarly conversation about ways that digital technologies—blogs, websites, listservs, flash animations, video games—both enable and constrain possibilities for democratic political participation (Alexander, 2006; Barton, 2005; Castells, 2001; Dadas, 2008; Losh, 2009; McKee, 2002; Queen, 2008; Simmons & Grabill, 2007; Warnick, 2002; Warnick, 2007). In particular, we hope to extend this conversation by offering a portrait of how a few student activists employed social networking sites such as YouTube and Facebook to intervene in the discourse of the 2008 election.

### **3. Context: The Cultural Ecology of “Political Rhetoric and New Media”**

Before analyzing the ways participants’ diverse literacy histories influenced their composing of remixes, we will first discuss the context of the course in which all the students were enrolled. In Fall 2008 during the height of the presidential election, Jason taught an honors writing course entitled “Political Rhetoric and New Media” that was designed primarily for an audience of first-year students. Most students in the class had the opportunity to review a brief course description before enrolling:

In this writing and cultures core course, we will explore the political discourses of elections and social movements in the United States, critically examining the rhetorical strategies that activists, politicians, and media commentators use in order to persuade their audiences. We will place special emphasis on interrogating the ways in which new digital technologies (blogs, social networking sites, podcasts, digital videos) are both enabling and constraining possibilities for democratic political participation. In addition to writing analyses of the political texts of others, we will also intervene in contemporary political debates by composing our own persuasive digital texts.

Influenced by the course description, many students reported that they chose this particular section of the course because they were interested in politics and/or technology. Jason employed Sharon Crowley and Debra Hawhee’s *Ancient Rhetorics for Contemporary Students* (2008) as a



core text that was supplemented by numerous PDF articles and other online texts (blogs, videos, audio files, websites). This course was taught in a laptop classroom in which every student was required to bring their own Mac or PC laptop to class; the room also had a networked teacher station with projector as well as four plasma screens to enable collaboration.<sup>1</sup>

In the first four weeks of the course, Jason focused on introducing students to key rhetorical concepts such as kairos, enthymemes, ethos, pathos, commonplaces, enargeia, delivery, and parepsis. Students practiced applying these rhetorical concepts to analysis of historical and contemporary political speeches, debates, political television ads (contemporary and historical), websites, and blogs. For their first major project, students wrote an 8 – 12 page rhetorical analysis of a political speech (or collection of speeches) of their choice. At the same time, students were also keeping their own political blogs in which they analyzed and made arguments about contemporary political rhetoric.

After completing the rhetorical analysis paper, the course then turned to the political remix project. The assignment asked students to create a remix of a political speech or other form of political discourse. In explaining the rhetorical purpose of the remix, Jason suggested that students should: persuade an audience to understand the source text in a new way, address an audience different from the one the source text initially intended to address, and, perhaps, offer critical commentary about a political figure or issue. See Appendix A for the complete assignment prompt (which we invite instructors to remix for their own ends).

In making this assignment, Jason hoped that students would gain a more critical understanding of the rhetorical implications of political remixes if they had the opportunity to

---

<sup>1</sup> Although the participants in our study differed substantially in their experiences and backgrounds using technology, they all were quite privileged to have access to personally-owned laptop computers. Especially because digital technologies are increasingly playing an important role in civic action, it is important that we attend to and take steps to redress the persistent digital divide (Banks, 2005; Grabill, 2003; Moran, 1999; Selfe & Hawisher, 2004).

produce one. He also surmised that experience editing political video and audio would help students develop a more critical perspective about the rhetorical ways in which media organizations construct reality through editing practices.<sup>2</sup> Jason further conjectured that the process of remixing might help hone students' skills in rhetorical analysis, since a remixer must necessarily attend closely to the ways in which language is used in her or his source texts. Finally, Jason hoped that some students might produce activist texts that circulated widely on the web—that students might use remix as a way to intervene in the 2008 election.

While students were working on this project, the class dedicated a good deal of time to analyzing political remixes on YouTube as well as parodic news segments from programs such as *The Daily Show*, *The Colbert Report*, and *Saturday Night Live*. The class also spent two periods learning about sound and video editing software (iMovie, Windows MovieMaker, and Audacity), completing workshops in which Jason demonstrated how to make a “mini-remix” and then students practiced making “mini-remixes” on their own computers (which they were invited to share with their peers at the end of class). We also discussed free applications—Zamzar.com and the Firefox media converter extension—that could enable students to download online videos to their laptops so that they could edit them.

Finally, the class also analyzed texts about issues of copyright, fair use, and creative commons (Faden, 2007; Lessig, 2008b). In particular, the class group considered ways in which using small pieces of a copyrighted work for the purposes of analysis, parody, and/or critique might fall under “fair use” guidelines, but also addressed how slippery and undefined fair use was when it came to the practice of video remix (DeVoss & Porter, 2006; DeVoss & Webb,

---

<sup>2</sup> Our understanding of *critical* literacies and rhetorical criticism in the context of the pedagogical goals for this course is influenced by Barbara Warnick, who in *Critical Literacy in a Digital Era* relies on Kathleen Tyner to define critical literacy as, “a literacy that encourages a reflective, questioning stance toward forms and content of print and electronic media” (6). We invoke such literacy throughout our essay.

2008; Lessig, 2008a; Rife, 2007). In the end, Jason instructed students that they should be prepared to make an argument for why their remix should be protected by fair use, but that they should be aware that other audiences (most notably, the RIAA: Recording Industry Association of America) might have a different point of view.

Students received peer and instructor response on drafts of the remixes, and they also showed the final drafts of their videos to the whole class on a “showcase day.” Jason demonstrated how to publish final videos to YouTube, but he also noted that students could turn in their projects via Blackboard or on CD/DVD if they did not wish to be as public. Along with the final draft of the remix, students also turned in a reflective essay (at least 750 words long) in which they discussed the rhetorical choices they made and what they learned from completing the project.

#### **4. Methods: Valuing Student Voices**

In constructing the case studies that follow, our primary sources of data were interviews with students and analysis of student-produced texts. Because the students recruited for this research were in Jason’s course, we made a special effort to ensure that his students did not feel in any way pressured to participate in the study. To this end, we decided that Abby (who was not an instructor of the students) would be the one who would recruit participants and conduct interviews. Abby came to Jason’s course once during the middle of the term (shortly after the remix assignment was completed) to recruit interviewees, and she returned once at the end of the term to recruit participants who would be willing to have their course writing analyzed in the study. During both recruitment sessions, we made it very clear to students that Jason would not find out who chose to participate until after the course was completed and grades were turned in.

In the end, fifteen students agreed to have their work analyzed in the study and four students agreed to be interviewed. In these semi-structured interviews, Abby asked students a range of questions about their previous experiences with digital media and activism as well as about their experiences in the “Political Rhetoric and New Media” course. In constructing these questions, we were influenced by oral life history methodology (Brandt, 2001; Selfe & Hawisher, 2004); however, our interviews lasted 45 minutes to an hour so we were only able to capture a relatively limited amount of information about students’ literacy histories. In addition to asking students questions about their past and present literacy experiences, Abby also provided students an opportunity to bring an example of their writing from the course to the interview; she then asked students numerous discourse-based questions in an attempt to uncover the kinds of rhetorical choices they made as well as the composing processes they employed. (See Appendix B for more details about participant recruitment and interview design).

### **5. Case Study: “There’s a Lot More that Goes Into a Remix Than You Think” (Mike)**

Mike is a white, male, first year student, majoring in international relations.<sup>3</sup> By the time he came to the “Political Rhetoric and New Media” seminar, Mike had already gained a wide variety of experiences engaging digital technologies, especially in school settings. Starting in his sophomore year of high school, Mike participated in a program in which he was lent a laptop by the school that he could use in class and take home. At that time, Mike developed the habit of bringing a laptop to class to take notes—a practice he continued with his personally-owned Mac laptop at college. In addition to using a laptop for alphabetic writing in high school, Mike also took a computer science class in which he learned java programming and a media production class in which he shot and edited videos. Although Mike expressed that he did not feel very

---

<sup>3</sup> All participants in this study are referred to using pseudonyms.

comfortable with or skilled at alphabetic writing, he felt a much stronger sense of enjoyment and accomplishment when he composed videos. In addition to making videos for the school television station and other course projects, Mike also kept a self-sponsored video journal in high school as a way to reflect on his thoughts and feelings in a medium he found easier to use than print.

Although Mike noted that he had “always been a computer guy,” his interest in political activism was more recent. He described himself as not having been very political growing up, finding himself mostly just agreeing with his parents’ “very conservative” views. In his senior year, however, Mike took an engaging AP government course that awakened his interest in following political news and developing his own opinions on issues. As a result of this process of political exploration, Mike decided to support Barack Obama in the democratic primary, volunteering for his campaign by participating in telephone and door-to-door canvassing. When asked to discuss a media text that was particularly influential on his thinking about politics, Mike cited the parodic Comedy Central television show *The Colbert Report*, noting that it combined humor and serious topics in a way that appealed to his generation. In addition to watching Colbert, Mike also regularly viewed and read other news media (CNN, *New York Times*), and he asserted that viewers really need to be aware of the day’s news in order to understand all of Colbert’s jokes.

In developing his video remix, Mike was especially influenced by a lecture that Thomas Friedman gave on campus about “the green revolution”—a lecture in which Friedman made the argument that the United States needed to become a leader in inventing and implementing clean, renewable sources of energy. Friedman’s lecture also critiqued contemporary politicians, especially Republicans, for promoting a policy of “drill, baby, drill” that treated energy issues

like “a party,” ignoring the difficult choices necessary for breaking our addiction to fossil fuels. After attending this lecture, Mike composed a blog post in which he sought to summarize this argument for his classmates and other readers. In addition to writing text restating Friedman’s key claims, Mike also embedded three YouTube videos in his blog: a clip of Republicans chanting “drill baby drill” at the convention, a clip of Friedman explaining his views on *Meet the Press*, and a clip of Sarah Palin and Joe Biden discussing energy issues during the Vice Presidential debate. Clips from all three of these videos (and many more) ultimately found a place in Mike’s remixed composition. In this way, Mike’s blog functioned as a kind of digital commonplace book for the video he ultimately produced—an inventive space in which he could both gather video materials and begin to formulate an argument.

Drawing upon the YouTube clips that he embedded on his blog, the first 40 seconds of Mike’s remixed video juxtapose clips of Friedman and Tom Brokaw discussing renewable energy with clips of various Republicans (John McCain, Michael Steele, Rudi Giuliani, the convention audience) repeating variations of the “drill baby drill” slogan. For example, after showing a clip in which McCain cheers “drill baby drill,” Mike then cuts to a clip of Brokaw noting soberly that allowing more off-shore oil drilling would not lead to “any more productivity for 10 more years.” At about 20 seconds into the video, Mike begins to layer in an instrumental soundtrack culled from the Vengaboys famous hit song, “We Like to Party.” At 41 seconds, Mike includes a still image of McCain at a rally along with a classic MTV-style title that identifies what is to come as a music video for the song “We Like Oil,” performed by “The Mavericks.” At this point, the instrumental soundtrack begins to include the repetitive refrain “we like oil...we like, we like oil”; the “we like” comes from the original song, but the word “oil” is spoken by McCain. The “we like oil” song is accompanied by a wide range of visuals:

still images and videos of Palin and McCain smiling and looking carefree; images of oil spills and hurricane damaged oil rigs; images of an elderly man dancing in a Six Flags amusement park commercial; a brief clip from the “We Like to Party” video itself. These still and moving images change in time with the beat of the song.

At the end of the song, Mike reinforced his message with two title slides of white text on a black background. The first title slide reads: “Say No to Drilling. Say Yes To Inventing” while the final title slide reads “Going Green Is No Party. Don’t Vote Like It Is.” In many ways, this final alphabetic message summed up what the earlier audio-visual juxtapositions had already shown so well: the pro-drilling Republicans’ “drill baby drill” rhetoric treated energy policy as a kind of “party,” ignoring the real costs of our dependence on fossil fuels and avoiding the hard work of developing renewable alternatives. Ultimately, Mike’s use of alphabetic title slides secured his video’s meaning, perhaps revealing his knowledge that YouTube audiences are often looking for quick and clear messages. In order to reduce the risk of being misinterpreted, Mike tightened his arguments with these clear alphabetic statements. In this way, Mike demonstrates a truly *multi-modal* understanding of the art of remix, recognizing ways in which words can be strategically used to reinforce and clarify more ambiguous visual messages. In many ways, composing a successful remix requires students to make rhetorical choices about which modalities best enable them to achieve their purpose. Once students have gained experience strategically deploying the unique affordances of particular modalities in making a remix, they may be able to transfer this rhetorical knowledge to composing other kinds of multimodal texts.

In explaining the rhetorical choices he made in composing the “We Like Oil” video, Mike noted that his decision to create a “catchy and amusing” music video was influenced by his knowledge of his “audience – YouTube viewers – and what they liked to watch.” Mike argued

that he decided to remix the song “We Like To Party” not only because it fit his (and Friedman’s) argument about the Republicans, but also because the “song is well known by many people so that altering one word would make it still recognizable.” In choosing to include a clip of the elderly man dancing, Mike noted that “the video of the Six Flags man dancing has long been a YouTube favorite; it just makes people laugh. So I took this particular video and used it to satirically relate to what I saw ‘drill, baby, drill’ being, a joke.” As an avid consumer of viral YouTube videos, Mike had a keen sense that humor was an essential ingredient for finding an audience, and thus he sought to portray his message in as funny a way as possible. Although Mike focused especially on making sure his text was humorous (and thus appealed to pathos), he also noted that he wanted to enhance his credibility or ethos by including “extrinsic proofs like the testimony of experts like Thomas Friedman and Tom Brokaw.”

“We Like Oil” was very well received by Mike’s peers, provoking both desired laughter and positive comments. Yet, despite the fact that Mike’s video was well-composed and funny, he has to date only received about 145 views on YouTube, largely failing to meet his goal to use “the new media outlet—YouTube—to spread this message at an exponential rate.” It is notable that Mike did not add tags or description for the video, nor did he post it as a response to another video, or (to our knowledge) attempt to spread it through social networks such as Facebook. Furthermore, his parody relied on a dated, though well-known, pop song that may not have resonated with YouTube’s most fervent users.

Interestingly, Mike’s video eventually ran afoul of copyright policing on YouTube. Several months after Mike posted his video, YouTube removed the audio track from it because he had not secured permission to use the Vengaboys song from Warner Music Group. (Without the audio track, the video clearly has less chance of finding an audience.) From a legal point of



view, it is unclear whether Mike's sampling of the song falls under the protection of fair use. Under an expansive reading of the fair use doctrine, we argue that Mike only used a small portion of the song, which he then substantially altered for the purposes of parody and critique. Furthermore, we argue that Mike's use is unlikely to negatively affect the market value of the original song. If anything, Mike's remix keeps the song's chorus in circulation and potentially increases the market for it. Yet, if a more limited understanding of fair use prevails, [one could argue that](#) Mike's borrowing of the chorus in particular [is](#) as substantial use of a large portion of the original work that would thus require that he secure permission from the copyright holder. In addition, [one could argue](#) that Mike's work is not a parody of the "We Like to Party" song itself but more a parody of Republican rhetoric (and thus the fair use protection for parody doesn't apply in this case). In many ways, Mike's video illustrates why it is essential that we composition specialists become strong advocates for protecting and extending fair use. Without the ability to incorporate popular cultural artifacts into their videos, young people such as Mike would find it much more difficult to craft activist texts designed to reach audiences of their peers.

Although Mike clearly encountered some difficulties in the delivery of his text, he still learned a good deal from composing it. As we have discussed, he developed a strong sense of rhetorical purpose and thought carefully about how he could craft ethical and pathetic appeals (humor, extrinsic proofs) to adapt his text to his chosen audience of YouTube viewers as well as the class. Showing his understanding of remix as a rhetorical art, Mike noted in an interview that "there's a lot more that goes into making a remix than you think. You actually have to have a goal in mind, like what message you want to convey, and then using all the different [rhetorical] methods we've been learning about, deciding what will be most effective to get that message

across.” And, perhaps most significantly, Mike found in video remix a form of activist composing that he enjoyed and felt comfortable doing—noting in an interview that the remix assignment was by far the most interesting aspect of the class. For Mike, a student who reported often struggling with writing alphabetic text, the opportunity to compose a video remix gave him a space in which he felt he could claim a kind of authority and expertise as an activist composer that he was hesitant to claim with alphabetic text. As Mike noted in his reflective memo, “taking my interest in video editing and using it as a launching point for political rhetoric was fun for me and very beneficial.” From Mike’s experience, it is clear that offering opportunities for video composing can be a way to help (at least some) students become engaged in studying and practicing activist rhetoric.

#### **6. Case Study: “Something I never I thought I could do” (Susan)**

Susan is a white, female, first-year student, majoring in elementary education and minoring in history. When asked about her previous technology experience, Susan noted that she remembered playing computer games when in elementary school, and that she also took a computer class during her junior year in which she learned about Microsoft Word, PowerPoint, and Excel. Despite these experiences, however, Susan still described herself as “not very good with computers in general.” Before taking Jason’s course, Susan had no prior experience with audio/video editing and she initially worried if she would be capable of completing the remix assignment. Although Susan was clearly apprehensive about the media production aspect of the course, she was also eager to develop her technological skills; indeed, one reason she chose to sign up for a “laptop English” class was that an advisor in the College of Education had encouraged her to take courses that could help her become more proficient in the kinds of digital technologies she would need to use as a teacher.

In addition to wanting to develop technological literacy, Susan also chose to take the class because she had an interest in politics. Beyond learning about political issues in a high school government course, Susan also reported regularly discussing political concerns with her family and friends. To keep informed about political events, Susan noted that she read numerous newspapers (both print and online) during high school and college, but she was skeptical of the reliability of other online sources such as blogs. Although Susan described herself as a politically aware voter, she stated that she did not consider herself an activist because she was not involved in letter writing, campaigning, or protesting--with the exception of one letter she wrote to a state house representative as an assignment for government class (a letter that was, sadly, never answered). Partly because she did not self-identity as an activist, Susan specifically chose to avoid making a partisan electoral remix (like Mike did), noting that she felt "beat over the head" by election videos and wanted to come up with a project that would be different from the rest of the class. As a history minor, Susan knew that she wanted to incorporate American history into the remix project in some way. After perusing audio and video recordings of famous speeches on the free archival website, [Americanrhetoric.com](http://Americanrhetoric.com), Susan decided to focus her project on analyzing the ways that "commonplaces of America" have or have not changed in U.S. political discourse over the past fifty years.

In describing her video remix, Susan noted that it is "an exploration of how presidents and presidential candidates have defined America and its people." Susan's final remix consisted primarily of a montage of spoken words from American presidents and presidential candidates, played one after another and culled (mostly) from hours of listening to presidential speeches archived on the [Americanrhetoric.com](http://Americanrhetoric.com) website. Susan's video opens with an instrumental track of "The Star Spangled Banner" and three intertitles on a background of the Statue of Liberty and

American flag, which read, " America Is.../ Commonplaces past and present about what 'America' means/ From some of the most powerful people in our country's history." Once the audio track of quotations begins, the visual track continuously features an American flag waving on a flagpole outdoors with trees and a blue cloudy sky in the background.

Susan did not identify the speakers (as we do below to credit the original sources and show the breadth of texts Susan is drawing upon) because she wanted the emphasis to be on their words rather than on who they were or in what context they were speaking. The transcript of Susan's audio track is as follows:

"America is a nation of exceptionalism and we are to be that shining city on a hill as President Reagan so beautifully said." (Palin)  
"America is that shining beacon on a hill." (Obama)  
"Whoever would understand in his heart the meaning of America would find it in the life of Abraham Lincoln." (Reagan)  
"America is still the greatest producer, exporter, and importer." (McCain)  
"America is once again that last best hope for all who are called to the cause of freedom." (Obama)  
"In America we change things that need to be changed." (McCain)  
"The American people in their righteous might will win through to absolute victory." (FDR)  
"As Americans we find communism profoundly repugnant." (Kennedy)  
"What is that American promise? It's a promise that says each of us has the freedom to make of our own lives what we will. But then we also have obligations to treat each other with dignity and respect." (Obama)  
"I believe in an America that is officially neither Catholic, Protestant, nor Jewish." (Kennedy)  
"It is with the book of history and not with isolated pages that the United States will ever wish to be identified." (Eisenhower)

In seeking to craft a remix that made an "argument for unity or patriotism," Susan was very deliberate in her rhetorical choices. The video of the waving flag and the instrumental soundtrack of the national anthem clearly cued the audience to read this text as an "inspiring patriotic film." In an attempt to bridge partisan divides, Susan opened with Palin and Obama delivering the same trope about America being a "city on a hill" and then moved on to Reagan

who also famously used that metaphoric phrase, initially coined by John Winthrop, to describe the United States. Furthermore, Susan noted that she chose to end with Eisenhower since she felt that he was a relatively neutral figure who could be appreciated by Democrats and Republicans alike, once again consciously making choices of arrangement to reinforce her unity theme.

In many ways Susan's audio track was deeply complex, weaving together multiple sources in order to make a coherent argument. Her visual track, on the other hand, lingered on a shot of a waving American flag for over a minute. Although this image certainly fit her theme of patriotic unity, it did not fit the expectations viewers have of the quick visual cuts in remix videos. In responding to a draft, Jason specifically suggested to Susan that the visual track was not adding a great deal to the project and that she might consider either revising the visual track to be more complexly layered or eliminating the visual track entirely and thus making an audio remix. In the end, Susan remained committed to doing a video project because she was motivated to learn more about composing with iMovie, but she did not substantially revise her visual track. We see a variety of possible reasons for Susan's decision. On the one hand, her focus on a looped single clip was a conscious attempt to reinforce the unity theme. On the other hand, the simplicity of Susan's visual track may reflect the fact that this was her first attempt at editing video and she had only a limited amount of time to complete this project.

Interestingly, Susan's argument about the similarity of commonplaces of America over time is not originally the claim she intended to make. In her reflective essay, Susan addressed the evolution of the project from her initial concept to the outcome:

Originally, I expected the result to be funny, in an ironic sort of way. I expected that the commonplaces would have changed significantly over time, and contradictions would arise...the statements I found were remarkably similar...Commonplaces are, after all, statements that a society agrees on...Because so many of the quotes that I found are still commonplaces today, my project almost turned into an inspiring patriotic film.

Whereas Mike began his project with a clear argument in mind and then selected and edited materials to support it, Susan approached her project as more of a historical investigation, and she flexibly remained open to letting her argument evolve. Furthermore, Susan remained conscious of other arguments that could be made about “commonplaces” in U.S. political rhetoric. Although she found that the commonplaces that U.S. presidents’ employed were quite similar, Susan reflected that if she had “looked at more countercultural groups [she] probably could have found more different ones and had more of a contrast.” In her interview, Susan noted that she even considered including a critical quote about America from Malcolm X, but ultimately decided not to do so since she liked the unity theme she had developed.

In many ways, Susan’s remix can be viewed not just as a final product but also as an act of invention for a critical rhetorical analysis of commonplaces in U.S political rhetoric. After all, Susan noted in her interview with Abby that she learned much about rhetorical commonplaces from all the clips she gathered (including those she did not ultimately use). Furthermore, Susan’s discussion of the contrasting commonplaces she chose not to include could potentially lead her to develop a research project that took a more multifaceted perspective on the differing ways commonplaces function in both electoral and social movement rhetoric.

Whereas Mike consciously attempted to reach and persuade wider public audiences, Susan originally thought of her audience as comprised largely of her “peers in the class” who would see the remix both during the peer response workshop and during the final class showcase. And, indeed, Susan’s work was well-received by members of the class who appreciated its patriotic unifying message during what was a highly contested and divisive election. After Susan completed the project she decided to share it more widely on her Facebook page and ultimately uploaded it to YouTube. Admittedly, Susan’s YouTube video has not received many views, but

then again she never intended to craft a humorous viral video that would spread (as some other students in the class did).

Although Susan clearly appreciated how the remix project enabled her to learn about the history of political rhetoric, she was most pleased by the way the project helped expand her technological literacy by introducing her to digital audio/video composing. In her reflection, Susan noted that her first reaction to the remix assignment was “No way. There is absolutely no way I will be able to do this. I have no ideas and no skills for this kind of project.” In the end, though, Susan stated in the interview that the video remix project was her favorite part of the course. In explaining how she moved from dreading the project to loving it, Susan related that she found the in-class workshop on iMovie to be very helpful, noting that it was beneficial for her to be able to watch the instructor edit video on screen and then try to replicate the same action on her laptop. Susan also noted the importance of choosing a topic that interested her and enabled her to draw upon her extensive background in history. In this way, Susan’s story reminds us that not all students come to classes with highly developed video/technological literacies. In order to create an environment in which all students can succeed with such projects, it is helpful to offer hands-on, in-class workshops as well as to craft flexible assignments that can enable students to draw on other literacy practices with which they feel more comfortable.

Significantly, Susan noted in her final reflection on the class that her newly developed knowledge of video production had already helped her succeed in her other coursework at the university: “I had no idea how to do movie editing before this class. At all. . . .It’s an extremely useful skill. I’ve already been assigned a video project in another class and I would be totally lost if I hadn’t had to do the remix project.” Ultimately, Susan’s story points to the ways in which video remix assignments, especially when accompanied with revision and reflection in

writing courses, can support the development of more conventional academic literacies. After all, Susan learned a great deal about the history of political rhetoric by completing the project, and she also developed technological literacy skills that have proved useful in her other coursework at the university. Susan's case also reminds us that many students are uncomfortable with appearing partisan or taking positions that might conflict with their peers or instructor.<sup>4</sup> Although we think it is valuable to allow students to use video remix to make partisan claims (as [Mike](#) did), we also think it equally valuable to support students in using remix as a methodology for conducting and presenting historically-oriented research (as Susan did).

### **7. Case Study: "I wanted to reach a new audience" (Scott)**

Scott is a 19 year-old, white, male, second-year transfer student, majoring in political science and planning to go to law school after graduation. Although Scott described himself as "not very tech savvy," he nevertheless came to the class with a good bit of experience using software such as Microsoft Word, Excel, Google documents and Facebook. Perhaps most relevant to this project, Scott took a media production class in high school in which he shot and edited news stories using digital video cameras and Windows MovieMaker (the same program he ultimately used to produce his remix).

Of all the students in this study, Scott was exceptional in the amount of previous activist experience that he brought to the class. When Scott was in high school, his father ran for the state house as a Democrat, a campaign Scott was involved with both as a volunteer canvasser and observer. From this experience, he learned strategies for addressing contentious issues relevant to

---

<sup>4</sup> It is important to note, however, that Susan did complete a more activist final project in the course—a blog and video designed to address many misconceptions about Catholicism that she had encountered during her first year at college. Although Susan wanted to avoid making a partisan claim about the election, she was more open to making persuasive claims about issues of faith.



his political district and formed an understanding of how to communicate with the voting audience. In high school, Scott also took an AP government course, which included a "mock legislative" program that required students to compete with other schools' teams, discussing such issues as freedom of speech.

At the time of the interview, Scott had been writing letters to the editor of his hometown newspaper, often correcting misleading information that the newspaper had printed about Barack Obama. Scott also published these letters on a personal blog, so that even if the newspaper chose not to feature his letters, his words could still find a public audience. This dual strategy, writing to the newspaper and posting to a blog, reveals what motivates Scott to use digital tools to compose. Although he personally values and enjoys writing for print media, he has increasingly come to see digital technologies as an important way that he can distribute his persuasive message to wider groups of people. In addition to this work writing letters and participating in his father's campaign, Scott spent the summer of 2008 canvassing for Barack Obama. When Scott arrived on campus for the 2008-2009 school year, he met the state director of Students for Obama and immediately began his political work on campus. As a core member of his university's Students for Obama group, Scott took part in formal debates across campus, wrote emails, posted messages to Facebook, made phone calls, and canvassed door-to-door.

As part of his work with the Students for Obama group, Scott was charged with coordinating the get-out-the-vote rallies with visiting speakers (entertainers, politicians). Around the time the remix assignment was given to the class, Scott was involved with hosting Obama supporter Seth MacFarlane, creator of the Fox animated comedy *Family Guy*. As part of his stump speech given at numerous universities in swing states, MacFarlane employed the voice of Peter Griffin, the buffoonish lead character of the *Family Guy* show, to read the transcript of

Sarah Palin's famously incoherent interview with Katie Couric.<sup>5</sup> Not unsurprisingly, MacFarlane's performances received big laughs from college crowds, were recorded by audience members, and posted on YouTube from universities across the country. At this point, Scott's idea for his remix was born. Would it be possible for him to create a video that would make it appear as if Katie Couric was literally interviewing Peter Griffin as a candidate for Vice President? In the end, this is just what Scott did.

Scott's remix video, entitled "Katie Couric's interview with Peter Griffin as Sarah Palin," juxtaposes and edits audio from MacFarlane's speech, a video clip from *Family Guy* culled from Hulu.com, and a video clip of Katie Couric's interview with Palin harvested from YouTube. It begins with the opening montage for "Katie Couric Reports," the CBS primetime news show that featured Couric's interview with Vice Presidential candidate Palin. This opening establishes the scene, indicating for viewers the journalistic tone Scott intends and setting up the rhetorical situation of a candidate interview. The video then moves to an image of Peter Griffin, accompanied by the text "Exclusive Interview with Vice Presidential Candidate Peter Griffin." What follows is CNN host Jack Cafferty introducing the interview clip, Couric asking a question regarding which Supreme Court decisions Palin disagrees with, and the answer embodied by a video clip of Peter Griffin sitting in a television studio (wearing a dark blue suit, white dress shirt, and red tie) answering Couric's question using Palin's exact words. The exchange follows:

Couric: "What other Supreme Court decisions do you disagree with [beyond *Roe v. Wade*]? Palin: Well, there's of course—in the great history of America there have been rulings, there's never going to be absolute consensus by every American. And there are—those issues, again, like *Roe v. Wade* where I believe are best held on a state level and addressed there. So you know—going through the history of America, there would be others but—," to which Couric replies, "Can you think of any?" Palin answers, "Well, I could think of—of any again, that could be best dealt with on a more local level. Maybe I

---

<sup>5</sup> For those readers who are unfamiliar with *Family Guy*, Peter Griffin is the dim, overweight middle class father—a character type originating in the likes of Archie Bunker and Homer Simpson but Griffin's version is more crude, scatological, incompetent, and politically incorrect.

would take issue with. But you know, as mayor, and then as governor and even as a Vice President, if I'm so privileged to serve, wouldn't be in a position of changing those things but in supporting the law of the land as it reads today.”

Following this exchange between Palin/Griffin and Couric, Scott cuts back to Cafferty who wryly asks, “Did you get that?” and then pronounces the clip, “one of the most pathetic pieces of tape I have ever seen from someone aspiring to one of the highest offices in this country.” After Cafferty’s critique, Scott cuts to an intertitle, which reads, “If Peter Griffin should not be president, then maybe someone who actually said these things should not be president either.” Then, a second intertitle reiterates the authenticity of the audio track by stating, “These were the real words of Sarah Palin and the real reaction by Jack Cafferty.” The video closes with an image of Barack Obama and Joe Biden, smiling and shaking hands, with the words “Obama/Biden ’08.” Although the early parts of the remix might be at least somewhat ambiguous in rhetorical purpose, these concluding lines really reinforce Scott’s intent to cast doubt on the credibility of Sarah Palin and thus encourage people to vote for Obama.

In explaining why he chose to compose this particular remix, Scott noted that he hoped that he

could reach a new audience who may not pay close attention to the election (i.e. couch potato cartoon watchers who [would \[search YouTube for\] \*Family Guy\*](#) on a regular basis) and show them an important moment in this election season. Additionally, I tried to make the piece likeable and *Saturday Night Live* like so that it would possibly become viral and be seen by a larger audience, including the people who (like me) pay very close attention to politics and simply enjoy good political humor.

By mashing up a political interview with footage from a popular television comedy, Scott hoped that he might have a chance to reach a wide audience beyond those who regularly watch news programs (as well as to craft a form of humor that would be appreciated by politicians like himself). And, as it turns out, Scott did succeed in creating a video that became ‘viral’ at least to some extent. In its first two weeks, Scott’s video garnered over 5,000 views on YouTube, and it

has received over 20,000 views at the time of this writing. In this way, it is clear that video remix assignments have the potential to reach wide audiences beyond the classroom. As teachers of writing, one of our primary goals is to help students engage audiences beyond the university—to [understand](#) ways in which their composing can do powerful rhetorical work in the world. Scott’s work reminds us that video composing, in particular, holds this potential.

In seeking to craft a viral video, Scott composed a “professional” product that looked as much like a real television scene as possible. After searching for footage of a *Family Guy* episode in which Peter Griffin was being interviewed on TV, Scott then engaged in the process of slowing down and editing the footage so that it really appeared as if Griffin was saying Palin’s words. Scott noted that matching the “audio and video was a long process because in multimedia settings a lack of attention to detail could lead to a very poor looking remix. I wanted this remix to be thought of as professional.” Scott recognized that it was not enough just to have a good idea for a parody, but that the parody had to be well-delivered as well. The quotation above also reminds us of the many hours that go into making such as short, seemingly simple video text “look professional.”

In addition to closely paying attention to video editing, Scott also made an effort to ensure that people found his text among the throng of videos that are posted to YouTube every day. To make his text easier to locate, Scott included an extensive description of his video as well as the following tags: Katie Couric/interviews/Sarah Palin/Supreme Court/Family Guy/Peter Griffin/Seth MacFarlane/Jack Cafferty/Obama/Parody. Furthermore, Scott posted his video as a response to several other YouTube videos that were popular at the time, and he also publicized the video through Facebook groups and listervs. In addition to crafting a humorous, popular-culture inflected piece of content that he thought would appeal to the YouTube audience,

Scott also recognized that he needed to exploit the power of social networks (YouTube, Facebook, listservs) to help his piece find its intended audiences of young, undecided, apathetic voters who watch *Family Guy* as well as political junkies amused by remix videos. In this way, Scott came to realize that paying attention to issues of delivery and circulation was crucial for an activist composer.

Although much of Scott's process of composing and delivering was quite specific to the medium of online video, he also noted ways in which he drew upon several classical rhetorical principles that were transferable across media. In his reflection, Scott wrote compellingly about how he manipulated words, images and sounds to construct pathetic and ethical appeals. Furthermore, Scott articulated the central argument of his remix as "an enthymeme where the premises would read in the following order: 1) Peter Griffin is unintelligent 2) Sarah Palin's words matched Peter Griffin's character 3) So, Sarah Palin must be unintelligent and therefore not fit to serve as vice president." Following Aristotle, Scott deftly realized that he could form enthymematic arguments by relying on unstated assumptions (Peter Griffin is unintelligent; the President should be intelligent) that his audience would be likely to share. Finally, Scott reported that the process of composing and distributing the remix helped him come to an understanding of "the importance of kairotic moments in political discourse. I knew that the kairotic moment for my parody was critical and that already I was about a week and a half behind the prime moment for its release." Indeed, taking Jason's advice, Scott actually finished and published his remix a week before the final draft was due, because he wanted to release it when the Palin/Couric interview was still a timely topic.

Interestingly, although Scott had a good bit of experience with self-sponsored activist writing before coming to Jason's class, he noted in his interview with Abby that he likely would

not have ever composed a video remix if he had not been assigned to do so. But, after the experience of actually composing the project and getting such a great reaction, Scott reported that he was now interested in using viral video for his activism in the future—that in the end he was happy with how his remix had become “more than a school project.” In this sense, this course served as a sponsor (Brandt, 2001) of Scott’s developing literacy as a media activist. From Scott’s experience, it is clear that assignments in video remix accompanied by reflective writing and discussion can be a powerful way for students to learn and practice activist rhetoric—an effective way for students to deliver and circulate their activist compositions well beyond the walls of their classroom or campus. As such, Scott’s case suggests that video remix is an activist literacy practice that teachers should value and consider employing.

Scott’s case can also productively cause us to question the traditional privileging of ‘originality’ in composition classrooms; after all, part of the reason Scott’s remix was so successful is that he took the idea and the vocal track from a viral video of Seth MacFarlane that was already circulating on YouTube. Scott’s rhetorical skill came not so much from inventing a radically novel idea, but rather from realizing how he could strategically build upon and alter a viral video that already existed. If we wish to encourage students to compose persuasive texts that circulate widely, it may be important for us to consider designing assignments and evaluative criteria that value strategic re-appropriation as much as so-called ‘original’ composition.

## **8. Implications: Remixing Composition Pedagogy and Research**

Due to the small sample of participant interviews and projects featured here, we cannot offer broader generalizations about the role of political video remix in composition pedagogy.

Nevertheless, we think that the cases we have presented can provide some tentative implications—some issues to consider. First, as writing instructors, we should recognize and value the role that parody and popular culture references can play in digital activist rhetoric. Cable television comedy shows and online videos hold cultural capital for our students and provide voices of critique and dissent that can contribute to students’ development of critical literacy. Students are largely already consumers of such texts and bringing parodic, pop culture texts into the classroom can provide bridges between students’ multiple literacies. Doing so potentially brings a variety of challenges and opportunities for discussion to the writing classroom. Students may not be accustomed to drawing on popular culture knowledge for academic work; as a result, teachers may need to engage classes in conversations about ways in which remixed texts make use of popular cultural [artifacts](#). [In particular](#), we suggest teachers encourage students to reflect about [which popular culture references](#) are most likely to resonate with [their](#) audiences [and accomplish their rhetorical goals](#).

Second, we should pair video remix activities with rhetorical analysis and reflective writing. We found that once equipped with knowledge of a plethora of rhetorical concepts, students relied on them to invent ideas, understand source texts, address desired audiences, and revise their own projects from start to finish. In order to ensure that students consciously consider the rhetorical choices they are making in remix, it is essential that we ask them to write reflectively about their work. Ideally, this kind of reflective writing should be woven throughout the assignment sequence perhaps by having students write [regular](#) blog entries about their processes of composing. Furthermore, we found especially (in Susan’s case) that rhetorical remix assignments can be a way to help students develop new insights about the history of political rhetoric—insights that might best be fleshed out in alphabetic, analytical essays. As a result,

teachers might consider using remix activities as a kind of invention exercise for future rhetorical analysis assignments.

Third, we should craft flexible assignments and activities that account for the diverse activist and technological literacies students bring to class, taking care to avoid assumptions about what students already know. As Susan's case shows, for example, students who are apprehensive about technology may be able to gain confidence by being able to draw on other literary practices (such as historical research) to craft projects that they find meaningful. Furthermore, Susan's case reminds us of the need to make explicit technology instruction a part of class—conducting workshops in which students can view a demonstration of how to use necessary software and then receive help from peers and instructor as they experiment with the software themselves.

Fourth, we should help students attend to the delivery and circulation of digital [texts](#). As the participants in our research attested, young people may be more comfortable consuming digital texts than creating and delivering them. In particular, we suggest that students can benefit from discussions of how to use tags and descriptions to increase the findability of the videos on YouTube, how to use social networks to publicize and circulate their videos, as well as how to manage the mechanics of video editing in ways that result in a 'professional' looking product. As a way to encourage students to consider the rhetorical challenges involved in reaching audiences on the Web, teachers could ask students to compose a delivery plan in which they outline how they intend to deliver their text: Where will they publish their text and why? What tags do they intend to use to make their text more findable? How might they use social networks to promote their work? How can they persuade potential audience members to share the text with others? What timing considerations are important to the delivery of their text? If students are asked to



write reflectively about issues of delivery and circulation, they may be more likely to ultimately choose (as Scott did) to make a concerted rhetorical effort to reach audiences beyond the classroom, at the right time and in the best manner.

Fifth, we should value political video remix assignments as an important method for enabling students to reach wide public audiences. Such videos are, right now, a significant vehicle for delivering arguments on the internet and, as Scott most fully showed, an audience is available to our students in such spaces. Further, the fact that YouTube deleted Mike's audio made clear to Mike and us that individuals beyond the university were paying attention to his remix text. We cannot predict the sustainability of the genre of political video remix, but for now it is an important way for citizens to participate in civic discourse (Dietel-McLaughlin, 2009; Lessig, 2008). We do not advocate requiring students to publish work to YouTube as we think that students should ultimately have the choice about how public they want their texts to be. We do advocate, however, having students create texts so compelling that they want to share them with a wider audience, and we think helping them reach this desired audience is part of our job.

Sixth, in order to enable students to craft activist remixes that can reach wide audiences, it can be helpful to question our traditional privileging of originality in student composition—making space for students to craft popular assemblages that (like Scott's work) rely on the strategic re-appropriation of existing viral videos (Ridolfo & DeVoss 2009). When teaching remix, it can be tempting to emphasize the criteria of "novelty" or "originality" in evaluating student work—to suggest that the best remix is the one that most radically transforms its source materials into a "new" text. Yet, Scott's case reminds us that remix composers may potentially reach wide audiences by making only relatively minor changes to their source texts (e.g. putting Seth MacFarlane's impression of Palin literally into the mouth of Peter Griffin). Rather than

pushing students solely to create “novel” remixes, we should [also](#) encourage them to consider ways they might make strategic, yet subtle, alterations to viral videos that are already in wide circulation.

And finally, we should explore ways that political video remix can heighten students’ understanding and application of key rhetorical concepts. Not only does bringing political remix videos into the writing classroom legitimize such texts as rhetorical and worthy of study for students, but asking them to compose political video remixes offers them an opportunity to apply traditional rhetorical concepts in new ways. For this sample of students, pathos, ethos, kairos, commonplaces, and enthymemes arose as the most relevant rhetorical concepts they practiced employing in their projects. As a result, teachers might consider using discussion of sample remix videos as a way to introduce these rhetorical concepts to students.

Although we think political video remix holds great promise for composition pedagogy, we must note that we have presented only a few case studies of white students (two men and one woman) with substantial access to technology composing remixes during the kairotic moment of the 2008 election season in the United States. More research is needed in other contexts and other periods of time to develop a richer understanding of the possibilities for integrating political remix into composition pedagogy. The collaborative teacher-research model we employed can be one useful way to conduct these studies, but it also could be beneficial to supplement the student interviews with ethnographic observation of course sessions and with video screen captures (Geisler & Slattery, 2007) of student composing.

Ultimately, we hope this study has shown that, “our students have a much richer imagination for what we might accomplish...[with political remix] than our journals have yet to address” (George, 2002, p. 12). As Scott conjectured in his interview, Jason’s goal in designing

the course and assigning the remixes was to “have students achieve something that [the instructor] didn’t know yet.” In order to employ remix as a fruitful way of engaging students in practicing political rhetoric, it is important that we remain open to the diverse ways that students will remake the genre to suit their own purposes.

## **Acknowledgements**

We thank our research participants for the exciting work and thoughtful reflections that inspired this article. We are also grateful the editorial staff of the journal, the two anonymous reviewers, and Wioleta Fedeczko for their helpful revision suggestions.

## **Works Cited**

- Alexander, Jonathan. (2006). *Digital youth: Emerging literacies on the world wide web*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.
- Anderson, Daniel. (2003). Prosumer approaches to new media production and consumption. *Kairos*, 8(1). Retrieved November 20, 2009, from <http://kairos.technorhetoric.net/8.1/>.
- Anderson, Daniel. (2008). The low bridge to high benefits: Entry-level multimedia, literacies, and motivation." *Computers and Composition*, 25(1), 40-60.
- Banks, Adam. (2005). *Race, rhetoric, and technology: Searching for higher ground*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Earlbaum.
- Barton, Matthew D. (2005). The future of rational-critical debate in online public spheres. *Computers and Composition*, 22(2), 177-190.
- Blackburn, Mollie V. (2003). Exploring literacy performances and power dynamics at The Loft: Queer youth reading the world and word. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 37(4), 467-490.
- Brandt, Deborah. (2001). *Literacy in American lives*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Braun, Catherine C., Ben McCorkle, & Amie C. Wolf. (2007). Remixing basic writing: Digital media production and the basic writing curriculum. *Computers and Composition Online*. Retrieved November 20, 2009, from <http://www.bgsu.edu/cconline/braun/index.htm>.

- Brooks, Kevin et al. (2006). What's going on? Listening to music, composing videos" *Computers and Composition Online*. Retrieved November 20, 2009, from <http://www.bgsu.edu/cconline/brooks/>
- Burgess, Jean & Green, Joshua. (2009). *YouTube: Online video and participatory culture*. Malden, MA: Polity.
- Castells. Manuel. (2001). *Internet galaxy: Reflections on the internet, business and society*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Comstock, Michelle & Hocks, Mary E. (2006). Voice in the cultural soundscape: Sonic literacy in composition studies." *Computers and Composition Online*. Retrieved November 20, 2009, from [http://www.bgsu.edu/cconline/comstock\\_hocks/index.htm](http://www.bgsu.edu/cconline/comstock_hocks/index.htm)
- Crowley, Sharon & Hawhee, Debra. (2008). *Ancient rhetorics for contemporary students*. New York: Longman.
- Dadas, Caroline E. (2008). Inventing the election: Civic participation and presidential candidates' websites." *Computers and Composition* 25, 416–431.
- Delagrange, Susan. (2009). Wunderkammer, Cornell, and the visual canon of arrangement. *Kairos*. 13(2). Retrieved November 20, 2009, from <http://kairos.technorhetoric.net/13.2/topoi/delagrange/index.html>.
- de Vellis, Philip. (2007, March 5). Vote different [Video file]. Video posted to <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6h3G-lMZxjo>
- DeVoss, Dànienne Nicole & Porter, James E. (2006). "Why Napster matters to writing: Filesharing as a new ethic of digital delivery." *Computers and Composition* 23(2), 178-210.
- DeVoss, Dànienne Nicole & Webb, Sue. (2008). "Grand theft audio." *Computers and Composition Online*. Retrieved November 20, 2009, from [http://www.bgsu.edu/cconline/COnline\\_GTA/index.html](http://www.bgsu.edu/cconline/COnline_GTA/index.html)
- Dietel-McLaughlin, Erin. (2009). Remediating democracy: Irreverent composition and the vernacular rhetorics of web 2.0. *Computers and Composition Online*. Retrieved November 20, 2009, from <http://www.bgsu.edu/cconline/Dietel/>
- Digirhet. (2008). Old + old + old = new: A copyright manifesto for a digital world. *Kairos*. 12(3). Retrieved November 20, 2009, from <http://kairos.technorhetoric.net/12.3/topoi/digirhet/index.html>

- Diogenes, Marvin & Lunsford, Andrea A. (2006). Toward delivering new definitions of writing. In Kathleen Blake Yancey (Ed.), *Delivering college composition: The fifth canon*. (pp. 141-154). Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook.
- Dyson, Anne Haas. (2003). *The brothers and sisters learn to write; Popular literacies in childhood and school cultures*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Election08. (2008, February 11). john.he.is [Video file]. Video posted to <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3gwqEneBKUs>
- Ellertson, Anthony. (2003). Some notes on simulacra machines, flash in first-year composition, and tactics in spaces of interruption. *Kairos* 8(2). Retrieved November 20, 2009, from <http://english.ttu.edu/kairos/8.2/binder.html?features/ellertson/home.html>
- Faden, Eric. (2007, May 18). A fair(y) use tale. [Video file]. Video posted to [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CJn\\_jC4FNDo](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CJn_jC4FNDo)
- Geisler, Cheryl & Slattery, Shaun. (2007). "Capturing the activity of digital writing: Using, analyzing, and supplementing video screen capture." In Heidi A. McKee and Danielle Nicole DeVoss, (Eds.) *Digital writing research: Technologies, methodologies, and ethical issues*. (pp. 185-200). Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.
- George, Diana (2002). From analysis to design: Visual communication in the teaching of writing." *College Composition and Communication*. 54(1), 11-39.
- Goncalves, Zan Meyer. (2005). *Sexuality and the politics of ethos in the writing classroom*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Grabill, Jeffery T. (2003). On divides and interfaces: Access, class, and computers. *Computers and Composition*. 20(4), 455-472.
- headzup (2008, April 15). John McCain Kicks It "Old School" – Maverick Rap Song [Video file]. Video posted to <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jE96K01YO24>
- Hocks, Mary E. (2003). Understanding visual rhetoric in digital writing environments. *College Composition and Communication*. 54(4), 629-656.
- Hess, Mickey. (2006). Was Foucault a plagiarist? Hip-hop sampling and academic citation. *Computers and Composition*. 23(3), 280-295.
- Jenkins, Henry. (2008). *Convergence culture: Where old and new media collide*. New York: New York University Press.
- Johnson-Eilola, Johndan & Selber, Stuart. (2007). Plagiarism, originality, assemblage. *Computers and Composition*. 24(2), 375-403.

- Johnson-Eilola, Johndan. (2005). *Datacloud: Toward a new theory of online work*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.
- Journet, Debra. (2007) Inventing myself in multimodality: Encouraging senior faculty to use digital media. *Computers and Composition*. 24(2), 107-120.
- Keller, Daniel. (2007). Thinking rhetorically. In Cynthia Selfe, (Ed.). *Multimodal composition: Resources for teachers*. (pp. 49-63). Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.
- Kirtley, Susan. (2005). Students' views on technology and writing: The power of personal history. *Computers and Composition*. 22(2), 209-230.
- Lee, Jennifer. (2004). Year of the blog? Web diarists are now official members of convention press corps. Retrieved November 20, 2009, from <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/07/26/us/eyes-nation-internet-year-blog-web-diarists-are-now-official-members-convention.html>.
- Lessig, Lawrence. (2008a). *Remix: Making art and commerce thrive in the hybrid economy*. New York: Penguin Press.
- Lessig, Lawrence. (2008b). iCommons summit talk on the history of commons. [Video file] Video posted to: <http://blip.tv/file/1163412>
- Losh, Elizabeth. (2009). *Virtualpolitik: An electronic history of government media-making in a time of war, scandal, disaster, miscommunication, and mistakes*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Manovich, Lev. (2001). *The language of new media*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- McKee, Heidi. (2006). Sound matters: Notes toward the analysis and design of sound in multimodal web works. *Computers and Composition*. 23(3), 335-354.
- McKee, Heidi. (2002). "YOUR VIEWS SHOWED TRUE IGNORANCE!!!": (Mis)communication in an online interracial discussion forum. *Computers and Composition*. 19(4), 411-434.
- Miller, Paul D. (2004). *Rhythm science*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Moran, Charles. (1999). Access: The a-word in technology studies. In Gail E. Hawisher & Cynthia L. Selfe (Eds.), *Passions, pedagogies, and 21st century technologies*. (pp. 205-220). Logan: Utah State University Press.
- New London Group. (2002). A pedagogy of multiliteracies: Designing social futures. In Bill Cope & Mary Kalantzis, (Eds.), *Multiliteracies: Literacy learning and the design of social futures* (pp. 9-38). New York: Routledge.

- Palfrey, John and Urs Gasser. (2008) *Born digital: Understanding the first generation of digital natives*. New York: Basic Books.
- Queen, Mary. (2008). Transnational feminist rhetorics in a digital world. *College English*. 70(5), 471-489.
- Rainie, Lee. (2005). "The state of blogging." Pew Internet & American Life Project. Retrieved November 20, 2009, from <http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2005/The-State-of-Blogging.aspx>
- Reid, Alexander. (2007). *The two virtuals: New media and composition*. West Lafayette, IN: Parlor Press.
- Rice, Jeff. (2006). The making of ka-knowledge: Digital aurality. *Computers and Composition*. 23(3), 266-279.
- Rice, Jeff. (2007). *The rhetoric of cool: Composition studies and new media*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Ridolfo, Jim & DeVoss, Dànielle Nicole. (2009). Composing for recomposition: Rhetorical velocity and delivery. *Kairos*. 13(2), Retrieved November 20, 2009, from [http://endora.wide.msu.edu/13.2/topoi/ridolfo\\_devoss/intro.html](http://endora.wide.msu.edu/13.2/topoi/ridolfo_devoss/intro.html)
- Rife, Martine Courant. (2007). The fair use doctrine: History, application, and implications for (new media) writing teachers. *Computers and Composition*. 24(2), 154-178.
- Ross, Heather (2003). Digital video and composition: Gauging the promise of a low-maintenance high-reward relationship." *Kairos*. 8.1, retrieved November 20, 2009, from <http://kairos.technorhethoric.net/8.1/index.html>
- rx2008 (2006, June 16). Sunday bloody sunday rx2008 [Video file]. Video posted to [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PXnO\\_FxmHes](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PXnO_FxmHes)
- Selfe, Cynthia L. Ed. (2007). *Multimodal composition; Resources for teachers*. Creskill, NJ: Hampton Press.
- Selfe, Cynthia L. & Hawisher, Gail E. (2004). *Literate lives in the information age: Narratives of literacy from the information age*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Earlbaum Associates.
- Shipka, Jody. (2005). A multimodal task-based framework for composing. *College Composition and Communication*. 57(2), 277-306.
- Sirc, Geoffrey. (2004). Box-Logic. In Anne Frances Wysocki, Johndan Johnson-Eilola, Cynthia Selfe, and Geoffrey Sirc (Eds.). *Writing new media: Theory and applications for expanding the teaching of composition*. Logan: Utah State University Press.

- Simmons, Michele W. & Grabill, Jeffrey T. (2007). Toward a civic rhetoric for technologically and scientifically complex places: Invention, performance, and participation. *College Composition and Communication*, 58(3), 419-448.
- Takayoshi, Pamela & Cynthia L. Selfe. (2007). Thinking About Multimodality. In Cynthia L. Selfe (Ed.), *Multimodal composition: Resources for teachers*. Creskill, NJ: Hampton Press.
- Ulmer, Gregory (1994). *Heuretics: The logic of invention*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- unak78 (2008, March 27). Hillary Clinton dodges sniper fire in Bosnia – raw footage [Video file]. Video posted to <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I23fjRN-PGc>
- Vargas, Jose Antonio. (2007, March 17). Candidates try web video, and the reviews are mixed. *Washington Post*. Retrieved November 20, 2009, from <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/03/16/AR2007031602373.html>
- Warnick, Barbara. (2002). *Critical literacy in a digital era: Technology, rhetoric, and the public interest*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Earlbuam Associates.
- Warnick, Barbara. (2007). *Rhetoric online: Persuasion and politics on the world wide web*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing.
- WeCan08. (2008, February 2). Yes we can - Barack Obama music video [Video file]. Video posted to <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jjXyqcx-mYY>
- WIDE Research Center Collective. (2005). Why Teach Digital Writing? *Kairos*. 10(1), Retrieved November 20, 2009, from <http://english.ttu.edu/KAIROS/10.1/binder2.html?coverweb/wide/index.html>
- Williams, Bronwyn. (2008). What South Park character are you? Popular culture, literacy, and online performances of identity." *Computers and Composition*. 25(1), 24-39.
- Wysocki, Anne Frances, Johnson-Eilola, Johndan, Selfe, Cynthia L., & Sirc, Geoffrey. (2004). *Writing new media: Theory and applications for expanding the teaching of composition*. Logan, UT: Utah State University Press.
- Yancey, Kathleen Blake. (2004). Made not only in words: Composition in a new key. *College Composition and Communication*. 56(2), 297-328.



## Appendix A: Rhetorical Remix Assignment

For this assignment, you will create a remix of a political speech or other form of political discourse (re-editing a single video or audio file or combining samples from several video or audio files). In addition to producing the remix itself (an audio or video file between one and five minutes), you'll also write a reflective paper.

### The Remix

Most likely, your remix will pursue one or more of the following goals:

- persuading your audience to understand the source text(s) in a new way, noticing aspects of the text(s) that are usually overlooked.
- making the source text appealing to an audience different from the one for which it was intended.
- offering critical commentary about a political figure or issue.

Most likely, your remix will involve use of one or more of the following strategies:

- cutting and juxtaposing elements of audio or video files.
- repeating elements of audio or video files.
- layering a musical soundtrack underneath spoken words.
- adding still images to accompany spoken words and/or music.

The final product will likely be an audio file or video file that is somewhere between one minute and five minutes long. The format and length you use should be determined by your intended purpose and audience: video is not necessarily better than audio; longer is not necessarily better than shorter.

### Reflective Paper

In addition to composing the remix itself, you will also write a reflective paper (minimum 750 words) in which you employ rhetorical theories from ARCS [*Ancient Rhetorics for Contemporary Students*] (and other course readings) to analyze the process of composing the remix. Even if you compose the remix in a group, I'll ask that you write the paper individually.

Some questions you should address in your paper include:

- What rhetorical concepts from ARCS (or other readings) did you find helpful to you in composing your remix?
- What rhetorical concepts from ARCS (or other course readings) did not seem to apply to remix composing? How might we need to revise rhetorical theories to account for the act of remix?
- What did you find particularly challenging about composing the remix and why?

- What was the purpose and audience of your remix? How did you manipulate words, images, and/or sounds to achieve this purpose?
- What kind of process did you use to compose (invent, draft, revise) your remix? How was this process similar to and/or different from composing a conventional paper or a blog?
- What did you learn from composing the remix?

## **Appendix B: Participant Recruitment and Interview Questions**

Jason left the classroom while Abby conducted the recruitment and Abby did not discuss this project with Jason until after grades were submitted for the course. Jason also told students that he understood that people might have many reasons not to want to participate in a study and that whatever choice students made about participation would have no effect on any future interaction they might have. Students were also informed that they could withdraw participation at any time.

Our institution's Human Subjects IRB approved this study. Our semi-structured interviews included questions such as the following:

*General:* What has been your past experience with computer technology or digital media, in school or out of school? What has been your past experience with politics, in school or out of school? How would you define activism? What roles do you think digital media is playing in politics today? Can you give me an example of a piece of online or digital political media that was particularly influential on you? Why? Why did you choose to take this course? What do you think the instructor's goals were when designing this course? What part of this course so far has been most interesting to you? Why? What part of this course so far has been least interesting to you? Why? What do you think is the most important thing you've learned in this course thus far? At this point in your learning, how are you defining rhetoric? Are there any particular rhetorical theories that you've found particularly helpful or unhelpful for your own writing? What skills do you think citizens need to understand in order to engage in current political discourse? Why? How has being in a laptop classroom influenced your learning in this course?

*Discourse-based Questions about a Piece of Digital Writing Chosen by the Participant:* What was your goal or purpose in writing this text? Who did you see as your audiences for this text? How did you get the idea for writing this text? Did you receive any feedback on this text from peers or your instructor? Did you revise this text in any way? If so, why and how? What did you find challenging about writing this text? What do you think you learned (if anything) through writing this text? I noticed you included X in this text. Why did you make the choice to do this? I noticed you didn't do X in this text, why not? What other information would you like to share regarding your process in writing this text?