

CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION TO FEMINIST FILMMAKING IN RHETORIC AND COMPOSITION

On the night of September 1, 2014 my mind went into one of my dreaded yet longed-for creative outbursts. My then two-year-old son, William, who usually sleeps with enviable abandon, woke up three times. His brother, Santiago, only seven weeks old at the time, nursed the night away. Seeing that there would be no sleep to be had, my mind returned to the questions that had been engulfing me those days. How was I going to manage motherhood and academia? And not just manage. How was I going to enjoy and excel at them?

I've been filming our lives since William was born, a gift to my mother, who lives on another continent, to my older, nostalgic self, and to the men my boys will one day be. These videos took a long time to edit but they helped me tell the story of my children's lives, the images and sounds infused with that wild, all-encompassing love I feel for them. Although I was always struggling to find time to edit the footage, the videos felt like the most important work I'd ever done. And yet they were not work, not the tenure-counting kind of work that assistant professors around the country spend their sleepless nights pondering.

I could feel the morning nearing when the ideas that had been germinating for hours finally coalesced. I would make five films about the boys and my experience as a mother. I would submit them to film festivals and conferences, publish peer-reviewed scholarship about them, and screen them as part of my community engagement and feminist activism. They would be taught in classrooms around the country. Maybe even the world. The projects that sprung to life that day are:

- A short documentary about my experience nursing my son Santiago as a working mother.
- A short documentary about my son William learning to read and write as a bilingual speaker.
- A short documentary where we see my sons side by side on the screen doing the same thing at the same time during their first year of life.
- A feature documentary in which we follow my sons' relationship as brothers for fifteen years.
- A feature documentary about the Venezuelan diaspora around the world, using my own story as a Venezuelan immigrant, as well as others, to explore the issue.

By the time the room filled with the morning's tentative light, I was exhilarated and exhausted at the thought of the path that lay ahead. In the coming weeks, I carefully examined the projects, hoping to find some that could be discarded, but none would budge. Over a year later, one is finished, and I have partial versions of all the others. Is it a lot of work? Yes. Is it work I'm desperately passionate about? Yes. Will it count for tenure and promotion? Absolutely.

I did not decide to make five documentaries in one night without having ever held a camera. I had five years of experience as a feminist filmmaker and seven short and feature documentaries behind me by the time these ideas burst into my mind. I did a lot of stumbling around in the dark as I learned to make moving images while getting my Ph.D in Rhetoric and Composition at Purdue University, and it is my hope that this video book will help future generations of filmmaking rhetoricians have a clearer roadmap than I did as they begin their own cinematic adventures. This does not mean that life behind the camera will be easy for viewers of this work. Making moving images is an often arduous, frustrating, and seemingly endless task, but as I show here, it is also one of the most enriching and exhilarating creative and intellectual practices available to us.

The aim of this video book is to make it possible for viewers to make the film and video projects that speak the loudest to their hearts and minds and to make them in ways that will count towards multiple aspects of their scholarship. As Michael Day, Susan Delagrange, Mike Palmquist, Michael Pemberton, and Janice Walker assert:

“being a scholar” is a broadly defined, inclusive, and highly interconnected set of activities. Among many other things, it means using theory to select and incorporate the best practices in our teaching... Being a scholar, in short, means engaging in reflective, well informed practices that help us accomplish the goals of advancing and sharing our knowledge of what it means to write and be a writer. (186)

The scholarship model I propose here follows their definition, so that although I do not address classroom practices directly, I do discuss the mentoring of and collaborations with graduate and undergraduate students, as well as community engagement and outreach as ways in which feminist filmmaking can play a role in our scholarly production. As I show in this video book, making digital scholarship count toward tenure and promotion can be a complex undertaking. Catherine Braun explains that “[a]lthough some departments have begun trying to accommodate digital media work, they often do so in a haphazard manner, either making minor tweaks to tenure and promotion policies or paying lip service to digital media work” (5). In order to help resolve that issue, I not only delineate the paths rhetoricians take to making moving images but also provide feminist strategies for making our work count as scholarship and for transforming our departments and universities into places that embrace digital work.

In what remains of this chapter, I discuss the disciplinary gap this video book aims to fill, describe the qualitative study I conducted to help me craft the arguments I make here, define the work's key terminology and audience, and address issues of citation, copyright, and access. Let's start with:

A WAKE UP CALL FOR RHETORIC AND COMPOSITION

According to a Cisco Systems study, 79% of Internet traffic will be video consumption by 2018, with almost a million minutes of video content watched every second ("Cisco"). Even today video is a vital part of our digital culture. While Google remains the most widely used search engine, YouTube comes in second. YouTube reports having more than a billion users, whose videos receive billions of daily views ("Statistics"). Not only is video becoming increasingly popular, it is also global, with an average of 60% of views coming from outside the YouTuber's home country ("Statistics"). Moreover, according to Digital Sherpa, while only 20% of online visitors read texts in full, 80% of them watch videos from beginning to end (Siu). This should come as no surprise since, as TED Conference curator Chris Anderson explains, verbal communication is much older than print. "Face-to-face communication has been fine-tuned by millions of years of evolution. That's what's made it into this mysterious, powerful thing it is. Someone speaks, there's resonance in all these receiving brains, the whole group acts together" (Anderson). Video streaming has allowed the medium for which—as Anderson so eloquently puts it—our "brain is exquisitely wired" to be readily available at an unprecedented global scale.

With its oral origins and its history of leadership in digital production, one would expect Rhetoric and Composition to be teeming with scholarship in the moving-image medium and with scholarship theorizing how moving images affect our field and human communication as a whole. However, that is not the case. What we have is a small amount of excellent scholarship on the subject. There are two print books: Sarah Arroyo's *Participatory Composition* examines the effect of participatory culture on video production and pedagogy and Bump Halbritter's *Mics, Cameras, Symbolic Action* addresses the relationship between video production and Writing Studies pedagogy. There are also two digital books: Patrick Berry, Gail Hawisher, and Cynthia Selfe's *Transnational Literate Lives in Digital Times* uses video to explore transnational literacy practices and in *Generaciones' Narratives* John Scenters-Zapico showcases video interviews where participants on the U.S./Mexico border describe their language practices and identity in English and Spanish. We have two feature documentaries about the field. *Take 20*, in which Todd Taylor interviews 22 rhetoricians about their approaches to teaching writing, and *Con Job*, where Megan Fulwiler and Jennifer Marlow explore our field's exploitation of adjunct labor. Geoffrey Carter and Arroyo co-edited a "Video and Participatory Cultures" special issue on *Enculturation*. There have also been a moderate number

of peer-reviewed articles and book chapters in which we present scholarship in film and video form and/or theorize its production.

Although many of these scholarly pieces are powerful and daring, we don't have enough of them. There is a marked disconnect between the profound importance of film and video production to our culture and the attention we as a field are paying to it. I would argue that gap comes in part from the fact that learning to craft moving images and/or edit together the moving images created by others is a grueling, often expensive process. However, as I show in this video book, the benefits in terms of the value and reach of our scholarship far outweigh the risks and costs of film and video production. This is especially true of the collaborative, ethically minded, and socially conscious film and video production process that is feminist filmmaking.

While Berry, Hawisher, and Selfe address some intersections between film and video production and feminism in *Transnational Literate Lives*, we, as a field, need a robust understanding of how feminism can be tied to every aspect of film and video production scholarship from the preproduction stages all the way to tenure files. The feminist filmmaking methodology I propose in this video book aims to fill that gap.

I discuss methodology at length in Chapter 2 but I wanted to provide a brief introduction here. I draw my notions of methodology from those proposed by Patricia Sullivan and James Porter in their influential book *Open Spaces*. Sullivan and Porter argue that “[m]ethodology is not merely a means to something else, it is itself an intervening social action and a participation in human events. It is itself an act of rhetoric, both with our participants in research studies and with our colleagues in a given research field.” This focus on the importance of our relationships to participants and to fellow scholars is key to feminist filmmaking, as I will show throughout this video book.

I not only draw from my experience as a feminist filmmaker, but from scholarship written on the topic, and from interviews, articles, and filmmaking narratives written by feminist filmmakers who belong to *agnès films*, a website supporting women and feminist filmmakers that I cofounded in 2010 and of which I'm the editor-in-chief. These filmmakers, some with awe-inspiring, long careers, others emerging and finding their voices, advocate a feminist approach to crafting moving images that I argue successfully adapts to academia.

I complement the ideas of feminist filmmakers with the film and video production experience of ten Rhetoric and Composition faculty and graduate students with whom I conducted extensive IRB-approved email interviews. The interviewees are:

Bahareh Alaei, adjunct instructor at California State University, Long Beach. At the time of the interviews she was an English Literature masters student at the same institution.

Sarah Arroyo, professor of English at California State University, Long Beach.

Jamie “Skye” Bianco, clinical assistant professor of Media, Culture, and Communication at New York University. At the time of the interviews, she was teaching at the University of Pittsburgh.

Geoffrey Carter, assistant professor of Rhetoric and Professional Writing at Saginaw Valley State University.

Steph Ceraso, assistant professor of English at the University of Maryland. At the time of the interviews, Ceraso was a doctoral candidate in Composition, Literacy, Pedagogy, and Rhetoric at the University of Pittsburgh.

Steven D. Krause, professor of English and Literature and Writing Program Coordinator at Eastern Michigan University.

bonnie kyburz, assistant professor of English at Lewis University. At the time of the interview, she was teaching at Utah Valley University.

Abraham Romney, assistant professor of Humanities at Michigan Technological University. At the time of the interview, Romney was a Comparative Literature doctoral candidate at the University of California, Irvine.

Don Unger, assistant professor of Professional Writing at St. Edwards University. At the time of the interview, he was a Rhetoric and Composition doctoral student at Purdue University.

Robert Leston, associate professor of English at New York City College of Technology. Although he did not participate in the original study, I interviewed him and his daughter, Alex Leston, at length about their filmmaking collaboration.

These scholars discuss how they learned to make moving images, how film and video production has broadened their views on collaboration and ethics, and the important role their films and videos play in their tenure and promotion arguments. I will weave their insightful and honest responses throughout this video book to provide viewers with a layered and multifaceted sense of film and video production in our field today. Now let me address:

WHO THIS VIDEO BOOK IS FOR

This video book is aimed at the growing number of Rhetoric and Composition scholars who are making moving images or are interested in doing so. The methodology I espouse here would also be of interest to scholars in the field working in digital production of other kinds. Even though the particulars are different—

learning to code instead of learning to use video editing software—the moves I propose for learning to create ethical, collaborative, and socially conscious digital work that counts toward tenure and promotion apply to digital work across the board.

This video book may also be of interest to Women Studies scholars inside and outside our field, who want to know how feminism can be applied to digital production and to making non-traditional academic work count as research.

Scholars in fields like Film Studies, Art, Communication, Mass Media, and the Digital Humanities, who are producing films and videos and other digital media, may also find the ideas mentioned here of use for their own trajectories. I hope this video book may serve to start a dialogue about how their approaches resonate with ours. Now:

A WORD ABOUT TERMINOLOGY

I have spent seven years as a feminist filmmaking rhetorician, and throughout this journey, I have tried to find the right terminology to name the intersections between feminism, film and video production, and Rhetoric and Composition. I will discuss terminology old and new throughout, but it is helpful to understand from the beginning how and why I use the following terms:

1. Video Book

I use video book to define the genre you are currently experiencing. I use video because it is the medium through which this work comes to viewers. I struggled with the term book, especially in a piece of scholarship that argues for the value of digital media. Books are, after all, the epitome of print culture. They also, though, denote a long, substantial work, the equivalent of a feature film. Unlike a feature film, however, this work draws from scholarly sources to craft its arguments through narration, images, and music. I return to this conversation in Chapter 3, but I wanted to differentiate the kind of work you're currently experiencing from feature documentaries about Rhetoric and Composition, such as Fulwiler and Marlow's *Con Job*.

Although this is the first video book, there are a number of video essays like Arroyo and Alaei's "The Dancing Floor," where we hear a scholar read their work while watching images and hearing music. Like other work in the genre, I will be reading quotes of others instead of having them read them themselves. I invoke the words of dozens of people in this video book and it would become unruly to add so many voices to the piece. I do, however, bring people's visual voices into the conversation the video book creates by showing their films and videos throughout the work.

2. Viewer

Even though I have provided a transcript of this video book, reading instead of watching this work would result in an impoverished experience of the arguments and ideas presented here. This work is meant to be watched and heard as one would a film. That is why I'm using, "viewer," the traditional term for film audiences, which is a throwback to the medium's silent origins.

3. Film and Video Production

As Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards explain, one of the recurring setbacks to feminism is the fact that the history of feminist work keeps getting lost from generation to generation, so that women find themselves reinventing the feminist wheel over and over instead of directing their efforts toward new goals. In order to create some continuity with Alexandra Juhasz's *Women of Vision: Histories in Feminist Film and Video*, a foundational text about feminists behind the camera, I will use film and video production as my key term for what we're doing as a field when we create moving images. By moving images I mean film and video footage, as well as animation. I do not address video games in this video book, even though they do feature moving images. The mode of engagement with video games is too different to that of film and video in order for me to create parallels that work between the two in the space and time allotted here, although it would be an interesting avenue to pursue elsewhere.

I use film and video as a terminology in full awareness of the fact that the distinction between film and video is eroding. While in the 60s, when Super 8 and 8mm hit the market, the distinction marked the kind of film stock and camera used to produce moving images, it now has more to do with distribution. Digital video has been embraced by independent filmmakers like Spike Lee and Agnès Varda and by top Hollywood directors like James Cameron, who shot *Avatar*—the highest grossing film in history—in digital video. *Avatar* is a film because it screened in movie theaters. Varda's *The Gleaners and I*, shot in a consumer quality digital video camera, is a film because it screened at film festivals and independent theaters. The ubiquitous "Charlie bit my finger – again!" was probably shot on a camera similar to Varda's, but having been distributed through YouTube, we think of it as video, not film.

Most of the work done in Rhetoric and Composition fits in the video category, being hosted by YouTube and Vimeo or published in online peer-reviewed journals like *Kairos* and *Enculturation* and university presses like Computers and Composition Digital Press (CCDP). However, we are also doing work that screens at film festivals, identifying itself more squarely within the film heritage. Since I am arguing that projects that identify as film also enrich our field, film and video makes sense as a term, especially when some works that screen at festivals also end up on our peer-reviewed journals.

4. Filmmaking and Filmmaker

For the sake of simplicity, I will only use the terms filmmaking and filmmaker, not the obscure videomaking and videomaker.

5. Feminism

In “Lifting as We Climb,” my documentary about the Coalition of Women Scholars in the History of Rhetoric and Composition, Jacqueline Jones Royster explains, “you don’t have to be female to take on the values, principles, and practices of feminisms and rhetoric.” Not only is it possible for men to join feminism, but as Andrea Lunsford states in the same piece, “we need more men who are feminists.” The feminism this video book espouses is not tied to a person’s gender but rather to the way in which they engage with the world by practicing ethical collaboration and doing work that fosters equality and social justice.

At the risk of using a label that may not be taken up by our field, I am aligning this video book with the nascent fourth-wave feminism. As Kira Cochrane argues, the fourth wave explores the intersectionality of oppression, meaning that the ways in which people are oppressed are connected, so that trying to address isolated issues does not solve the problem as a whole, although addressing one issue does partially help address others. Another aspect of fourth-wave feminism that resonates with my arguments is the opening up of feminism to, as Cochrane writes, “thousands of activists ambitious to pursue liberation, not just for women, but for those oppressed by class, race, sexuality, age, [and] ability.” Lastly, fourth-wave feminists use digital spaces to bring about change. As I argue here, scholars practicing film and video production are in an ideal position to perform that kind of activism.

6. Feminist Filmmaking

Feminist filmmaking, as I will discuss in detail in Chapter 2, values collaboration between every member of the filmmaking team. Collaboration extends to those in front of the camera and/or to those whose creative work, such as moving images, music, and alphabetic writing, is sampled in our work. The goal of feminist filmmaking is for everyone involved to benefit from the filmmaking experience and from the resulting film or video. Films and videos created through feminist filmmaking are also activist pieces seeking to foster social justice and equality.

7. Rhetoric and Composition

I call our field Rhetoric and Composition because it seems to be the most common term shared by those who attend our flagship conference, the Conference on College Composition and Communication, and who publish in our journals such as *Kairos*, *JAC*, and *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*. I realize a field is made of many unquantifiables besides conferences and journals, but that is a matter for a whole other video book.

8. Rhetorician

While I use Rhetoric and Composition as the name of our field, I refer to its members as rhetoricians, not rhetoricians and compositionists. As with my use of filmmaker, this choice is related to avoiding clunky language. Let's now turn to:

ENGAGING WITH THE WORK OF OTHERS

As viewers have no doubt noticed, I have been showing images of copyrighted material. I will discuss this practice at length in Chapter 4 but I wanted to briefly address the issue here because as Bonnie Kyburz argues, questions of copyright often prevent people from engaging with moving-image work made by rhetoricians because they focus on our permission to create rather than on what we have created ("Open Aesthetics"). I argue that the images you see as I speak are citations. I am engaging with these works as I would with alphabetic writing sources.

Guided by Fair Use principles, I make sure to use only a small portion of the original work and to create "new insights and understandings" about each piece as I weave it into my arguments (Sims). I also argue that, instead of hurting the cited copyrighted works' potential marketability, being cited here raises a work's profile and status by bringing it into a scholarly conversation.

For the soundtrack I decided to work with Creative Commons music so as to not be limited to use only small portions of songs and in order to provide visibility to artists working under open-access ideals.

In order to make sure that viewers interested in engaging with the work featured here can do so easily, I cite all works at the end of each chapter in three categories: Films and Videos, Soundtrack, and Alphabetic Writing. I aim for these categories to make it easier for viewers to locate the sources they're looking for. The sources can also be found in each chapter's transcript. Lastly, although I do not add source page numbers to the version you're hearing now because they break the flow of speech, I do add them to the transcripts. Let's now talk about:

ACCESS

I am thrilled to be publishing this video book with CCDP, which is an open-access press. The open-access philosophy toward academic knowledge fits with feminist ideals and with the way moving-images are consumed in our digital culture. I also hope to make this video book available to anyone with an Internet connection, so there are transcripts and closed captioned versions for each chapter.

And now that we have a sense of what this video book is trying to do and what its terminology means, let's go to Chapter 2 to learn how to make moving images the feminist way.

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NOTE

Behind-the-Scenes footage of *Vanishing Borders* by Michelle Mueller. Additional photography by Josie Keefe.

Unattributed footage throughout the chapter by Alexandra Hidalgo. Additional photography by Nathaniel Bowler, Lindsey Spitzley, Jefferey Ivey, and Peter Bowler.

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SOUNDTRACK

"Do Better" and "Gentle Marimbas"
by Podington Bear

Downloaded from soundofpicture.com

ALPHABETIC WRITING

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