Transcript for "On Queer play, Messiness, and Risk-taking: An Interview with Jacqueline Rhodes." From *Doing Digital Visual Studies: One Image, Multiple Methodologies*. https://www.ccdigitalpress.org/book/ddvs/chapters/rhodes.html

Laurie Gries:
Jackie, thank you so much for being here today. We're just, I'm so excited about your participation in this project, and I'm so looking forward to picking your brain about where we can go with digital visual studies from here. I want to begin by just giving you the opportunity to introduce yourself to some of our readers and viewers and listeners who might not be familiar with your work.

Jacqueline Rhodes:
Okay, well, hello. I'm Jackie Rhodes. I'm currently a professor of rhetoric and writing at the University of Texas at Austin. I'm the co-author of a book called *On Multimodality* with Jonathan Alexander, which came out about six years ago. That's sort of one area of my expertise--I would say multimodal composition. But then, we saw that as the theory behind multimodality, and then we did a project right after that called *Techne,* which was more the practice of multi-modality. And that particular project, *Techne* blends together a lot of my areas of interest: multi-modality, queer theory, digital video, and I would say it's probably my favorite thing that I've ever made…until my recent documentary.

So after I had done a lot of academic books, I was setting out to do another academic book about a lesbian separatist group from the 70s. And I was stuck in this academic mode of how can I bring these people to light by writing an overly theoretical piece on radical lesbian print culture, and then I had this moment of like Saul on the road to Tarsus with lightning hitting him, and I was like, you know what, they're still alive and you could talk to them. So, so it changed very, very rapidly from being a book project where I had had about 10 years of writer's block to a digital video. And so, I made an 83-minute documentary on the Furies that's been playing in festivals, and so that's currently my favorite project.

So I was trying to figure out what I worked on, and I thought, you know, I work on things that let me tinker. I like messing with things, and that's how I got into multi-modality because I had started out--back when I was going through my undergrad--as a typesetter and a graphic designer, and then it just got--as I went into grad school, you know, it was the birth of the Internet, and there was plenty of opportunity to tinker with things, and so yeah, digital video, multi-modality, even queer theory--even queer theory--I would say is a matter of tinkering with things and messing them up and see what happens.

Laurie Gries:
Well, I love that because that's very much, you know, part of the premise behind this particular digital visual studies project. I mean it was really--this is really a ground up project in that, you know, I came up with this idea that it would be useful to study this particular image from different methodological perspectives, so we could see the distinct affordances of each of those

methodologies. But I had no idea what the students who agreed to participate were going to do. I mean it was all--it was all about tinkering, right? I mean some of the projects in which they're you know dealing with augmented reality--some of them had already had had—had-- had already experience with that kind of stuff, but when it came to 3d printing or the glitch studies project, I mean all of that was just pure tinkering and experimentation. And what was really interesting, I think, and challenging for both the…contributing authors and me was well, this is really fun and this is really cool, but what does this really do for our understanding of visual studies, right? And so that actually took a lot of experimentation; it took a lot of practice and reflection in a recursive process, and so I love that you got into all of this because of your own love for tinkering.

So just give us a little bit of feedback to the project itself. I'm curious about your response to the digital visual studies collection and what you think is going on that's perhaps interesting and constructive.

Jackie Rhodes:
I actually--you know what's interesting to me is something that you mentioned just now and that was all of these different approaches and coming up with this is cool and this is fun but what does it do, and what I love about digital visual studies is actually the first part which is the this is cool, this is fun, and then the understanding comes through reflection. And that's good, and your authors are doing that, so I think the reflection is great. But really what is interesting to me is the different sorts of play in the book. I loved the glitch chapter. I was just reading it because I'm working on a glitch piece right now, and I thought *well this is this is cool* because it shows sort of critical engagement and play at the same time. So I guess that's one of the things that I like about the book--is that simultaneous critical engagement and play.

I always talk about play, and people think that I mean, we mean like fun things. I'm like, yeah I mean fun, but I also mean almost a Derridean sense of play, right--like you have a steering wheel, how much play is in it, where you're like testing the boundaries and seeing how far you can go this way before you turn the car. So that idea of play I think is really apparent in the book, and I like that in the different chapters that I've been reading and…of course, the intro and conclusion because I'm a completist.

Laurie Gries:
Well, talk about--let's also talk about play in relation to failure and risk-taking.

Jackie Rhodes:
Oh yeah.

Laurie Gries:
Because I'm sure you when you, you know--I don't think you ever made--I know that you've been experimenting with digital multimodal projects for a very long time, but I'm not sure how much experience you have with producing a documentary film. And yet, you went for it, knowing that, very well, it could have ended in pure failure, right? So I'm wondering, you know-

-I try to bring up in the afterword--the necessity for us to encourage more risk-taking in light of a consequential failure because there's something really productive about that learning process, and I'm wondering if you could just talk about that through your own experiences.

Jackie Rhodes:
Yeah, I think one of the things that you also bring up in your discussion of failure is that failure is a privilege in some ways. Productive failure is a privilege, and so I'm sure that earlier in my career, I wouldn't have taken up doing a documentary. I think being a full professor at a research university with, you know, books behind me, and it was okay if I wanted to go play with cameras. Nobody said, "Oh, it's okay if you want to go play with cameras." But because I was already at that particular status, I could just go play with new technologies. And, so there was a lot of freedom in that.

I think, yeah, I did a lot of failing along the way--a lot of failing. It's not in the movie, except I can see where the little failures are. Like ewww, that was a bad jump cut, that was really bad, oh that was bad. Pete didn't catch that--you know because my failures as an editor were caught by my editor, Pete Johnston. But there was a lot of trial and error and failing forward, but I do think it's important to point out that that failure is a privilege in some ways when you're trying new stuff.

At the same time, I think that we still need to encourage failing forward, and I think that's part of changing the field. You know, if all we want is polished academic prose, then we're not doing anything particularly engaged, we're not doing anything theoretically informed. What we're doing is just replicating an old system, right, and the old system is not built for play. It's, it's all like, you know, stay within the lines and do this stuff, and that is still with us, unfortunately. And the only way to get out of that is to say, you know what? The lines are wrong. I'm going to go this way, right, and you hope that enough people will sort of see where you're going and go with you or fail in their own way to the other side, so that it destabilizes that old system.

So, yeah. I think that part of getting ready to do the documentary was doing techne because it does have video in it and, part of it, because I've always been a tinkerer. When I was 13,14 years old, I decided that I wanted to be a director.

Laurie Gries:
Ahhhh…

Jackie Rhodes:
So I had my little super 8 camera and one of those old editors where you like physically spliced the film together and did all this stuff, and I was making spoof commercials. And I actually found them and had them digitized. One of these days, they're going to show up in a project because they are hilarious. They are hilarious, at least to me. But, you know--so I had this weird history with film. It didn't feel like taking on something entirely new. It was still telling a story. It still was, you know, so you're still doing narrative, you're still doing some film stuff that you wanted to do. But I did a lot of experimentation with, you know, how to place the camera, how

to place the--I mean like the physical experimentation with--if I put the mic up here and the camera over here, what happens with the interaction between the two of them? And I don't think that shows up necessarily in the documentary, but I have the clear sense of the failures I had.

Laurie Gries:
Right. Yeah. I mean I love that you're speaking into this and especially in terms of privilege because I feel that same way, right. Like I feel like I was just able to embark on this digital project and a digital public humanities project that I've been working on only after I had gotten my book published, and I was pretty certain I was going to get tenure. Right, because there's so much pressure, I think, to generate knowledge in genres that have been academically sanctioned, right, over time. And so I'm wondering, you know, you're--you have the--you know you have the great opportunity there at UT Austin to be working with a lot of really stellar students, and you have a really dynamic digital rhetoric program there. What do you think we can be doing as a as a discipline to open up opportunities for risk-taking and failure for those who might--I don't know, who are on the 10-year process, you know, the 10-year track, right, so that they can experiment and take risks without having to really worry about the consequences of not living up to what I consider to be very kind of elite--I mean you could even say white supremacist standards. What do you think we need to do, as a field, I mean. What are we--what are we doing in that regard, do you think, well and what could we still be doing?

Jackie Rhodes:
The the one glimmer of hope I see--I mean the revolution is always too far off. It just is. It just is because I think that there needs to be a wholesale change in how we think about scholarship. I'm not sure how soon that's going to happen, but there is a glimmer of hope, and I think it has to do with this new-ish idea that we should be public intellectuals now. Tenure guidelines don't necessarily value your public intellectual work, but they--in some universities they're starting to pay attention to your interaction with the public. And I think of that in terms of you know--you want your work to make a difference. I want my work to make a difference. I'm assuming that most people, when they're doing this work, want it to make a difference to somebody. So when you do your dissertation and you do your first book, it's like oh, this is this is going to change things. I mean *Still Life with Rhetoric* changed things. It changed how people talked about visual rhetoric, which is cool. I'm not sure how many readers you got compared to your digital humanities project. I mean, again, if you're looking at reach and virality and all of those things, it makes a difference in this way just like *On Multimodality* made a difference in some things. *Techne* made a difference in some things.

But I tell you. I made my documentary, which I have to make arguments to show how it even fits within rhetoric and composition because it doesn't really. I mean it is about a print culture moment, but it really is more about queer history. But I showed that at festivals, and I know that many more people saw my documentary than ever will read my book.

Laurie Gries:
Right.

Jackie Rhodes:
And you know, if it is something that--you know because this particular group of people is in their 60s and 70s, and I've gotten responses from people in their 60s and 70s saying, Oh I remembered. It's so great you made that film. It made my day. Or I get responses from 20 year olds saying, I had no idea that we had this as part of our history. This is really cool. And I think that's--that to me is more meaningful than, oh I got reviewed in one of the big journals in the field.

Laurie Gries:
Right.

Jackie Rhodes:
And that might be a position of privilege too. That's a privilege to be able to do that, but I think the move to being a public intellectual and starting to talk about, okay what is your real impact factor?

Laurie Gries:
Right.

Jackie Rhodes:
Not just did you get in x, y, and z journals, but did you get a response? Did you get a reaction? I mean, I'm thinking about--Oh god, I'm thinking about Bahktin of all things. See, I'm trying to be all public intellectual then like…

Laurie Gries:
But I love Bahktin too, so go on.

Jackie Rhodes:
When he talks about answerability, and it's like you know how you know something is alive is you poke it and it responds. He says it much better than that, but I'm just thinking, you know, our scholarship should be something that generates a response.

Laurie Gries:
Right.

Jackie Rhodes:
And so, I think once we can reframe what we're doing in terms of different metrics, right, it's not a matter of where it gets reviewed. That already just replicates the same old track. Does it bring new light to something? Does it bring new light to the university? Does it position you in a, in a different way toward the public sphere? And that's the sort of work we need to be doing.

And I think it also would do well to break down some of the barriers between town and gown right? I mean, we're--we are hopelessly the absent-minded professors in relation to the "real

world," and I think that we need to do something about that. There's a dire need to do something about that as funding gets cut for higher education.

Laurie Gries:
Absolutely. I'm really excited about, you know, this notion of the engaged humanities--the engaged humanities--which has been kind of circulating for a while, but I think is starting to gain currency at different institutions. And I know that's something that we're going to try to begin working on here at CU Boulder, right---like how do we actually work with students on projects that have pressing value to what's going on in our local and national communities and even global communities. But, you know, I think-- I think that also it requires not just different metrics, but it also requires inventive kinds of pedagogies that have everything to do with, okay let's just--you know, this attitude of let's just try this, right. Let'--I mean part of what I'm really interested in and why I've always been interested in method and methodologies is that you know the more we come to questions about rhetoric and writing and publics through the same kinds of methods, and I would even say multimodal production, the greater the limits, I think, in the opportunities to open up new insights, right? Because it's kind of like you just--you know the definition of crazy--so you keep trying to think about the things in the exact same way and then, in a sense, I mean, I feel like in a way that's what kind of we do in academia when we become so cemented to traditions of inquiry or research methods, right? And so part of, I think, the exciting challenge is thinking about, hey especially in this current, you know, age of the Internet or whatever we want to call where things are just you know happening so differently, we can't keep coming to understand how rhetoric and problems are emerging through these very, I'm not going to say outdated but just kind of static methods and modes.

Jackie Rhodes:
I think that's absolutely true. I was just flashing on Jody Shipka's work with food and cooking. I mean, who would have thunk it? You know, just people just doing stuff that--it's like, okay, well we weren't thinking about the rhetoric of you know putting together a 50s meal from an old cookbook, but why not? And why not have a presentation where she does exactly that? I mean-- so stuff like that where it's playful, but it also brings up all sorts of questions about the cultural context of stuff, and it's a very rhetorical bit of work. But you know, some of, some of her work in multimodality, I think, challenges digital multimodality. And I think, you know, the engaged humanities, I think, is a really valuable way to go, especially if it involves some sort of doubling down on humanities work.

Laurie Gries:
Yeah.

Jackie Rhodes:
What is it that we do that is unique, that is useful? Because I do believe that the humanities are unique and useful, and I think it has to do with questions of ethics and values, and, you know, trying to be follow our better angels, perhaps. But I think that what I've seen lately happening is it gets put pushed to the side as sort of an addendum to digital humanities, medical humanities, environmental humanities. And I know--I would say, particularly in terms of say medical

humanities, the old version--there's new stuff now that's really exciting where people are really working together--but the first iteration of medical humanities was basically, we need the doctors to have more empathy and so we're going to have them read novels. And it's like okay, that doesn't work.

Laurie Gries:
Right.

Jackie Rhodes:
And it and it does a disservice to the humanities and to the medical field. So I think that that doubling down on the humanities, saying, you know, we look at questions of ethics, and we look at questions of difference in identity, and we do it in ways that trouble and also celebrate what it is to be human in this particular world. So I still have this very renaissance, almost romantic idea, of the humanities, but it keeps me going. It makes me happy to play.

Laurie Gries:
No, absolutely. I always tell this story--I'm so glad you brought this up, in part, because--I'm going to get back to the digital visual studies--but I want to just comment on an example that I always give regarding this. And I might have already talked about this in…another interview, so listeners if I did forgive me for repeating myself. But I brought in an augmented reality artist to camp--from New York to campus to talk about augmented reality as engaged public scholarship and then the following day after the lecture,…we taught an augmented reality workshop for teachers and students to help them imagine how they might put it to work. And so we had a bunch of students come down from a program that I'm not going to name, but one of the students stood up and they were talking about this project that they've been working on for a really long time. And it was out of a-- it was clearly out of a program in which the critical questioning that I think the humanities, you know, plays such an important role in was kind of just left off the plate in the production of the project, right. So, the student was talking about a project that they developed where they…created augmented reality opportunities…for people when they were walking through space and when they were going into stores. And if I remember correctly, it was almost like a scavenger hunt of sorts. And so, you know, I raised my question. I'm like, okay, what if all the people who don't feel like they can, who don't and can't move freely and feel safely moving through public space, how has this, you know, this app, this augmented reality app, accounted for that, right. And the question just, you know, just flew right over the student's head and the faculty mentor that that was there too. And it was just so apparent to me that, you know, a lot of the times with digital visual projects that critical humanities perspective gets pushed to the side like you're suggesting, right, and so I think, you know, part of the challenge in doing digital visual studies is making sure that we always remember to bring that critical perspective into the projects from the very inception of the research questions we're asking that drive the production of the project, right. And so with that said, you know part of the--I want to pick your brain on what you think digital visual studies can do better in terms of bringing that critical perspective to the work. You have so much experience I know with feminist work and queer, you know, perspectives, and I'm just wondering like if I had to ask you what does it look like to queer digital visual studies, right, like

what would what would your vision be? What would, you know, what would the tenets of responsibility and ethics be in doing that kind of work? What kind of work would you like to see, if you don't mind me asking?

Jackie Rhodes:
That is such a hard question, such a hard question.

It would be really messy. It would be really messy. Because I think that part of queering digital visual is to--you know, at a very basic level--I'm thinking way back when when I was learning graphic design, people kept referring me to Robin Williams' work and you know the CRAP principles of design and how everything had, you know, proximity and contrast and this and that the other side and it. And I think Ann Wysocki did a great takedown of that years ago 20 years ago, and yet it's still used. It's still used. So I think queering is getting outside of how things are supposed to look.

I think that it's connected--because I was just reading the glitch chapter--I think it's connected to glitching. There's some great work being done on the intersections of glitch and queer by Legacy Russell who just did the glitch feminist manifesto. Yeah, it's a great book. And part of it is looking at--as with queering--how glitch both disrupts a system, but also reifies it, right. Because you see a ghost in the machine, you're still seeing the machine. You might be seeing the ghost, but you're still seeing the machine. So how do we get out of the machine? That would be the ultimate queer move--is just to, sort of like, set it aside and do something entirely new. But we can't do something entirely new because wherever we go, we bring ourselves with us, right. So, I can't talk about what an ideal query would look like. I can say that in practice a queering would be messy and multiplicitous.

I think that the work that you've done with the Obama Hope virality and the different changes made to that is sort of a queering of the visual because you're looking in those--as I said-- multiplicitous and messy ways at an image that is just at first sight kind of cool, kind of pretty, and then it's not. So how do you make things ugly? How do you make things messy? And then, who are you making it ugly and messy against? And who are you making it ugly and messy for? Because that's the queer humanities. Does that, does that make sense? Because it comes back to your example too, right. That who are you doing this for, who are you doing this in spite of.

But I would say, right now, in queer studies, there's this really productive conversation going on about how queer isn't necessarily always anti-normative. You can't just say, oh it's anti-normative therefore it's queer. Because, because always being in opposition isn't a productive place to be. And I think that the work of Muñoz, in particular, and Mari Ruti did a great job spelling this debate out in *The Ethics of Opting Out* that--how do you generate a mess that is utopic? How do you get a messy utopia because we have this idea that we're working towards something perfect and positive—Heaven, Garden of Eden--all those sorts of things. And it's like, well, you know, what if what we're working toward is like a big junkyard with potholes and, but things to play in, right. Where the demand is that you use your imagination to make it better instead of it being better for you automatically. I'm sort of I'm just spinning at this point

because I think that my frustration with queering has been that anti-normative stance--that the people think, oh well I'm standing in opposition therefore I'm queering something. It's like, no, no. You're not. You're just standing in opposition. To make it queer means going through processes of disidentification, I think. It does have something to do still with sexuality and embodiment. So yeah, it would be messy. It'd be sexy. Multiplicitous. It would turn people on in inappropriate ways.

Laurie Gries:
Okay, so let me launch into my question then.

Jackie Rhodes:
Right, yeah, I'm liking this idea of utopia. Yeah.

Laurie Gries:
Right. So, I mean, let's imagine, if you will, some digital visual projects that you think would do that kind of work in provocative, sexy, messy, multiplicitous ways. I mean, can you point to some projects that you think, like, that either--you know, I'm always thinking of projects that I would want to do, but I just don't have time to do, right. But are there projects you would want to see done in relation to digital visual studies that either you might take up or others because, you know, you just think they're really worthwhile?

Jackie Rhodes:
Let's see. I can't speak to anything I've seen recently. I saw a great exhibit of Ai Weiwei's work who--and his work with political protest and, you know, his own x-rays when he was beaten by guards and stuff like that. It's like, well this does not seem sexy.

Laurie Gries:
Right.

Jackie Rhodes:
But it's very embodied, and it makes you think, and it makes you feel something in not a sexy way, but a very earthy way. I think work like that does it. There was a great exhibit in L.A. at LACMA that my student, Derek, went to where somebody had put together--it was great (I'll send a picture of it if you want to see it. It's great)--somebody had made something that looked like a tiger rug, but as you got closer, it was made out of cigarette butts. Okay that is--it's cool, it's fun, it is over the top. It's making use of waste, so it's messy. Is it sexy? Again, it makes you feel. It makes you feel in a very inexplicable way. Like it's not just like, oh that makes me happy because it's pretty, but like, wow, that is disturbing and gross and cool. That's inappropriate. I think, that's part of it.

Laurie Gries:
Yeah, unpredictable.

Jackie Rhodes:
Unpredictable, uh slightly surprising, right? So I think work like that. So that is actually not digital visual, though that's getting back to sort of material, multimodal. I think with digital visual, I would like to see stuff that doesn't have to be smooth and perfect, but I think that smooth and perfect can also be messy depending on how you contextualize it, right. So, say you had a picture of an egg. It's like, can you make somebody feel the perfection of that egg? Right. And can you do it without breaking it? Or do you have to break it and take another picture of it to show that too? right? But somewhere between the whole egg there and the breaking of the egg, I mean again, it gets back to Ai Weiwei--what he did with the Chinese Vase--somewhere between the perfection and the breaking is that productive mess. And we fill it in as viewers , and it's a very rhetorical move. It is, you know, it's an enthymeme. It is here's the major premise, here's the conclusion, and I'm asking the audience to fill in all the minor premises to make meaning out of it. I mean, and I think, that that enthymatic move is a very sexy move. And so yeah, picture of an egg. I challenge people to make a picture of an egg.

Laurie Gries:
Well, I mean, and I think, what you're, I mean I hear you pushing for, is maybe, you know--and I haven't seen this done a lot, like I don't think we do enough with performance studies in visual rhetorical studies or visual studies or even you know rhet/comp, especially. right. And I think there's some really provocative work going on there.

Jackie Rhodes:
Oh yeah. Yeah, I think so. I mean, I think that this is one of the strengths of the humanities is branching out into other areas of the humanities. I mean, not even going like let's run towards STEM. It's like, no, go to theater. Go to theater AND see what they're saying about performance, and then go to cultural studies and see what they're saying about performance, and then like, what about the actual photographers who study this thing? And the theater people who study this thing? And people who embody it and dance. How do they queer the humanities? I think that that gives us that sort of more whole sense of what it might look like.

Rosi Bradoitti, in *The Post-Human*…. the task of critical theory--and I would say this is the task of humanity's work--the task of critical theory today is creating an adequate representation of the self in its sociohistorical context, and it's in that attempt that the humanities is really valuable, and the queering part of it is the adequacy of it. Like I'm just creating an adequate, temporary, strange vision of the self in a context. I use that in a cyborg rhetoric seminar and had it as the prompt for the final project. So, all the students were tasked with creating an adequate representation of the self in a socio-historical context. It was great. It was great.

Laurie Gries:
Tell me what some of them did.

Jackie Rhodes:
You know, my favorite one--I mean some of them are like, okay I'm going to make it, I'm going to make a documentary. It's like, okay you can make a documentary. It was all very

experimental and very good. I mean, a lot of weird exciting video failures that he couldn't have planned but he made use of because they were there, so that was that was good. But my favorite was Patrick decided he would play a video game as a character that's not like him, right? So, it's a role--it's an RPG. And he played it, and he kept a journal, and he kept a journal inhabiting that particular self all the way through this game and reflecting on what was happening during the game. And he just turned the journal in at the end. And I was like, okay that's really weird and really cool. And it was so much writing. It was so much writing, and it was so much inhabiting a self, and it was so much creativity. It wasn't digital. Again, it was a material thing. But he could have as easily done it digitally. He could have created--it was multimodal, right, because he's interacting with this RPG, but that sort of creative work where you're trying to inhabit yourself or other selves to get at some sense of an adequate sort of, kind of, representation is the sort of work that I think we can be doing. And I would say that probably is queer work.

Laurie Gries:
What are the ethical dilemmas that come up, though, in doing that kind of work? Like I mean, I'm curious as to what--was this just an avatar? Was it a superhero? Like what was the body? And was it--how was it related to Patrick's own body in terms of race?

Jackie Rhodes.
You know, it's interesting because he spent a lot of time talking about that with me. And we came to the conclusion with all the students that--don't necessarily pick yourself to create an adequate representation. Pick a self and try to contextualize it. So that was part of it because I wanted them to feel safe enough to do that sort of work.

Laurie Gries:
Yeah.

Jackie Rhodes:
And I don't want to be in the position--as so many people in Rhet/Comp are--of judging the selves of people who write for us. You know, I'm judging your voice, I'm judging yourself, and that's just my purview. It's like, no, don't do that.

The other thing that, I think, is part of the ethical dilemma is that it puts the professor on high judging selves and judging adequacy, and so I think it's imperative that we participate, and so I did too.

Laurie Gries:
Oh… a

Jackie Rhodes:
And that's part of the reason that *Techne* came about, right. So, I think that framing it in terms of—well, it reminds me when I used to have to teach personal narratives in First Year Comp. It was an assigned rubric and an assigned course sequence. I was just teaching, and they're like,

everybody has to write a personal narrative at the beginning of the semester, and it has to be about a time that your students learn something, which is what I always call the Foucauldian Strip Search, right. That we are going to look at you and judge whether or not you're worthy personally being in the University. So I hate the personal essay, for that reason, as the, as the entry point into written discourse of the University. Anyway, I got to the point where I would just tell people,…my students, I'm not going to know if you're telling the truth.

Laurie Gries:
Right.

Jackie Rhodes:
Let me, let me talk about and let's explore the narrative arc of these sorts of stories because that's what we're looking for--is putting that narrative art together.

Laurie Gries:
Right.

Jackie Rhodes:
And so create, create a self, create the narrative. So that was a sort of…subversion of the project. But I took that with me when I assigned this particular piece in the cyborg rhetorics class. That I try to create safe enough spaces in my classrooms and safe enough and strong places where people can feel like they can communicate what they need to and not communicate what they don't need to. And so that's a delicate task, and it requires being attentive. Attentive, yeah. And doing the work yourself. And doing the work yourself because, I think, that's part of it. You have to--if you're going to ask your students to put themselves on the line, you need to too.

Laurie Gries:
Yeah, well, and what you're making me really think about is the notion of experience. I've talked about this with other respondents that I've interviewed. You know, I think so much--I think because we, you know--the production of knowledge has been so immersed in print culture. We're, we're so intent in thinking about okay, well what do we want our audience members to read? What do we want them to understand? What do we want them to comprehend? What do we want them to realize? Right. And those have just been--what do we want them to be persuaded by? Right. Those are such dominant questions of knowledge production, whereas the activities that you're, you know, you're playing with, and I think even some of the--what I'd like to see more in digital visual studies--is, how do we let go of those, those, you know, those goals and rather think about how do we open up possibilities for new experiences? Right.

Jackie Rhodes:
Oh yeah.

Laurie Gries:
You know, and what happens when that be--when we understand that embodied experience leads to all kinds of knowledges that perhaps we haven't traditionally valued in the academy but perhaps can open up ways for us to think and feel and do otherwise?

Jackie Rhodes:
Oh yeah. You know when you were saying that, it reminded me of the rules. Do you remember those books where it's like the rules for getting a husband or the rules for picking up women? It was like in the 90s. People were publishing these things. And I think it's a particular approach to seduction that's very--it's akin to our approach to audience. How do you attract an audience? How do you keep an audience? How do you persuade an audience? Here are the rules. Do this, and they'll be with you. And then—and, I think—but, you know, in the real world such as it is in the embodied world, if you want to attract, seduce, keep somebody, you're not necessarily playing by the rules of a 90s book that says these are the rules for attracting an audience. Right? So what if in rhetoric, we started saying, this is what it is, this is who I am, and I created it ,and it's kind of cool and playful and messy. And if you get it and you're really into it, that would be great. If you think that it's absolute crap, that's fine. That's fine. It probably is to some people. Does it make you feel? Does it make you connect? Does it make you identify? I mean, and start measuring things (I'm getting a huge sunbeam here right now), start measuring your rhetorical success not by convincing or persuading an audience but by connecting and moving them in an embodied sort of way. I mean, it's getting very Hugh Blair at this point, where you move the passions in order to spur action, but…there is, there is that sort of like, how do, how do we connect? I mean, we are in the age of the digital and the age of the Internet, so easily disconnected from each other even at the time that we seem pathologically connected to each other. But there's a great disconnect in an embodied way, especially, you know, with Covid, in the sequestering. We're so detached. We're so disconnected. What if the purpose of rhetoric now is to build some sense of embodied connection? Because we're missing it so profoundly.

Laurie Gries:
Right. Absolutely. I love that, and it resonates. I mean, I've always loved Greg Ulmer's work for his notion, of helping us understand, that affect really is kind of the governing kind of apparatus for how we make decisions and how we behave in this, you know, in this day and age. That's always resonated with me, right. I mean, we—I--always go back to Jon Stewart, you know, in his like okay, so why--you know why, why isn't anybody believing in science anymore? And it's like, well because, you know, the facts--I mean we're living in an era of post-truths, in fact, anyway. So if that kind of--if that kind of knowledge production isn't serving our purposes any longer, you know, what happens--I mean this is blasphemous--but what happens if we let that go to a certain extent and really begin to experiment and try other ways and--you know, I love, what I love also about Ulmer's point is that, you know, it's our responsibility as teachers to begin to experiment and come up with new ways of educating students that allow them to perhaps generate affective experience, embodied experiences that will, perhaps, resonate and with individuals and afford connectivity in a way that we're just struggling with today.

Jackie Rhodes:
Yeah, yeah. Absolutely. I keep having E.M. Forster going through my head. Did you read *Howards End*?

Laurie Gries:
Yes, but actually I saw the movie.

Jackie Rhodes:
But, well, the book is good too. But there's--there's an epigraph that's just "only connect."

Laurie Gries:
Ahh, right.

Jackie Rhodes:
Like the whole, the whole story is about that connection. And I think that, that what you're bringing up is absolutely, absolutely. That trying to create an affective connection between people. That is the higher work, perhaps, of the humanities.

Laurie Gries:
Yeah, and I think it's going to take--I mean we're not trained to do that kind of work.

Jackie Rhodes:
Oh no. We're not. We're trained to pretend that we have the same level of objectivity as science and philosophy, maybe. We're just like, no, no this is really true. I've argued it really well, so it's really, really true. And it's like--but it's, it's truthy. It's truthy. We know our sophists, it's truthy. You would think that we would be doing great these days in terms of post-truth. This is, perhaps, the fourth sophistic right now.

Laurie Gries:
Absolutely. Yeah, I love it. Well, thank you so much. I mean, is there anything else you want to add you think that we haven't touched upon in relation to digital visual studies and looking forward as we continue this work and experiment and take risks and tinker and fail.

Jackie Rhodes:
I was wondering, actually, what your authors are doing now and if--because I thought what would be really cool is if some of them worked together now in a new way. Because I read the piece on queer archives, I read the piece on glitching, and I thought that would be cool if they work together--to put together, you know, Pinterest and glitch, which seem, like, they so don't go together, but it would be really cool.

Laurie Gries:
Yeah, right.

Jackie Rhodes:
So I was just wondering about your authors. Have they have they started collaborating in any sort of way? That would be that would be a great next step.

Laurie Gries:
That would be really fascinating. No, they haven't. But I think that what you're suggesting, you know, hopefully opens up ideas for you know the readers and the listeners and the viewers of this of this digital collection, right. Like how they--how do they move from the individual to the collaboration--like collaborative, messy.

Jackie Rhodes:
Collaborative, messy. I mean, just the mud fight, you know….Not the mud fight. I mean, fighting is bad. But still, just, you know, those days when you're a kid and it is--you know, I'm glancing back to my childhood in Montana. We're down in the creek bottom, and we're throwing mud at each other because it's fun.

Laurie Gries:
Right. Right. I mean that goes back to us trying to, you know, I think, I mean, I feel that--you know now that I'm on the other side of tenure, and I feel like I'm aging really quickly, I keep thinking about, what are my responsibilities to the younger generations of scholars, right, and part of that, I think, is us doing the work to create those spaces where they can feel comfortable to do this kind of wacky, messy work.

Jackie Rhodes:
Absolutely. I think that that's what's going to change the field--is more collaboration, and, I think, that collaboration across rank, across privilege. You know, creating the opportunities for people to do messy work--to work with you on your own messy work, you know.

Laurie Gries:
Yeah, I think that's absolutely right. Well, let's, let's commit to doing it and try to come up--I don't know what we got to do, but it'll be fun. But thank you so much, Jackie, for being here. It's always a pleasure to talk to you, and I know that the readers and listeners and viewers are going to get so much out of this conversation. So I just can't thank you enough for participating.

Jackie Rhodes:
Oh, sure. It was fun.

Laurie Gries:
Yeah!