Audio, Archives, and the Affordance of Listening in a Pedagogy of "Difference"

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Abstract

While attention to "affordance" has tended to focus on the forms of *production* that technologies encourage, this essay shifts emphasis to how different modes and mediums also afford certain kinds of *engagement* in the process of digital composing. Seeking a fresh pedagogical approach for how writing instructors and students might productively engage difficult issues of "difference" together, I argue that engaging audio archives of non-normative voices in the process of composing digital "audio collage" can afford iterative listening practices. Through a study of students' listening practices revealed in their audio compositions in a gender-themed composition course, I demonstrate the rewards of this pedagogical approach: an increased potential for "a stance of openness" (Ratcliffe, 2005, p. 17) to non-neutral texts and gender-critical inquiry, a greater sense of creative freedom and productive uncertainty felt by students, and the occasion to discuss fundamental issues in writing, including the process of coming to invention across a multitude of sources, the responsible appropriation of others' voices, issues of Fair Use and plagiarism, and the relationship between historical evidence and contemporary claims.
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A technological affordance, or a suite of affordances, is *directional*, it *appeals* to us by making some forms of communicative interaction possible or easy and others difficult or impossible, by leading us to engage in or attempt certain kinds of rhetorical action rather than others.
–Carolyn R. Miller

[W]e need to develop and enact innovative pedagogies that will better negotiate students' resistance, precisely so they may *more productively engage with difference*.
–Karen Kopelson

Perhaps through *listening* we can avail ourselves with more possibilities for inventing arguments that bring differences together, for hearing differences as harmony or even as discordant notes.
–Krista Ratcliffe

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1. Introduction

"Affordance" has become a terminological touchstone for digital scholars in rhetoric and composition, its usage underscoring the entwinement of rhetoric and technology. In Carolyn Miller's (2010) definition of affordance in the first epigraph, composers are the agential recipients of a medium's appeal, induced to craft specific rhetorical acts because they can and because they can't craft others. When digital scholars attend to the affordance of a mode or a medium, they tend to emphasize what kinds of composing its constraints help produce, such as the "particular affordances of sound" to "convey accent, emotion, music, [and] ambient sounds" (Takayoshi & Selfe, 2007, p. 9) or the "affordances of a digitally connected, networked environment" to "enable combinations of sounds, images, motions, and words" (Adsanatham, Garrett, & Matzke, 2013, p. 317). Different modes (such as words or sounds) and different mediums (such as television or the Internet)[1] "afford" different rhetorical moves.

In pedagogical practice, however, a focus on the *production* that technologies afford can sublimate the *engagement* with texts and materials in the process of composing. In alphabetic writing pedagogy, acts of engagement have been called "reading-to-write" tasks (Flower, 1990, p. 3) to emphasize how engagement with existing texts is embroiled in the production of new ones; as Christina Haas reminded, "in a variety of literacy contexts—within and outside educational settings—much real writing arises in response to reading, and students' reading is often challenged, enriched, and evaluated by having them write" (1993, p. 19). Haas's argument remains cogent in multimodal composing, where engagement expands beyond reading to include listening, viewing, and clicking. Yet, multimodal composition scholarship has shown less attention to these acts of engagement than it has to composing for an imagined user, to exploiting the affordances of technology to reach a perceived audience.[2] This essay brings the longer pedagogical concern for engagement with texts into the multimodal composing context, shifting the emphasis of affordance to how different modes and mediums also *afford certain kinds of engagement* in the process of composing. This shift returns to the origins of "affordance," coined in 1979 by ecological psychologist James Gibson. Above all, Gibson was concerned with *perception*—with what guided our attention to some environmental aspects over others and how this sensory reception of an environment "afforded" different behaviors. In Gibson's theory, engagement was the condition for production, rather than the other way around.

While pedagogical attention to student engagement with texts and topics is important in any compositional process, it is particularly imperative in curricula that enact what Karen Kopelson has called a "pedagogical focus on 'difference'" (2003, p. 117). These feminist, queer, or critical pedagogy approaches ask students to recognize and challenge how "gender, ethnicity, race, class, sexuality, and many other markers of difference" can subordinate or privilege subjects (Luke & Gore, 1992, p. 1), or to queer the stability of these identity categories in the first place (Alexander & Rhodes, 2011).[3] As Kopelson explained, texts assigned in such pedagogical approaches can provoke resistance in some students who view them as an "*intrusion* of sorts, resenting and even actively rebelling against what they may experience as the 'imposition' of race, class, gender, sexuality, or (more generally) cultural issues on their 'neutral' course of study" (2003, p. 117, her emphasis). Student resistance to feelings of "intrusion" has much to do with how they engage with the politically charged materials; how they "attribute identity or intention to a writer in order to understand or account for a text" (Haas, 1993, p. 23); and how they map that reading onto their instructor, who may herself be marked by an identity of "difference." This, too, is an attribute of affordance. As Gibson explained, engagement is fundamentally guided by social relations of *difference*: "we pay closest attention to the optical and acoustic information that specifies what the other person is, invites, threatens, and does," before acting accordingly (1979, p. 128). Paying attention to how students engage with sources before and during multimodal composing means shifting our understanding of affordance back to Gibson and back to difference.

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[1] A mode is defined as a semiotic channel employed in composing, whereas mediums are "tools or material resources used to produce and disseminate texts" (Lauer, 2009, p. 227).

[2] For example, Rosinski and Squire (2009) examine how the HCI concept of "perceived affordance" (how a designer organizes the visual and navigational aspects of an interface based on assumptions about users) mirrored composition's focus on "*tapping into audience expectations* about a document's conventions and constraints—textually, visually, organizationally—in an effort to enhance readability and comprehension" (p. 152, my emphasis).

[3] My use of "difference" in this essay draws on Kopelson, Luke and Gore, and other feminist pedagogy scholars who have employed it an umbrella term for the vectors of identity that intersect and diverge in society and our classrooms. "Pedagogies of 'difference'" often draw attention to those vectors and the ways in which they construct, privilege, or subordinate subjects.

Listening, I suggest, can serve as a bridge between the technological affordance of certain kinds of engagement on the one hand, and student resistance to pedagogies of difference on the other. Krista Ratcliffe has argued for rhetorical listening as a form of "cross-cultural" engagement, a conscious "stance of openness that a person may choose to assume in relation to any person, text, or culture" (2006, p. 17). While Ratcliffe offered classroom strategies for fostering rhetorical listening, the promotion of purposeful and self-conscious openness to difference remains a challenge in classrooms where resistance can lead to gridlock and resentment among students and instructors. But listening connotes both understanding and, literally, *hearing*. As Steph Ceraso argues, students can be taught to become "more capable and sensitive listeners during the production of multimodal compositions" (2014, p. 120). Listening's dual meaning of understanding and hearing suggests that audio composing can be harnessed in affording a stance of openness to difference.

1.1. Proposal and framework

In particular, I propose that the process of composing audio *collage* can afford students more sustained, iterative, and self-conscious listening. I define audio collage as a specific genre that treats "voice as a malleable material" (E. Anderson, 2014, n.p.) found in digital audio archives. Such archives encompass both a *mode*—audible voice—and a *medium*—a digital archive—that each carry affordances for a stance of openness, particularly when specific archives comprised of a cacophony of non-normative voices are assigned. To develop this argument, I reflect on a gender-themed composition course and classroom context in which I found evidence of the affordance of engagement through audio collage and with archives. Introducing an audio collage assignment that asks students to compose with voices from the GLBT Historical Society's digital audio archive of gay liberation radio shows, I explore how engaging audio archives of difference can afford rhetorical listening.

1.2. Methodology

While many pedagogical studies rely upon interviews or surveys to assess students' perceptions of their composing practices, I have elected to focus on the listening practices revealed in students' *compositions*. This methodology aligns with what Thomas Huckin (1992) has called "context sensitive text analysis," a composition studies research method that reads student writing in the context of a "broad spectrum of contextual factors, including social, cultural, and other factors," relying on "plausible interpretation rather than...proof" (1992, p. 89). Extending the premise that students' reading is often evaluated in their writing, as Haas (1993) and others have argued, I collected each piece of audio and alphabetic composing produced by the students in the course and carefully examined them for evidence of *engagement*—for a sustained, iterative, responsible, and open return to the assigned texts. Student work cited in this essay is referenced because it was representative of a pattern of engagement and is used with the students' permission. Because this methodology entails reading student composing in the social and cultural context of the class and program, I begin below by outlining the course and its culture of student engagement with assigned texts.

2. Contextualizing the course: Digital archives, critical inquiry, and student resistance

Recently, I designed and taught a gender-themed first-year writing course, regularly offered by the department of English in my large, urban, mid-Atlantic research university. Eighteen women and one man self-selected into the gender-themed course that, like the many non-themed sections they might have chosen, satisfied their first-year writing requirement. Though the demographics of the class were somewhat racially and ethnically diverse,[4] most students shared a similar middle-class background and inexperience with gender study in academic settings. In response to a first-day in-class writing prompt asking them to anonymously share their experience with the words "feminist" and "queer," no students identified themselves as lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, or queer and only one identified as a feminist; in fact, the majority of students understood both "feminist" and "queer" to be pejoratives and *dis*identified with the terms in their responses. My iteration of the course asked these students to engage with digital collections of feminist

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[4] The class consisted of a majority of white women, a minority of black women, a small number of international women, and one white man. Most students were from suburban areas in the region surrounding the university's urban center.

blog posts, audio archives of gay liberation radio shows, a selection of canonical gender theory, and collections of gendered media images. Like the diversity of their assigned texts, students composed in a variety of media, beginning with alphabetic writing before later remixing audio collages.

This university's programmatic goals for first-year writing ask students to engage in the intellectual work of critical inquiry: to use writing to form questions, explore problems, and examine their own experiences, thoughts, and observations. In this composition program, students use writing and multimodal composing to engage in the critical and creative work of *reading and listening*—both published authors and student writing—with the goal of investigating a multifaceted subject with sustained scrutiny. When used productively, uncertainty and contradiction are celebrated as sites where deeper complexity can be pursued and exploited. While these goals undergird all iterations of the first-year course, they are well-suited to a pedagogy of difference: my design of the course was guided by the desire (cultivated by my own research in feminist and queer theory) to inspire uncertainty in students' assumptions about gender and sexuality as natural and fixed identifications and to engage them in critical inquiry with feminism, the "F word" from which so many had learned to dissociate.

Unsurprisingly, students don't always revel in uncertainty and contradiction or in listening to feminist and queer perspectives that might unsettle their understandings of gender and sexuality, as Kopelson (2003), Dale Bauer (1990), Johanna Atwood (1994), Janice Wolff (1991), and other scholars have demonstrated. In this class, student resistance to gender-critical inquiry was stoked by the first set of assigned texts—a collection of feminist blog posts written by Melissa McEwan for *Shakesville.com*. Curated on the site under the tab "Feminism 101," the blog posts made arguments for feminist analyses of current events and McEwan's own experiences with assault and casual sexism, as well as responses to common stereotypes about feminists (McEwan, 2010).

Instead of conscious openness and inquiry into the complexity represented in the collection of blog posts, most students tended to reduce and silence the blogger to justify their resistance to feminism in their informal responses to the reading. Andrew, for example, wrote that "Melissa seems like one of those people who are hard-stuck on being outlandish and outspoken" and "ignorant of what could be considered common sense." Several students followed a similar pattern in which they began by disidentifying with feminism, admitted to overlooking sexism in their lives, and then quickly dismissed McEwan's exigency: for instance, Regina wrote, "I am nowhere near a feminist. After reading this blog, I realized that I frequently just brush off the way men treat me, mostly because I've never had a problem before. I feel that as long as I feel comfortable in the relationship, then there is no problem." Similar to Regina, Maddie wrote, "I have never considered myself a feminist nor have I ever considered myself not one. I constantly overlook the fact that some men think women are second-class citizens. Frankly, I don't believe that we are, nor do most men." In these two examples, moments of awareness that the students' lives *might* require the negotiation of gendered power imbalances—this was productive uncertainty—were quickly closed down and abandoned. While students' disidentification with McEwan and feminism was not itself at odds with the goals of the course, the use of this conclusion to shut down critical inquiry into the multifaceted subjects of gender and power was.

The assignment of the blogs as texts compounded students' existing aversion to gender-critical inquiry and helped create an environment in the classroom that was vocally resistant to gendered difference. At this point, my attempts to encourage students to undertake a stance of openness were unsuccessful—in part because students often associated topics of difference with politics of the instructor. This association was particularly likely when the instructor's *body* marked her a biased advocate for a cultural issue or identity, as Kopelson (2003) has argued: if the instructor is black, for example. If she is visibly queer. If she is a woman. I—a young, white, female instructor—was read by my students to embody the feminist and queer politics of the texts I assigned. So that my students could linger in difference, I needed to speak with other voices and to allow my students to speak with others' voices too. In the next two sections, I consider how composing digital audio collage and engaging audio archives can afford a stance of openness to difference.

3. Audio collage and the affordance of iterative listening

To promote more sustained listening practices to course texts, I assigned the class a vast audio archive as their course "text": the GLBT Historical Society's online archive of gay liberation radio shows originally broadcast in the 1970s and 80s in San Francisco. The GLBT Historical Society's "Gayback Machine" provides listeners with online access to over 250 hours of San Francisco journalist Randy Alfred's show, *The Gay Life*, which ran from 1979 to 1984 and featured studio interviews, political meetings, government hearings, Pride celebrations, and other lesbian and gay community events. The Gayback Machine also houses producer Kevin Burke's Berkeley radio show, *Fruit Punch*,

which ran from 1975 to 1979 and focused on cultural work and theater arts. These gay liberation radio shows are a fascinating archive of materials in the history of sexuality, but they are also deeply personal, overtly political, and can be discomforting for some students. Through the form of interviews, comedy, music, poetry, and monologues from hosts Alfred and Burke, the radio shows explored in depth the difficult terrain of AIDS, of mental anguish and social ostracism, of explicit homosexual intimacy, and of "hustling" (gay male prostitution). The shows were sometimes humorous and even frivolous, with segments of comedy, campy songs, and topics like pick-up lines in gay bars.

In preparation for their audio compositions, I asked the class to *listen*—far and wide—and to stop and take note when anything sounded interesting, bizarre, or otherwise intriguing. The goal was to encourage students to chart a line of inquiry of their own making through the cacophony of voices. As Erin Anderson argues, when we view voice as a "malleable" compositional material, we move "toward alternative possibilities of invention, through experimental composition practices that *begin from and return to the material itself*" (2014, n.p.). To come to invention, students needed to repeatedly listen to the archive's voices until patterns emerged—recurring ideas and topics that came into view by virtue of students' own interests or uncertainty. These patterns, sparked by curiosity or discomfort, would be the impetus for their design of their audio compositions.

Using the open-source audio editor *Audacity*[5], each student's task was to selectively cut and arrange clips from their process of invention into a 4-6 minute "audio collage" in order to explore a focused, complex, and nuanced topic in gender and sexuality. An audio collage is a kind of "assemblage": a genre "built primarily and explicitly from existing texts in order to solve a writing or communication problem in a new context" (Johnson-Eilola & Selber, 2007, p. 381). In the assignment description, I called the assigned genre a *collage* to distinguish it from other forms of assemblages like political remix, a popular YouTube genre with which students were typically familiar. When the source material is politically-charged or when the "writing and communication problem" (Johnson-Eilola & Selber, 2007, p. 381) encourages it, remix tends to afford parodic forms of argumentation, wherein composers take existing popular and political media and strategically splice it together to expose the hypocrisy concealed by an original source or to argue for an alternative view (Rice, 2007; Gurney, 2011; Dubisar & Palmeri, 2010). But, while parodic remix is an effective and popular form of argumentation, it does not afford a stance of *openness* when engaging with the existing media—quite the opposite, in fact, since these remix practices often intentionally undermine the original source. Indeed, the doctrine of Fair Use even rewards resistant engagement with source materials, favoring parody and irony[6] over sympathy or identification in the adjudication of copyright. Framing the genre to students as *collage*, on the other hand, can afford a more receptive relationship between the composer and the source materials. And because the audio collages would not be uploaded publically, students were still protected by the educational clause of the Fair Use doctrine (a distinction that was discussed thoroughly with the class).

While students were permitted to use their own voices sparingly if they chose, I asked that they constrain the majority of their material to the archive itself because I wanted to discourage them from speaking over or for the archive's voices. I also wanted to encourage them to linger in the archive—to listen further and wider than the short clips they would eventually extract and arrange. Because the constraints of the collage assignment depended upon students listening and listening again to many different shows and segments, most of which would not end up in their compositions, one important way composing audio collage helped intervene in student resistance was by circumventing kneejerk avoidance of the text. When their compositions are actually stitched together from the voices of others, students must take the time to listen *iteratively* to the vast audio archive from which they choose their words and sounds. As Michelle Comstock and Mary Hocks remind, "while we have the ability to contract our ear muscles to lessen the vibrations, we cannot yet close our ears completely" (2006, n.p.). My students could close their eyes and their browsers on McEwan, the feminist blogger, but they could not close their "earlids" (Comstock and Hocks) on the radio show archive—not when they needed to listen widely and repeatedly to find the material for their compositions. The rhetorical listening that Ratcliffe advocates as a way to forge connection across gender and racial difference happened quite literally here, fostered by the aural mode of the gay liberation radio shows and the constraints of the collage assignment. In this way,

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[5] To introduce the class to this unfamiliar mode of composing, I led an in-class workshop with *Audacity*, during which students practiced downloading radio shows as mp3s; cutting, pasting, and rearranging clips in sequences and layers; and discussing the rhetorical effects of their choices.

[6] Anne-Marie Boisvert writes that remix can "engender. . . distantiation" which is "manifested in parody and irony and also in nostalgia" (2003, n.p.). Courts have rewarded parodic forms of "transformational" engagement with source material over others. (http://www.copyright.gov/fls/fl102.html).

the "reading-to-write" tasks (better understood here as "listening-to-collage") can increase students' engagement with the complexity of gender and sexuality.

This increased engagement is also afforded by the *process* of composing with the digital voices of others. As several scholars have demonstrated, working with unfamiliar technologies like audio, video, and image editors has been shown to result in longer, more focused student engagement (Anderson, 2008; Dubisar & Palmeri, 2010; Brooks, Tomanek, Wald, Warner & Wilkening, 2006; Kuhn, 2005; Alexander, Powell, & Green, 2012). Indeed, Daniel Anderson's students reported spending "hours just trying to figure out how the program worked," describing their focus on the project as an "addiction," a need to "keep working" because they were "never satisfied" enough with the results (2008, pp. 50-51). Portrayed here is another affordance of production but one that carries with it a kind of *engagement*: repeated and sustained listening. Like Anderson, Comstock and Hocks (2006) remark on the increased compulsion to repeatedly revise—but they also emphasize that this increased desire to keep working is particularly pointed in audio composing *because* of the kind of listening it demands:

> As our students have discovered, listening to recordings.. inspires a self-conscious perspective (a form of ana-lytical listening) on what's being said, how it is being said, who is saying it, and to whom. Along with this self-consciousness comes the impetus to revise and revise again in order to achieve resonance (or dissonance) with an audience. (n.p.)[7]

Listening, they suggest, is self-conscious and other-conscious; it calls attention to who is speaking, who is hearing, and who is silent, and this attention results in iterative revision. A productive consequence of an increased desire to revise and revise again is that students necessarily spend more time with the *texts* that they record, select, manipulate, and collage, resulting in a more sustained, recurrent encounter with their sources.

The productive consequences of this strategy are evident in the class's audio compositions. Despite their resistance to feminism earlier in the semester, many students elected a gender-critical approach in charting their line of inquiry through the archive. Some students, for example, were struck by the relationships between lesbians and gay men represented in the shows and used this focus to strategically collect clips from the archive and arrange them in their audio essays. Others focused on the performance of masculinity in 1980s San Francisco gay bars, a topic of conversation recurring in several of the radio shows, while still others focused on gay male sex work, the artistry of drag queens, and other topics in non-normative gender and sexuality. An increased engagement with difference was evident across this class of 19 students, compared to their prior work with the feminist blogs, as students took on diverse topics in gender and sexuality with a more open orientation toward the source material (although, as with any assignment, levels of effort and quality varied).[8] Below, I showcase the composing process and product of two students, Sareece and Maddie (whose discussion board I quoted above). My analysis is derived from their informal pre-writing, audio collages, and post-writing reflections.

3.1. Case study #1: Sareece

Compared to some of her peers, Sareece expressed less vocal resistance—her responses to McEwan's blog were dutiful summary—yet, she engaged in little gender-*critical* inquiry thus far in the semester. However, when Sareece listened widely in the audio archive, she began to notice that women's voices were few and far between. After discussing this observation in class, she started to listen expressly for the contributions of lesbians as interviewees, speakers, musicians, and comedians and took notes on when and where she found the clips. In so doing, Sareece practiced what Comstock and Hocks called the "sonic literacy of social conscience," which is a heightened "awareness of what voices are heard and amplified and what voices aren't" (2006, n.p.). Sareece also listened for evidence about *why* women's voices might have been sublimated in the liberation radio shows and made note of those clips too. After downloading the mp3 files of relevant shows to her computer, Sareece then used *Audacity*'s tools to cut out, arrange, and rearrange the precise, short clips she wanted to use as material.

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[7] Comstock and Hocks were especially interested in the listening that came from students recording and composing with their own voices, but as this essay demonstrates, iterative listening can also result from listening to and composing with the voices of others.

[8] Despite demonstrating less resistance to difference, about a third of the class still struggled with the difficult task of narrowing in on a self-defined topic within the bounty of the archive, instead choosing broader, less focused topics or spending less time on precise selection, arrangement, and editing.

Many of Sareece's rhetorical choices depended on the way that she listened in the archive for silenced voices and the rhythms of speech. When Sareece listened to the archive, she "heard" a conflict between women and men in gay liberation, made implicit by the silence of women's voices, and she wanted to make that conflict *audible*. She then used audio layering techniques to make lesbian and gay male voices that had not in fact been in conversation in the original radio shows seem to speak to one another: to represent an "argument" or disagreement between lesbians and gay men, adjusting the volume at different moments to demonstrate anger or interruption.

Sareece also listened attentively to the sound of the lesbian activist's voices, and was taken with the rhythms of their spoken-word poetry and rally speeches. She decided to record her own voice in the same style and integrate it between clips from the archive. For example, over the sound of booing at a lesbian feminist rally, Sareece clipped in what would become a recurring phrase in her essay—an unnamed rally leader's female voice proclaiming, "we.. we have been made invisible!"—which Sareece seamlessly followed with a different woman's voice proclaiming, "because lesbians are women—at least in the gay community." Sareece's own voice then broke in with the focus of her essay in her spoken-word style, mimicking the rhythm of the rally speakers:

> Despite being gay/Because lesbian women are gay and being a woman does not make them *not* gay/Lesbians were often pushed aside and ostracized in the early times/Of the gay rights movement/Finding it difficult to find a place in organizations that/Bonded over male appreciation.

As a result of these listening practices, Sareece's essay concluded with some sophisticated gender-critical inquiry, as she probed why lesbians might have been underrepresented in the radio shows. In her spoken-word style, Sareece asked:

> If two women were walking down the street holding hands/Would they be mistaken for sisters, relatives, best friends?/Or would they be seen as gay?/And it is this uncertainty that was not associated with men/Who were expected to be strong and without weakness./Surely not expected to hold hands with another man./Is this the reason why lesbians were not accepted and represented in some gay activist communities?/Or was it something else, a selfishness among men, an accidental exclusion that/Left lesbian women booed or silenced in early demonstrations,/That forced lesbian women to face male supremacy where they/Thought they would be accepted.

In contrast to her earlier avoidance of gender-critical analysis, here Sareece asked intellectual questions about lesbian invisibility, a complex notion explored by prominent queer theorists like Annamarie Jagose, and she considered whether sexism might have played a role. Sareece's analysis emerged from listening to the fissures of the archive, to what the gay radio shows did not contain. She then used and spoke with the voices they *did* contain strategically to reveal the archive's gaps.

My assignment asked Sareece to listen widely in the archive and carve out a line of inquiry of her own making, but I did not dictate the direction of her inquiry. The lesbian-feminist approach she took emerged in the process of listening and listening again, the pattern perhaps taking shape from a seed planted by earlier class conversations about feminism. The vastness of the radio show archive presented a great number of potential avenues for each student, which helped detach the content from my person. Indeed, the very emphasis on men's experience that Sareece pinpointed in the archive may also have helped distance the politicized content from my perceived endorsement. Yet, the emphasis on gay men also created distance between Sareece's composition and her own life. As I will explain in the concluding section, this distance may be integral to students' increased engagement with archives of difference, but is not without drawbacks.

3.2. Case study #2: Maddie

Maddie was one of several students who had expressed resistance to gender-critical inquiry earlier in the course. Unlike Sareece, Maddie did not ultimately choose to focus on an explicitly feminist line of inquiry in her audio essay. However, like the majority of the class, her audio project demonstrated a much richer engagement with politically-charged texts than her earlier alphabetic work. As she listened widely in the archive, she found herself intrigued and unnerved by several radio shows' focus on homophobic violence, and began to curate all the segments that dealt with this topic. Maddie wrote in reflection that hearing the experiences of violence from the victims' own voices increased her sense of empathy and belief in their credibility and, in her audio essay, she elected not to use her own voice at all, instead showcasing experiences of violence from the voices of the victims.

Her collage displayed the phenomenon of homophobic violence with complexity. By juxtaposing experiences from several people, Maddie demonstrated the pervasiveness of the problem and the alarming extremes taken by strangers against gay men. In one segment of her collage, she assembled three different male voices describing their experiences:

> Man 1: "I'm mortified at violence, I've been beaten half to death all my life by various people."

> Man 2: "The second incident involved a man whose body was thrown out of his car on San Mateo. He'd been beaten so severely that he literally had no face left."

> Man 3: "What was most alarming to me personally was that no one came to my aid."

By juxtaposing these separate experiences, Maddie demonstrated the severity of the violence, the lives lived in fear, and the surprising assertion that what was most upsetting was not the violence itself but the failure of bystanders to help.

A section of her audio essay sought to situate these liberation-era experiences in a longer history of homophobic violence:

> Woman's voice: "At one point homosexuals were killed en masse because a superstitious emperor [the Byzantine emperor, Justinian] believed that natural disasters were caused by the presence of homosexuals."[9]

> Man's voice: "That could happen to any of us. I had been jumped on the street corner before, but I had never made the connection that this kind of institutionalized violence was right there and could lash out at us at any moment."

These clips were not adjacent in the original radio shows. With strategically arranged past-present connections like these, Maddie's essay recognized that the fears and superstitions about difference that underpin homophobic violence are systemic, institutionalized, and part of a longer history of hostility and danger. When an essay is composed solely with the voices of others, the creative, critical work happens in the precise selection and arrangement; claims are made through the juxtaposition of voices, through choices about when to begin and end a clip and how to order them for the most intellectual and affective impact. Maddie's decision to start the second clip with a "that" was strategic, making it seem like the male speaker was referring to the longer history of fear and violence articulated by the female speaker.

However, Maddie's audio essay became most gender-critical when she began to display clips reflecting on the motivation for this kind of violence. Commenting on the higher incidence of homophobic attacks in poorer neighborhoods, one man's voice spoke that "the violence is passing around. The oppressed becomes the oppressor." Immediately following this man, another man's voice explained that the violence was incited by a "fear of sexuality, a fear of other people. The whole cultural attitude of men in society," bolstered by definitions of masculinity that depended upon heterosexual relations with women. These kinds of insights, curated by Maddie, reflected some of Melissa McEwan's assertions on her blog earlier in the semester about the consequences of rigid definitions of masculinity and about complex relations of power across vectors of class, race, gender, and sexuality. But, while McEwan was read by Maddie as if she might be judging her own heterosexual relationships with men, the gay liberation radio show archived housed evidence of the lives of individuals temporally and socially distant from Maddie's own. The gay male lives represented in the archive could not be mistaken for her own relationships and, since she had not herself perpetrated homophobic violence, it induced little personal guilt. This distance helped Maddie showcase insights about the consequences of rigid gender performance, lingering in them as she arranged and rearranged her essay, but it also suggested a limitation of perpetuating distance: the continued absence of gender-critical self-reflection.

4. Engaging the archive as a medium: The rewards and risks of distance

I have argued that the process of listening to and composing audio collage out of voices of difference has the potential to afford deeper, more iterative engagement with those voices. In this concluding section, I reflect on how the specific medium of an audio *archive* of historical material facilitates this kind of listening. That is, it is not only the mode of

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[9] The woman was referencing psychologist Wainwright Churchill's 1971 book, *Homosexual Behavior Among Males.*

sound or the genre of audio collage that helped circumvent kneejerk resistance, although both were imperative: it is also the *medium* of the audio archive.

Archives, as a medium, afford preservation, the collection of sometimes vast numbers of materials and records. As a medium of preservation, archives encourage the assemblage of more historical, temporally removed materials, or at least materials that become historical as time passes. The vastness of collections—and the absence of requirements for their arrangement into a coherent narrative—means that archives can hold incongruous and even contradictory elements. These, again, are affordances of production, of the kind of *making* that archives do: the expansive collecting of unwieldy, sometimes contradictory, and often historical elements. But these compositional affordances of archives carry with them affordances for a kind of engagement.

There are several factors at work in how the audio archive encourages greater engagement, each related to a concept of productive distance. As Kopelson explains, resistance to pedagogies of difference sometimes emerges when students come in with an expectation for a "'neutral' course of study," an objective space free from cultural and political "bias" (2003, p. 117). Students' expectation for neutral content is, in a sense, an expectation that what happens in class will remain distant from their lives and emotions outside of class. The success of the audio archive as a medium that affords engagement can, I argue, be attributed to its *replacement* of the function of distance that is lost when course materials reflect gender-political positions and non-normative lives. When neutrality and its coincident distance are lost, archives of unfamiliar voices and technologies can provide some redress.

One factor lies in the vastness of the audio archive and my refusal to assign particular elements. In so doing, I gave students a greater sense of creativity and agency in defining their lines of inquiry. The students with a stronger resistance to gender-critical analysis, like Maddie, were free to carve a less overtly feminist path through the archive. Other students who had been more neutral about feminism earlier in the semester, like Sareece, took on decidedly feminist analysis of their own volition. In line with Abby Dubisar and Jason Palmeri's findings after a political video remix assignment, I found that working with audio archives can provide students the space to "claim a kind of authority and expertise as an activist composer" that they were "hesitant"—or outright resistant, as in my experience—"to claim with alphabetic text" (2010, p. 83). Like Dubisar and Palmeri's political remix, the gay liberation audio assignment allows students who are "uncomfortable with appearing partisan or taking positions that might conflict with their peers or instructor" (Dubisar & Palmeri, 2010, p. 83) to pursue a project with a level of political engagement of their choosing. As I suggested in my analysis of Sareece and Maddie's work, the vastness of the archive—and the unfamiliarity of its contents—provided a degree of distance between my perceived feminist bias and my students' listening practice. Despite the constraints of an assignment asking them to compose with the voices of others, students actually felt *freer* and in more control of their essays than they had when they were limited to a set of blog posts.

This sense of agency allowed students to linger longer in productive uncertainty and sensations of contradiction. One student, Joya, noticed that several radio shows focused on the clashes between different kinds of masculinity performed by gay men at the time. As she listened, she kept hearing descriptions of masculinity from hosts and interviewees, ranging from the feminine ("sissy boys!") and drag ("heavyset, buxom drag queens!") to the assertively masculine, with descriptions of hunting, fishing, and "butch" performances in bars (as one male voice reflected in her collage of clips, "there's something about the gay community itself that seems to reinforce these male-identified behaviors"). Joya was drawn to this topic precisely because it sparked a feeling of uncertainty in her, a contradiction that drove her to pursue and reflect the diversity and conflict between masculinities in her audio collage. The shows about traditional masculinity subverted assumptions about the effeminacy of gay men but did not replace those stereotypes with new ones because of the diversity of representations in the archive; these voices coexisted and clashed in her essay, queerly resisting "composure" (Alexander & Rhodes, 2011, p. 189). In this way, vast archives with seemingly incongruous elements can help "develop our students' critical and rhetorical sensibilities about the constructions of sexuality in our culture," using "communication technologies in the *interrogation* of such constructions" (Alexander & Banks, 2004, p. 273). The incongruity in the archive can help encourage more complex, multifaceted understandings of identity.

The topics and experiences in the gay liberation radio shows also created more distance between its contents and students' own lives than did Melissa McEwan's blog posts. McEwan frequently analyzed the gender politics of current events and her own relationships, and her conversational yet acerbic writing style suggested that she was speaking to readers, that she wanted readers to consider her arguments in light of their own relationships with friends, family, and lovers. Indeed, her curated collection of posts, "Feminism 101," served as a resource for readers to borrow her arguments and use them to negotiate their own gendered power inequities. In contrast, the gay liberation radio

show archive contains a diverse collection of experiences and perspectives that are likely unfamiliar to a group of predominantly heterosexual, cisgender, western Pennsylvanian college freshmen. The class had little experience with either gay liberation activism or the cultural and personal experiences that the shows deeply and unapologetically probe. The distance created by the students' unfamiliarity made the radio shows' social critique less squarely directed at their own relationships. They were neither directly responsible for, nor victims of, the violence and ostracism voiced by the radio show archive, and so they felt moved to say something about it instead of inhibited by guilt or resentment.

Here too, the audibility of the voices mattered. The lives represented in the archive were articulated in the speaker's own voice, which attached the words to his or her body and not the student's. As Erin Anderson asserts, "when we hear a voice, we hear a body" (2014, n.p.), and it is the *body* on which feminist arguments about assault and objectification and queer experiences of sexuality and homophobic violence hinge. In line with Comstock and Hocks' claim that listeners tend to "ascribe presence and immediacy to speech" (2006, n.p.), students reflected in class that they were inclined to trust and feel empathy for the speakers on the radio show because they could hear the emotion in the speakers' voices and they seemed to speak "naturally," with less premeditation than some of our alphabetic course texts like McEwan. In the collage assignment, these voices become "malleable material" (E. Anderson, 2014) for students to compose *with*, rather than against, and because the presence and immediacy of the voices were compounded many times over in the vastness of the archive, the class felt more persuaded that the voices were articulating collective, cultural, or systemic experiences.

In this way, the collage assignment capitalized on this affordance of audio archives by creating an initial distance between my students' own position and the positions of others, even as they use other people's voices to craft their essays. The voices were "real" to the students; they were to be "believed," but they were not identical to the students' own. This temporary distance can be productive, especially for some contemporary middle-class students who "believe that the feminist battle has been won" (Atwood, 1994, p. 134) or that advances in gay marriage laws have eliminated homophobia. By composing an essay almost entirely of the voices of individuals disenfranchised by normative sex and gender regulations, students were forced to step outside of themselves and into the lives of others. My intention was to give students other voices to speak with, temporarily, in order to slow their reflexive rejection of critical gender study.

There are, of course, serious risks in a pedagogy that asks students to speak with the decontextualized voices of the historically disenfranchised. Uncritical or insensitive appropriation should be a major concern in any such project. Yet, speaking with others' voices is already an integral part of academic composing in any mode. Even in alphabetic writing, citations and quotations from both authoritative scholars and narratives of personal experience should evoke similar concerns for appropriation and ethical consideration. When students reduced McEwan through ad hominem or disbelief, they diminished her articulation of her lived experiences of sexism and assault; they spoke *about* her through slapdash paraphrase or selective quotations. But when students are asked to compose *with* the voices on the radio shows—particularly when those voices shared deeply personal experiences—we can have explicit conversations about the ethical challenges and the stakes involved. As a class, we can discuss what it means to "make" a voice say what students want it to say, to silence certain voices in favor of others, and what it means to responsibly interpret, cut, and splice together others' voices. After the audio archive unit, I brought class discussion back to McEwan, using the language of silence and voice figuratively as students reflected on how they had used, silenced, or "spliced" her voice with theirs. Thus, audio-composing solely or mostly with others' voices does more than help students move beyond negotiating their resistance to non-neutral subject matter. It can also provide the class with a new vocabulary for thinking critically about the ethics of citing and quoting responsibly and adeptly. When students moved back to print-based, alphabetic composing in later assignments in the course, we could transport the vocabulary of "speaking with others' voices," splicing or collaging the words of others, and positioning our own voices ethically and considerately among other views.

The *historical* nature of the archive is also a factor in promoting productive distance and the affordance of iterative listening. One reason students might have been less resistant to the contents of this archive, despite its lack of neutrality and occasionally overt politicality, was the temporal separation between their own lives and the archive's voices. The historical distance made it easier for students to see and acknowledge the consequences of gender and sexual regulation. Listening to the archive and focusing their essays on gender-critical topics from the past did not make students feel like the radio shows were attacking the contemporary gender and sexual politics of their own lives or the men and women they love.

The benefit of the increased engagement incurred by historical distance is tempered by its concurrent risk, as I hinted in my analysis of Sareece and Maddie's audio pieces. Students may come to find gender-critical analysis

necessary in decades past but irrelevant to their own contemporary lives. But some form of distance may be necessary to work through student resistance: distance between the students and the political/cultural issues, distance between those issues and me, distance between familiar and unfamiliar technologies of reading and writing. It may be that these forms of distance are required as a first step in circumventing a kneejerk refusal to engage with the texts at all, creating the potential for later self-reflection. The historical nature of the archive can provide an entre into ways of listening and composing that may then continue to be available and refined with more temporally proximate materials.

Finally, there may also be risks in asking students to compose with historical voices in particular. Pop culture and contemporary political media may seem freely available for subversive remixing into new digital compositions (Dubisar & Palmeri, 2010), but those who repurpose the foundations of history are less easily forgiven. In "To Preserve, Digitize, and Project: On the Process of Composing Other People's Lives," a video essay, Jody Shipka (2012) illustrates the hazards of using the contents of historical archives as compositional material. Shipka recounts the experience of a craft blogger who purchased a box of old Kodachrome slides from an estate sale and made a window curtain by fastening them together with aluminum rings. The blogger, "Yarn Zombie," was roundly condemned by a reader for "destroying history" by using the lives captured in the photographs as material for her craft. Like Yarn Zombie, my students and I might be critiqued for using GLBT history as material in new compositions. After all, this history is precisely what San Francisco's GLBT Historical Society sets out to preserve against erasure and exploitation. The fundamental function of archives is to keep historically important materials safe for generations, and gay and lesbian archives in particular exist to provide a safe "home" for individuals seeking evidence of a lineage, a heritage, a community and identity across time and place. However, in contrast to Yarn Zombie's critic who condemned her craft for exposing the slides to sun damage and punched holes, the digital audio archive remains unblemished after my students' use. Downloading radio shows as mp3s does not harm the archival materials themselves, which are preserved digitally and in several forms in the physical archive. Indeed, the unimpeachable sanctity of historical archives has already been undermined by digitization, even by official archives. In December 2013, the British Library released over a million digitized images from 17–19th century books to the open-source archive, Flickr Commons, for "anyone to use, remix, and repurpose." The library plans to provide tools for users to help crowd-source information about each image to make the collection better indexed and more easily searchable for use in remix projects. As Erin Anderson explains, we are seeing a "decisive shift away from the nineteenth century culture of 'preservation'" toward "the possibility of remixing and rearticulating voices into new material assemblages" (2014, n.p.). As archives proliferate digitally, so do occasions for manipulating and modifying their contents—and, in the process—for *engaging* with voices of difference in the writing classroom.

5. Conclusion

Engaging audio archives of non-normative voices in the process of audio collage can afford iterative listening practices, suggesting a fresh pedagogical approach for how writing instructors and students might more productively engage difficult issues of "difference" together. As with any pedagogical approach, there are risks in asking students to compose with the voices of others, particularly when those voices are housed in archives of sexuality. But, as I have demonstrated, the rewards are an increased potential for *listening* to non-neutral texts and participating in gender-critical inquiry, a greater sense of creative freedom felt by students, and the occasion to discuss fundamental issues in writing: including the process of coming to invention in a multitude of sources, the responsible appropriation of others' voices, issues of Fair Use and plagiarism, and the relationship between historical evidence and contemporary claims.

These rewards depend upon giving more sustained pedagogical attention to the kinds of engagement our students perform in the process of composing. The texts we assign and ask students to compose contain more than content: they inhabit and channel different modes, media, and genres, each of which carry a potential for the affordance of engagement. Ultimately, engagement and production remain intimately entwined acts within and outside the classroom and, as much as we should celebrate the affordance of production in multimodal composition, we will do well to remember that our students continue to read, listen, see, and click throughout the composing process.

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