Participatory Composition
Video Culture, Writing, and Electracy

SARAH J. ARROYO
1. Introduction: Electracy, Videocy, and Participatory Composition

All the practices used to conduct schooling are relative to the apparatus of literacy. In the history of human culture there are but three apparatuses: orality, literacy, and now electracy. We live in the moment of the emergence of electracy, comparable to the two principal moments of literacy (the Greece of Plato, and the Europe of Galileo).

—Gregory Ulmer, “What Is Electracy?”

I believe that the arrival of free online video may turn out to be just as significant a media development as the arrival of print. It is creating new global communities, granting their members both the means and the motivation to step up their skills and broaden their imaginations. It is unleashing an unprecedented wave of innovation in thousands of different disciplines: some trivial, some niche in the extreme, some central to solving humanity’s problems. In short, it is boosting the net sum of global talent. It is helping the world get smarter.

—Chris Anderson, “Film School: Why Online Video Is More Powerful than You Think”

Embed. Share. Comment. Like. Subscribe. Upload. Check in. The commands of our online world relentlessly prompt participation, encourage collaboration, and quite literally connect us in ways not possible even five years ago. This connectedness no doubt changes college writing courses in both form and content, thus creating a wide-open space for investigating new forms of writing and student participation. This book explores this dynamic space by arguing for a “participatory composition,” inspired by the culture of online video sharing and framed through Gregory Ulmer’s concept of electracy. Electracy can be compared to digital literacy but encompasses much more: a worldview for civic engagement, community building, and participation. For three decades, Ulmer has been predicting electracy’s emergence, and he casts electracy as an “apparatus,” a type of
a space where one doesn’t “choose to write” but where, according to Cynthia Haynes, “everything is writing” (Haynes’s “prosthetic rhetoric” qtd. in D. Davis, Breaking Up 250). In other words, the “posthumanist paradox” places writing at the center of human interaction, which makes it a cultural practice—not merely a tool for communicating thoughts—interwoven with identity construction, relationship building, and community involvement. The notion of “writing,” then, plays a much larger, cultural role.

The general study of electronic spaces and composition is an extensive and expanding field of study that dates back to the early 1980s, exemplified by the early studies of the influences of word processing on student writing, such as David Dalton and Michael Hannafin’s “The Effects of Word Processing on Written Composition” and Gail Hawisher’s “Studies in Word Processing,” to the nonlinear possibilities of hypertext for writing found in George Landow’s and Jay David Bolter’s work, and finally to interacting with students and teaching writing in online spaces as seen in Cynthia Haynes and Jan Rune Holmevik’s High Wired. For nearly three decades, then, we have witnessed an explosion of scholarship interrogating technology and writing from several areas of study. From artists like Mark Amerika in “Expanding the Concept of Writing” and John Craig Freeman in “Imaging Place” to technical communication experts like Johndan Johnson-Eilola, rhetoricians like James Porter, and computers-and-composition gurus and prolific publishers like Hawisher and Cynthia Selfe, the amount of scholarship concerning technology and writing at large is impressive and dense. Much of the material interrogates specific problems and offers strategies for integrating technology into writing classes. Hawisher and Selfe’s contribution in this regard cannot be overstated. Along with other collaborators over the years, Hawisher and Selfe have amassed an oeuvre of studies and gained recognition for their research in digital media and writing, which has significantly transformed the alliance between computers and composition.

Anne Frances Wysocki, Johndan Johnson-Eilola, Cynthia Selfe, and Geoffrey Sirc’s Writing New Media remains an influential and highly useful text and offers concrete approaches for teaching composition with technology. More recently, J. Elizabeth Clark’s “The Digital Imperative” shows how she refugured her composition course as an “emerging space for digital rhetoric” (27); Abby M. Dubisar and Jason Palmeri present strategies for teaching political video remix, and Cheryl Ball and James Kalmbach’s collection RAW: (Reading and Writing) New Media, “builds on the first decade of work in new media research within English Studies” (RAW companion website) and offers many productive insights for the future of new media research. These works all serve as representative examples for how digital
space continues to transform the teaching of composition, and I hope that Participatory Composition's specific focus on electracy and video culture will add another layer to this transformation.¹

Many others have also contributed to the project of directly engaging the electrake apparatus in order to build a rhetoric for electracy, while not necessarily engaging composition pedagogy. Jeff Rice reminds us that scholarship for the electrake apparatus comes across "as both explanation and experiment" ("1963" 24). Accordingly, along with Ulmer, his former students have produced multiple works that engage with and perform electrake writing, and these works make up the network within which I place my book. These include Rice's The Rhetoric of Cool, Craig Saper's Artificial Mythologies, Michael Jarrett's Drifting on a Read, and Barry Mauer's "Lost Data, 2." Ulmer and his former students have also published New Media/New Methods: The Academic Turn from Literacy to Electracy (edited by Rice and Marcel O'Gorman), a collection associated with the "Florida School" of which they are a part. The self-named Florida School is intended to serve as "a form of pattern recognition, a strategy for organizing information in the otherwise overwhelming infoscape of new media studies and critical theory" (Rice and O'Gorman 7). Thus, while my work is not part of this act of self-naming, it can be seen as a link to and from it, or, perhaps, as a "friend" of it, as they suggest (7), along with many of my colleagues from the "Arlington School" whose work appears throughout this book. That is, my version of electrake writing, by way of "participatory composition," presents a version of what Rice and O'Gorman hope to accomplish with their own collection, since they write that New Media/New Methods "is meant to demonstrate as well how we have come to adopt Ulmer's notion of electracy, the consequent shift in meaning-making which follows—and integrates—orality and literacy" (5). Offering a version of electracy that dusts off Ulmer's earlier conception of "videocyn" (from Teletheor)y, I'll update it with the practices associated with the culture of online video and put forth a viable practice for writing in the electrake apparatus.

Additionally, Lisa Gye's "Halflives, a MyStory," Gye and Darren Tofts's Ilogic of Sense: The Gregory L. Ulmer Remix, and Talan Memmott's "Beyond Taxonomy" have all worked with electracy from an array of disciplinary perspectives and trajectories. In fact, Gye's article and accompanying MyStory have served as exceptional guides for students of electracy over the past several years. The sources I have cited represent only a fraction of the work these scholars have produced; each of them has taken electracy writing in their own direction, thereby creating less of an academic conversation and more of a complex network in which to place my own work. Finally, Collin Brooke's Lingua Fracta, Thomas Rickert's Acts of Enjoyment, Byron Hawk's A Counter-History of Composition, Alexander Reid's The Two Virtuals, and Sidney Dobrin's Postcomposition also work alongside my effort from a disciplinary perspective. While they do not engage electracy specifically, they all call for a reconsideration of writing for the electrake apparatus, and they all present theories and practices for doing so, many of which I will build upon.

Participatory Composition is different in that it works with electracy by blending conceptions of video and participatory culture specifically to frame the book's central arguments, while making the arguments through a mix of scholarship in rhetoric and composition, continental theory, media studies, video sharing sites, and teaching situations. While I do not necessarily follow Rice, Saper, Mauer, and others by engaging in my own performance of electrake writing, I do present my arguments from a variety of perspectives while relying on exemplars from video culture, as well as creating accompanying videos that perform these arguments. Since electracy permeates all of the institutions of our lives, I hope that my focus on long-lasting theoretical questions in each chapter—the questions of subjectivity, definition, authorship, and pedagogy—combined with my research on electracy and video culture presents possibilities for electracy not yet articulated in existing works. This is not to say that what I do in this book is all that different from what has been done before; yet, I hope this layering of mixing emphasizes, first, that electracy is buzzing all around us; it is not something that we call up when we turn on our computers or mobile devices and shut down when we power them off. Rather, the cultural transformations, inspired by changes in technologies, reflect phenomena that reach us regardless of the presence of actual machines. Second, the behaviors and practices we see occurring in video culture, while not "new," present an unprecedented gateway for inquiry into the posthuman condition, and I hope to contribute to the growing number of studies doing so.

The Electrake Apparatus and Participatory Culture

Historically, electracy encompasses the second major shift in apparatus: the first was from orality to literacy, and now it's from literacy to electracy. According to Ulmer, electracy helps distinguish the "epochal possibility that what is at stake is not only different equipment but also different institutional practices and different subject formations from those we now inhabit" ("Foreword/Forward" xii). What Ulmer is suggesting here is that the apparatus of electracy impacts all areas of our lives—not just when we turn on our computers or mobile devices—and is creating a need to invent new practices for living in an electraken world. Of course Ulmer's articulation of the electrake apparatus calls upon the pioneering work of Walter Ong in
Orality and Literacy and Marshall McLuhan’s in Understanding Media that catapulted the study of the relationship between technology and humans to the forefront. By making us aware of the impact of the move from orality to literacy on human consciousness, Ong opened the door for future study of language apparatuses. A statement made by Art Bingham in a review of Orality and Literacy is quite pertinent. He reminds us that when discussing our relationship with writing and print, Ong reveals that “our membership in a society as completely committed to writing and print as ours has made it necessary for [Ong] and others to describe primary orality in relation to literacy. This necessity, he says, led to the use of such preposterior terms as ‘oral literature.’” This statement connects directly to our present time when we aim to describe the emergence of electracy and the electrate apparatus: particularly with the use of such terms as “media literacy” or “electronic literacy.” Ulmer contends that we became “self-conscious about the nature of the language apparatus only recently” (“Foreword/Forward” xi) and cites Eric Havelock’s The Muse Learns to Write as the best introduction to this discovery. Ulmer suggests that Havelock and other grammatologists (historians of writing) “argued that we rediscovered the shift from orality to literacy precisely because we are moving out of literacy” (xi-xii). However, this does not mean that electracy will surpass literacy; rather, electracy will work alongside literacy and orality, as the apparatus continues in its emergence.

Similarly, at the 2005 annual meeting of the Conference on College Composition and Communication, Ulmer reiterated the importance of understanding the apparatus out of which our theories and practices emerge. The apparatus, again, has to do with technologies, identity formations, and institutions at work within a given time and place. Echoing Ong, Ulmer suggested that the aforementioned apparatus of print thus currently drives how we think about and interact with our world in and out of the academy, and, he suggested, is slowly being transformed (not eclipsed) by the emergence of a new apparatus built around electracy. Ulmer reminded us that electracy is often associated with electronic literacy; however, as he was quick to point out, electracy has less to do with a new version of literacy and more to do with a combination of the concepts of electricity and trace. By combining the two terms, Ulmer echoes Derrida’s idea that the trace “is a rupture in metaphysics, a pattern of incongruities where the metaphysical rubs up against the non-metaphysical” (“Jacques Derrida”). The trace of something does not appear as such, but the logic of it can be exposed through a deconstructive intervention (Of Grammatology 65). Thus, an engagement with the electric, or online, world necessarily leaves “traces” of participation, and these traces, when juxtaposed, make up the electrate experience. Both electricity and trace articulate the many societal features, logic, and metaphors we use to describe the electrate apparatus, which do not eclipse, but rather exist alongside the apparatus of print. Electracy emphasizes a multiplicity of meanings for any one concept, supports imagination, and encourages creativity and invention: all of which are traditionally not valued in a university environment built upon analytics. Ulmer called for us to become more aware of the emerging apparatus of electracy—which started with the invention of photography and continues today in the digital world—and encouraged us to intervene in its emergence. Our intervention will help invent and shape the new apparatus as it is unfolding, and Ulmer emphasized that we might intervene in the new apparatus best by helping to invent a rhetoric for electracy. The purpose of this book is to do just that: to intervene in the new apparatus by combining what we already know about electracy with the burgeoning culture of online video sharing, since, many of the practices manifesting in online video sharing sites reflect what Ulmer and others have been predicting for decades about the electrate apparatus.

Comparing the values and purposes for the three apparatuses is extremely useful, and the table allows us to see the different ways of seeing the world through the lenses of an oral, literate, and electrate apparatus. It is not difficult to find examples of how these schemas are playing out in the online and offline worlds. Practice, for example, is “entertainment” in electracy, and we only have to go as far as YouTube to see how entertainment has expanded from something people only consume in their leisure time to an entity with which people engage on a daily basis for any number of reasons, some educational and some not. One of the more obvious examples of this occurs with Khan Academy, a loosely organized educational enterprise created by Salman Khan. Khan began by assembling informal tutoring videos for his young cousin and posting them on YouTube, since they lived in different cities. Through the course of a year, Khan realized that his videos were more effective than face-to-face tutoring for his cousin’s learning, since she could watch and rewatch at her own pace, but the biggest phenomenon was that people all over the world starting watching the videos and writing Khan to thank him for finally getting them to understand math concepts they had been struggling with for years (Khanacademy). Today, the Khan Academy videos are being used in entire school districts and have been watched countless times by people around the world. This segue into the Internet as the “institution” in electracy, as school was the institution of literacy. School and Internet, in the case of the Khan Academy, are one and the same, but the difference lies in the structure of the school day and the sense of community in the schooling experience, as the basic curriculum
has not changed. The Khan Academy is one of many instances of electrate practices being played out in the participatory realm. Most of the other distinctions on the table will be elaborated on in subsequent chapters of Participatory Composition, particularly the concepts for axis in chapter 4 and ground in chapter 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>APPARATUS</th>
<th>Orality</th>
<th>Literacy</th>
<th>Electracy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Practice</td>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>Science</td>
<td>Entertainment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedure</td>
<td>Ritual</td>
<td>Method</td>
<td>Style</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institution</td>
<td>Church</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>Internet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State of Mind</td>
<td>Faith</td>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td>Fantasy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavior</td>
<td>Worship</td>
<td>Experiment</td>
<td>Play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philosophy</td>
<td>Mythology</td>
<td>Epistemology</td>
<td>Aesthetics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ground</td>
<td>God</td>
<td>Reason</td>
<td>Body</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ontology</td>
<td>Totem</td>
<td>Category</td>
<td>Chora</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mode</td>
<td>Narrative</td>
<td>Argument</td>
<td>Figure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Axis</td>
<td>Right/Wrong</td>
<td>True/False</td>
<td>Joy/Sadness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Electracy thus creates a need for new theories about writing, reading, and thinking, about subjectivity, community, and representation: theories that will allow us to see how electracy creates new values and purposes for writing, conceptualizing identity, and forming communities. From the perspective of electracy, for instance, incrementally building an argument is not as important as building networks. From the perspective of electracy, entertainers are also teachers, and students are also archivists. From the perspective of electracy, shallow content juxtaposed with intellectual content is a rich learning experience. From the perspective of electracy, dynamic sites such as YouTube are a part of a complex network, creating communities by leapfrogging out of their platforms and residing in countless digital spaces. Electracy and the electrate apparatus are changing the ways in which we conceptualize identity and community, build and maintain relationships, and learn both in and out of the university, and Participatory Composition will delve into these changes—by way of online video culture—in order to put forward a viable rhetoric for the electrate apparatus.

It goes without saying that the electrate apparatus can be easily coupled with the notion of “participatory culture,” especially since both concepts have to do with the changing landscapes of learning. Participatory culture suggests a theory and practice that supports student learning in media environments; as Henry Jenkins et al. explain in Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture, participatory culture involves an "ecological approach, thinking about the interrelationships among different communication technologies, the cultural communities that grow up around them, and the activities they support" (7). The electrate apparatus thus reflects this type of environment and further supports its development. In an interview with Patricia Lange, Henry Jenkins defines participatory culture as a term that’s used to describe spaces that are very open for individual contributions, where there is a supportive environment where people can learn and grow and share what they produce. So [it is] everything from video blogging and YouTube, the gaming world to fan fiction. . . . these are sites where people interact, create together, grow together, communicate together outside of some of the rigid formal structures that shape school in its current form. . . . we throw ideas out into the world and we bring them back in an improved way because of our engagement with communities.

(AnthroVlog “Participatory Cultures”)

In this regard, participatory culture, as a networked site for learning, allows us to reenvision the image of learning: from skills in which individuals demonstrate competency to the act of creating, sharing, and developing complex networks around a given concept. Jenkins has been developing the concept of participatory culture for the past twenty-five years, so it is not unique to the online world. However, the quick development of the ability to create media content and share it online has catapulted the concept into the public realm. In a video discussing participatory culture and education, Jenkins states the following: "As reported by the Pew Center for Internet and American Life . . . 65 percent of American teens have produced media, and about a third of those teens have shared that media with a community larger than friends and family, so there’s a communication shift that’s going on as more and more young people are becoming participants in their society" (edutopia). Given these numbers, and as an example supporting the Pew Center findings, we might see the provocative 2010 study “Academically Adrift” in a different light. The most stunning finding was that 52 percent of students surveyed reported that they have not written more than twenty pages in any of their college classes or ever read more than forty pages in a given week (Jaschik). While this news might be appalling to some, it may reveal something other than low faculty expectations or
student apathy: a blurring of page, screen, and participation in networked culture. This type of participation, which admittedly was not part of the study, is not counted in “pages” and might expose a gap between students’ perceptions of learning and their actual practices. How, for example, would a student quantify watching and commenting on a video? Participating in social media sites? Adding and commenting on discussion posts? Using a search engine and sifting through Internet sites? Uploading media content? Creating a video? Remixing a video? And on and on. Since these practices are not in the realm of traditional learning, students most likely did not count them in their responses to questions that asked about time invested in studying or working on a particular course. By blending the larger notions of electracy and participatory cultures by way of video culture, I hope to offer a rich picture of how writing, in all of its manifestations, has expanded quite literally from the page to the network. One of the central aims of this book is to show how electracy and participatory culture work in tandem in our everyday lives. These terms and the conceptual connotations arising from them are particularly valuable, because they truly offer something different: not just an adjacent term to an existing concept. Similar to “oral literature,” “media literacy” encourages critical reflection on media practices and is part of the literate apparatus. Participatory composition addresses the convergence of the visual, verbal, aural, and corporeal by removing the hermeneutic requirement of analysis and instead advocating production and participation in every writing gesture, largely defined.

Resuscitating Videocy for the Participatory Realm

To link electracy and participatory culture to online video culture at large, we will look more closely at Ulmer’s early conceptions of electracy in Teletheory, where he envisioned “video intelligence,” or what he then called “videocy,” as something enabled by the technological capabilities of video. Working out of Jack Goody, Ian Watt, Brian Street, and other literacy theorists of the 1970s and 1980s, Ulmer predicted that “video intelligence” would become a legitimate form of learning, and in contrast to analysis in literacy, invention would be the driving force behind “videocy.” Ulmer writes: “Until now we could not institutionalize invention in the way that we have institutionalized analysis, because we simply lacked the prostheses needed to democratize it” (94). As a prosthetic for invention, video served as the medium within which invention could finally stand at the forefront of writing and pedagogy: something scholars in composition were also arguing for at the time (see especially Crowley, Methodical Memory). This move is quite stunning, as Ulmer envisioned a much larger, cultural role for video, even though the only format available for widespread use at the time was VHS. In fact, it was quite a feat when Ulmer produced his “Mr. Mentality” VHS video, which is now uploaded to YouTube, as a spinoff of the 1951 Mr. Wizard television show in which kids visit a teacher and participate in a seemingly impossible experiment that they later find out they can accomplish at home themselves. Craig Saper’s “The Felt Memory of YouTube” revisits “Mr. Mentality” to show how it brings new inventive strategies to the forefront by homing in on the “felt” of memories associated with traumatic experiences. Aside from Ulmer’s own ruminations on “Mr. Mentality” and Saper’s article, the inventive potential for video and videocy remains untapped.

Perhaps because of the technological limitations of producing analogue video, Ulmer moved toward hypertext in his 1994 book, Heuristics, especially since HTML code was so accessible. Many of us will remember how cumbersome working and teaching with VHS video was over the past three decades, so the possibilities afforded by hypertext offered a more viable technology for writing in electracy. With the arrival of online video, however, we can blend the vision of “videocy” articulated in Teletheory with the ease of linking, remixing, and repurposing that hypertext affords. Heuristics took the focus off of video and onto hypertext, but Participatory Composition brings video back, with the legacy of hypertext, since producing video is now a ubiquitous practice. Seeing “videocy” both in terms of electracy and participatory culture can bring back this vision to enhance what has already been articulated about the apparatus of electracy. Pre-dating his articulations about apparatus-theory in terms of electracy, Ulmer writes, “Part of the project of teletheory is to imagine a different apparatus, beginning with a different technology. My assumption is that to inquire into the future of academic discourse in the age of a new technology, we must include the possibility of a change not only in technology, but also in the ideology of the subject and the forms of institutional practice” (21). Seeing this shift by way of television and video at first, Ulmer places the potential for the apparatus of “teletheory” in the ability to manipulate moving images.

It is not difficult to think of the many ways videocy works today: nearly every major site on the Internet has a video element, and video is literally embedded across most platforms online. From news organizations like the New York Times to social media sites like Facebook and Twitter, video not only gives us information but also invites participation, remixing, and repurposing. The videos we see on CNN.com, for example, are also on YouTube and sometimes countless other sites. News sites encourage people to upload video of events as they are happening, relying on the participatory nature of online video to create and spread the news.
Thus, in envisioning “teletheory” and by extension, “videocy,” which are both precursors to electracy, Ulmer began to question how “theory,” largely defined, worked in the age of television. Responding to a cultural outcry at the time lambasting the stultifying effects of television, seen especially in Jerry Mander’s famous book, *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television*, Ulmer argues:

Against the “critics” of the new technology who charge it with being “uncritical” or incapable of representing critical cognition, teletheory offers this proposition: video can do the work of literacy, but no better than literacy can do the work of speech. It has its own features and capacities that are fully cognitive, whether or not they are “critical.” The interest of teletheory is in defining these areas, and integrating them with the critical and rhetorical dimensions of academic discourse. (19)

Ulmer’s vision for video speaks directly to the fact that video and “videocy” are part of a new apparatus that changes the way ideas and thoughts become institutionalized. According to Ulmer, Mander “reiterates some of the same objections to video that Plato made to choreography, with even stronger warnings about the disaster that awaits a civilization in which television is the dominant medium (part of the lesson of this example is this failure to distinguish between television and video). . . . As a medium video is inherently stupid, is anti-democratic, and is not reformable” (91). Ulmer’s parenthetical statement about distinguishing between television and video is paramount, since it foreshadows the transformation of analogue video to the online video of today. Videocy, then, articulates a practice that aims to highlight working with image-events, and particularly producing moving images. To address the common misconception that video is inherently stupid, Ulmer realizes that “part of the argument of the apparatus is that ideology contributes to invention in part through the dreams and desires of a civilization. Mander joins in this line of thinking at least to suggest that video is a technology born of madness” (91–92). While the connection between video and madness deserves its own chapter and conjures up larger, philosophical debates, I point it out here to show that working with videocy illuminates the “joy/sadness” axis displayed in the table that shows the differences in the oral, literate, and electrate apparatuses. While it may be tempting to see video as only revolutionary and in a positive light, we also have to consider the “underbelly” of videocy that can lead to tragedy and ruined lives.

I wrote to Ulmer and asked him about his use of videocy in *Telethecy*. He responded that he articulated the concept of videocy to counter the “literacy absolutists who think TV and entertainment in general destroy culture and thinking” (Ulmer, “RE: Question”). We can see Ulmer intuit his response to the “literacy absolutists” with a call for invention by way of video in every writing—or image—gesture. His response also aims to add complexity to something that is otherwise easily dismissed. Interestingly, when asked why he dropped “videocy” for “electracy,” Ulmer replied that “videocy sounds too much like idiocy”: a statement that is more crucial than ever in today’s online video environment. Ulmer suggested that if he were to revisit videocy today, he would pursue the etymology of “idiocy,” which leads to an articulation of a Cartesian cogito, a sense of self. While the project Ulmer suggests is beyond the scope of this book, it is still worthwhile to ruminate on the connection between videocy and idiocy, or, the “idiocy of videocy.”

An example of “the idiocy of videocy” can be seen in a video posted by Alexandra Wallace, a student at UCLA, in March of 2011. Wallace’s video, which she first posted on Facebook, is titled “Asians in the Library.” The video shows Wallace talking to her webcam and complaining in a very condescending and racist manner about all of the “Asians” who crowd UCLA’s library and living areas and who don’t have “American manners.” Needless to say, Wallace’s video did not last long on Facebook, yet by the time she took it down, it had spread across the Internet, gained academic and mainstream media attention, and was reposted several times on YouTube. Within only a few hours, countless response videos and parodies appeared on YouTube, and news sites received commentary from academic bloggers like Anna Lau in *Psychology Today*. Wallace also quickly began receiving death threats. Within the mix of text comments, video responses, links to and from other sites, and professionally produced parodies such as Jimmy Wong’s song “Ching Chong!,” we see all aspects of video culture at work. Within the first week, the chancellor of UCLA even posted his own video in response to Wallace’s video, as seen in “UCLA Chancellor Appalled by Student Video,” and Wallace dropped out of UCLA (“Student Quits at UCLA over Rant”). Without going into much more about this story, I want to suggest that Wallace’s efforts expose the “idiocy” of videocy. That is, she underestimated the ruthlessly public nature of video culture by thinking that only her “friends” would see her video. The joy of ranting and getting her frustrations out there was instantly replaced by the sadness of the wreckage that followed. We have only begun to understand the messiness involved in such a participatory blending of the public and private and the complexity involved in the idiocy of videocy. With Bahareh Alaei, I constructed a video exposing the idiocy of videocy through the Wallace case simply titled “The Idiocy of Videocy,” which can be found here: http://youtu.be/6ozdBkzSGSo.
The Popcycle Revisited

While idiocy and videocy may be inexorably linked, it is possible to see their relationship through the lens of what Ulmer envisioned as the product of videocy, and by extension electracy: the genre of the MyStory. In Teletheory, however, Ulmer introduces the “popcycle,” a heuristic for assembling the MyStory and discovering chance occurrences happening across all of the discourses of any person’s life, which hold great invention potential. He writes:

Any one individual, as part of the oral life story, will possess a small set of images of wide scope, four or five at most, that constitute that individual’s personal cosmology, and to which he or she is committed by desire and value. If method is important to problem-solving, the images of wide scope, with their emotional associations, are vital to the way the problem is represented in the first place. Such images organize the information into complex sets that direct the mapping or translation process of comprehension and learning, and finally of invention. (57)

By drawing on Roland Barthes’s articulation of the “punctum of recognition” from Camera Lucida (to be discussed at length in chapter 3), Ulmer validates the emotional and visceral reactions we feel when looking at certain images or recalling certain events. Video, as a medium, allows image-events to be realized without having the burden of “putting into words” felt knowledge. Ulmer explains: “One purpose of teletheory is to make personal images accessible, receivable, by integrating the private and public dimensions of knowledge—invention and justification” (58). The discourses Ulmer places in the popcycle include: Family, Entertainment, and School. In later iterations of the popcycle, we see “discipline” (or career), church, and street (or community). Within each of these paradigms, the popcycle offers a heuristic for searching our own histories for uncanny connections that may well repeat themselves across the cycle enough for a writer to make something from them. In literacy, these connections would seem irrational, but for electry they make sense if one regards the popcycle as Ulmer suggests as “learning how to write an intuition” (Heuretics 37). Also referred to as electronic or conductive logic—a form of logic that Ulmer suggests “supplements the established movements of inference between things and ideas” that we usually grasp through additive, deductive, and inductive reasoning—Ulmer turns the popcycle into an entity that helps us become better attuned to our “unconscious thought” (Heuretics 127).

While the aleatory procedures involved with such an approach to writing have often been regarded with some suspicion in the field of rhetoric and composition, such as in Janice Lauer’s assessment of Ulmer in Invention in Composition, there are a great many works available online that suggest the popcycle strategy has been useful to people adapting Ulmer’s ideas. I elaborate on the notion of aleatory procedures versus more traditional strategies for invention in chapter 3.

In any event, in Ulmer’s first articulation of his own popcycle in Teletheory, he composed “Derrida at Little Big Horn,” which Kevin Brooks explains like this:

[Ulmer] tried to show (not exactly explain) how the French philosopher Jacques Derrida—who functions as Ulmer’s academic star or hero—had been with him in Montana the whole time he had been growing up. … Ulmer comes to realize that his father’s gravel and cement business, and particularly the process of sifting through sand, was a kind of lesson in being an academic, in sifting through texts to separate the fine-grained and useful sand from the problematic but difficult to see larger chunks of rock. It just so happens that Derrida uses that metaphor in one of his essays. (“Lecture 1: Ulmer in Context”)

These uncanny connections lead to discoveries that otherwise would not have been made. Ulmer uses a 1978 article by Howard Gruber, “Darwin’s ‘Tree of Nature’ and Other Images of Wide Scope,” to develop his own conception of the importance of these images that guide our thinking throughout our lives. Ulmer cites Gruber’s assertion that “An image is ‘wide’ when it functions as a schema capable of assimilating to itself a wide range of perceptions, actions, ideas. This width depends in part on the metaphoric structure peculiar to the given image, in part on the intensity of the emotion which has been invested in it, that is, its value to the person (135). The wide image functions as a metaphor for the intersections of the popcycle and can be a driving force of invention. In explaining his own emblem, Byron Hawk writes: “For Ulmer, the emblem should cut across the discourses of the popcycle” (“Bystory”), that is, the emblem, or wide image is the thing that consistently repeats.

My own popcycle is based on the music of my childhood, since I have identified music played on the radio during the mid- and late 1970s as my image of wide scope, or emblem. After wrestling with this for some time, I realized that my own emblem is not static; I cannot identify one image for my emblem, which is uncanny in itself, since it adds a dynamic sense to the popcycle. My emblem is in motion; it is a video that consists of me listening to music on the radio while driving in the cars and school buses of my childhood. It started like this. I put my given name into the Internet anagram
of my popcycle evokes my relationship with my chosen field of rhetoric and composition: contemplation in the presence of and alongside others while passing through the landscape. Like Ulmer’s description of Derrida at Little Big Horn, participatory practices, combined with various media, have always been with me. Perhaps we can now return to an unfinished analogy Ulmer started in Teletheory and, interestingly, one of the few places he uses the term videocy: Alphabetic literacy : criticism :: videocy: ——? (21). The question mark can be replaced with invention. Alphabetic literacy is to criticism as videocy is to invention.

My brief articulation of my own popcycle, while mostly based in the analogue days of the 1970s, shows how Ulmer’s vision can be played out by adding to the requirement of choosing one emblem or one wide-image and envisioning it in terms of video. With Bahareh Alaei’s help, I have created a series of three accompanying videos to perform this popcycle on the move entitled “Being Placed (Not!): 1970s Pop Music and the Cadence of Small Town Life”: Parts 1–3, and accessible at http://thechoricarcade.wordpress.com.

Teletheory’s articulation of the popcycle and MyStory was followed by Ulmer’s Heuretics, in which he again performs parts of his popcycle and composes a MyStory. In fact, the MyStory has been the quintessential genre for electracy since then. Ulmer’s other prolific genre is the MEmorial, articulated at length in Electronic Monuments, which also encourages lateral associations, values chance occurrences, and uses seemingly irrational linkages to strategically blend public and private experiences in order to intervene in public problems, particularly the task of creating monuments for national disasters and catastrophic events. It goes without saying that the genres developed by Ulmer have made an impact. In effect, they have catapulted electracy into many composition courses, and scholars and students alike have amassed a valuable repository of exemplars over the past several years. The genres have also been extremely useful for composition scholars, as seen especially in Hawk’s and Brooks’s works; they allow fluid movement between public and private, observation and participation, and consumption and design. These facets have already been established and reworked by many who are also striving to intervene in electracy’s emergence. However, it is no secret that Ulmer’s work and these genres have been aligned with personal or expressive writing, especially in the sense of a return to the utopian sense of self-discovery, seen especially in Marcel O’Gorman’s rendering of the MyStory as a form of “navel gazing” (“From Mysterian to Curtmudgeon”) and Brooks’s paraphrase that the MyStory (and perhaps by extension the MEmorial) seems like “self-indulgent, new media expressivism to some skeptics” (“Exploring MEmorials”).

Keeping in mind
the exigency for bringing video and participatory cultures into the mix of already-established practices associated with electracy, I will take electracy and composition on another trajectory into video and participatory cultures, and, with participation as the key element, civic engagement and action is inevitable. That is not to say, however that social action will always be favorable; rather, on the contrary, electrate engagement encompasses the good, bad, and ugly of large-scale participation.

Electrate reasoning is crucial to the world of participatory culture and online video culture, and one of the central goals of this book is to add an overtly participatory element to the electrate work already in existence. Information in electracy is organized by image events, which exist outside the realm of rational analysis. In electracy, one does not critique media; one uses media to perform critique: critique and performance become symbiotic. By understanding the larger project of electracy, we see that electracy is not necessarily confined to Ulmer and his body of work. To tie electracy only to Ulmerian genres is to slight the cultural relevance inherent in the concept of the electrate apparatus. Ulmer’s genres, which have produced amazing products already, represent a small piece of the work of electracy. If we follow Ulmer’s definitions and explanations of electracy, we know that electracy is emerging and thus its rhetorics are emerging too. Video and participatory culture are integral to electracy, and likewise should be understood within its context.

Smashing Divisions: You, the Tube, and Participatory Composition

Linking electracy and video and participatory culture seems like a no-brainer, particularly after revisiting Ulmer’s early articulations of electracy in Teletheory as videocy. After all, one of the central features of electracy includes making public moving images designed for eliciting participation, remixing, and reappropriation. The popcycle and MyStory invite collaboration and response by stirring up connections that would have otherwise not been made, and if we envision them as videos posted on YouTube, we can see how they would be instantly transformed. That is, if we go back to the articulation of my own popcycle and its accompanying videos, which are posted on YouTube, we will see that they gain the element of participation by having text comments underneath them, related videos to the side, and, potentially remixed versions of the videos posted in response. This is strikingly different from the MyStories currently out there that exist on their own platforms and are, for the most part, self-contained.

I must go back to the initial exigency for me to investigate the relationship between electracy and the burgeoning culture of video sharing. In 2008 while preparing for a CCCS presentation on YouTube, I stumbled on Alexandra Juhasz’s now famous course at Pitzer College, Learning from YouTube. Juhasz has since taught the course several times, and published articles, blogs, videos, and a “video book” on the course (Learning from YouTube); all of these publications situate YouTube as haphazard, non-academic, and pedestrian and conclude that YouTube as it stands today impedes serious learning. I immediately connected these assertions to some of the main features of the electrate apparatus, namely that the lateral associations encouraged by participating on YouTube do not impede learning; rather, they serve as the impetus for building networks of “learning” around particular concepts. Further, in the context of electracy, the layers of participation going on at any given moment on the site reflect the changing social and cultural dynamics of the site and present a rich space for learning.

Juhasz’s article “Why Not (to) Teach on YouTube” laments that sites like YouTube smash the divisions that have traditionally held up a properly functioning classroom environment. These divisions include: public/private; aural/visual; body/digital; user/owner; entertainment/education; and control/chaos. “As these rigid binaries are dismantled,” Juhasz claims, “the nature of teaching and learning shifts (I’d say for the worse)” (359). I certainly agree that these traditional binaries are blown apart on YouTube and other video sharing sites, but I don’t think it’s for the worse at all; rather, particularly on YouTube, where cultural phenomena develop so rapidly, dismantling rigid binaries accurately reflects the project of electracy and working in participatory culture. As I’ve already discussed, the most obvious split is between entertainment and education; in electracy, entertainment is the primary form of practice, thus recreating and remixing the relationship between education and entertainment. However, it is not enough to say that, in electracy, we “learn through entertainment”; rather, and as I will try to articulate, we become participants in the entertainment enterprise of learning while creating.

Why YouTube?

Most work on video cultures has been tied to YouTube, specifically, since YouTube has become synonymous with online video sharing. While other video hosting sites such as Vimeo, Tumblr, and Hulu have also gained momentum, YouTube remains the platform for video culture. As of this writing, YouTube boasts over 800 million monthly viewers, and many of these views originate somewhere else: “70 percent of YouTube traffic comes from outside the United States” (“Statistics”). Consequently, YouTube now features an “as seen on” link below some videos that shows where they originate. With
This added feature, we can discover all the other places in which the video is located, thereby creating an instant “deck” of sites containing the video, each with its own rhetorical framework. For instance, I recently found out that one of my videos posted on YouTube has been embedded on a blog in Germany for several years; this video has also been formally published in the journal Kairos and has been linked to on some course syllabi. While my example is minor compared to some videos on YouTube that are reposted and embedded thousands of times over, it shows how YouTube acts as the central platform for video hosting, even though it does not act as a traditional “center.” While videos rarely stay on YouTube only, the platform is still the most widely sought after site for video upload, download, and participation.

One of the better sources for understanding the popularity of YouTube is YouTube: Online Video and Participatory Culture by Jean Burgess and Joshua Green. Burgess and Green delve into the culture inspired by YouTube by analyzing hundreds of YouTube videos and present a picture of the platform that allows us to peer into the inner workings of video culture as it stands today. Their work is at the forefront of studies that “attempt to tread YouTube in itself as an object of research” (6). “YouTubers” are those who participate in the site on all levels, and Burgess and Green suggest that YouTubers, and by extension those who participate in video sharing sites, approach these sites with their own purposes and aims and collectively shape YouTube as a dynamic cultural system: “YouTube is a site of participatory culture,” they claim (vii). They even go on to suggest that “For YouTube, participatory culture is not a gimmick or a sideshow; it is absolutely core business” (6). The key point here is that, contrary to the site’s tagline of “broadcast yourself,” participants in YouTube experience success not because of the content they produce but because of “grounded knowledge of and effective participation within YouTube's communicative ecology” (56–57). Even “lurking” is a form of participation; Burgess and Green suggest that “one of the fundamental characteristics of co-creative environments like YouTube is that the participants are all at various times and to varying degrees audiences, producers, editors, distributors, and critics” (82). “Various times and to varying degrees” suggests that there are no predetermined roles or rules for interaction and participation on YouTube, and the “roles and rules” usually evolve and revolve around particular genres of videos, only to be reinvented again and again.

Thus, according to Burgess and Green, YouTube, as a cultural system, is better understood as a “continuum of cultural participation” (57). The continuum encompasses, they suggest, “the activities of not only content creators but also audiences and practices of participation, because the practices of audiencehood—quoting, favoriting, commenting, responding, sharing, and viewing—all leave traces, and therefore they all have effects on the common culture of YouTube as it evolves” (57). We can see videocy and electroly at work in that the video content on YouTube is just as important as the network—a network of creative practices—the content created within the various social network settings (58, 61). As a social network, YouTube connects people, but not in the formal and very structured way of other sites like Facebook.

Juhasz laments that YouTube studiously refuses the structures for community building, the hallmarks of web 2.0 (137). In electroly, however, technologies exist to create networks and not remain contained in one platform. This is why YouTube especially pushes the limits of how web 2.0 is currently conceived, since, the practices on YouTube rarely originate or remain on the site itself, despite its capacities as a social network. In agreement, Patricia Lange, in “Publicly Private and Privately Public: Social Networking on YouTube,” found that “in addition to supporting social networks, video sharing practices helped create new connections and develop social networks” (369). Burgess and Green write that video sharing sites reflect technologies that are “expansible, adaptable, and malleable . . . and so preserving the potential for the technologies to be ‘generative’ of new or unexpected possibilities. Even the most usable and apparently simple technologies may offer creative possibilities that extend far beyond their most obvious, invited uses—possibilities most frequently realized (or even pioneered) by users, often to the surprise of the technology’s designers” (64).

That YouTube represents technologies created for generative purposes lifts the division between control and chaos. In electroly, we become producers as we are consumers and inhabit these roles differently each time we engage with participatory sites. While “generating new and creative possibilities” may seem cliché, we actually see this happening as users figure out ways to re-create YouTube with their combined practices. What is at once controlled is also sent into chaos when, for example, comments, videos, or links pop up, thereby creating an instant network.

Networking and participation are central to electroly. YouTubers routinely branch out to other sites to enhance and supplement participation in YouTube, and their cross-registrations demonstrate that YouTubers, as cultural agents, are not captive to YouTube’s architecture and also show “the permeability of YouTube as a system” (66). YouTubers move their identities and content among multiple sites and manipulate both to meet specific sites’ communal conventions, which demonstrates another feature of electroly,
especially the manipulation of content to meet a specific site’s communal conventions. As I will explore in chapter 4, popular YouTubers intricately weave content, including videos, comments, remixes, and video responses, across the site, leaving traces of their identities in numerous places. Burgess and Green conclude that despite YouTube’s technological limitations, the so-called YouTube community aims to “embed their video practice within networks of conversation”; they found that “their willingness to find ways to do this even if not supported to do so by the provided technology” was astounding (67). This practice is a key feature for participatory composition, as sharing and embedding are inherent in the practice.

We can thus see the conventions of participation found on YouTube continue to take shape by evolving on the site and adding to what Collin Brooke and Thomas Rickert have described as “information density” (“Being Delicious”). I consider Brooke and Rickert’s essay in chapter 4 but mention it here to support the idea that participation drives the ever-changing social and technological dynamics of sites like YouTube. In fact, Burgess and Green suggest that “in order to operate effectively as a participant in the YouTube community, it is not possible simply to import learned conventions for creative practice, and the cultural competencies required to enact them, from elsewhere” (69). Rather, creative practices—remixed and remade with content from other sites—are consistently revised to fit the cultural moment in which YouTubers and YouTube as a cultural site find themselves.

If we return to three of Juhasz’s divisions: Body/Digital; Control/Chaos; and Public/Private, we can see how smashing them productively reflects facets of the electorate apparatus. In electocracy and likewise in video culture, these divisions are not opposites but instead work in tandem to reflect the shift in values at work. In the practice of video blogging (vlogging), for example, we see the body and digital working in tandem, and the result is a series of third options, which we see all over the site in the form of comments, video responses, and so on. That is, the former divisions merge to reflect a necessary blending of them for participatory culture. Lange studies practices on YouTube that specifically deal with the collapse of public and private space, and she concludes that most participants in video cultures offer some range of combining the public and private, hence her terms “publicly private and privately public.” These terms indicate that no action in video culture can be seen as either private or public; instead, each level of participation offers a necessary public/private merge.

James Porter, in “Recovering Delivery for Digital Rhetoric,” examines the idea of the body in digital space, especially since the body was once an important aspect of rhetorical delivery. While some people may think that, in a virtual space, the body disappears, Porter claims that the “body does not disappear in virtual space. It is certainly constructed differently, but it is there in all its non-virtual manifestations: gender, race, sexual preference, social class, age, etc.” (212). He is dealing here with pictures or videos of people, and I think the vlog, used for so many purposes in video culture, stands out as an example of merging the body and digital, public and private, and control and chaos. Most vloggers come to the genre with neither experience nor script, and the resulting product provides an array of conventions with which to contend. Stunningly, “collaborative and remixed vlog entries were a very noticeable feature of the most popular content in [Burgess and Green’s] survey” (65). Again, despite YouTube’s interlace not adequately supporting creating or remixing video on the site, vloggers continue to network to other sources to experiment with the genre of the vlog. The point I want to make has less to do with the content of particular vlogs and more to do with the bodily presences of the vloggers. In fact, most vloggers exert more bodily presence here than they do in a face-to-face situation, particularly if we take advantage of the technological capabilities of changing the timing and duration and remixing content, for example. (See chapter 4 for a discussion of particular vloggers at length.) These debates only begin the discussion of participatory composition and set the stage for each chapter to come. Participatory composition requires rapid remixing of identity formation, technical savvy, rhetorical skills, and participation in networks, all of which are necessary components of video culture. Thus, each chapter will include a manifestation of electocracy from video culture to extend and connect these claims.

**Participatory Subjects and “Three Countertheses” Redux**

So what are we to do with [Vitanz’s] radical critique of our field? The answer is easy: ignore it. And to a large extent, that’s just what we’ve done. But I think that’s a mistake. “Three Countertheses” is one of the most compelling critiques of composition in our literature—penetrating, perceptive, and on the whole, persuasive.

—Michael Carter, Where Writing Begins

Chapter 2 begins with a discussion of the rhetoric of empowerment to show how the idea of empowerment through critical reflection changes in electocracy and particularly on YouTube, since YouTubers receive immediate and repeated response to their actions, thus continuously remaking subjectivity. I turn to Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s concept of “desiring production” to articulate how subjectivity is continuously remade. Alex Reid suggests in “Exposing Assemblages” that “the externalization of the
subject in the emergence of community, which is difficult and abstract in the print world, becomes more palpable and material in digital media networks, and this “externalization of the subject,” Reid continues, “is even intensified by the shift from text into video.” That shift plays a large role in this book’s arguments; which is why I devote an entire chapter to the question of the writing subject for an electorate apparatus. I aim to create a complex notion of subjectivity for electacy and participatory composition that will serve as a framework that I will elaborate on in the subsequent chapters. A video produced by Bahareh Alaei accompanies chapter 2—entitled “Choric Slam Tilt: Unpinning the Table,” which can be located at: http://thechoricarcade.wordpress.com.

Chapters 3, 4, and 5 are organized around Vitanza’s seminal article, “Three Countertheses: Or, a Critical In(ter)vention into Composition Theories and Pedagogies,” written during a specific scholarly moment in rhetoric and composition—around 1991—when cultural studies, social epistemic rhetoric, and critical pedagogy were all gaining momentum and scholars were exploring the implications of postmodern theory for the still relatively new discipline; a time, as Hawk argues, when the pedagogical question inevitably evoked the social-epistemic question: “does this pedagogy seek to produce the proper political subject and corresponding critical text?” (Counter-History 207). Because of this timing, I am especially interested in the mood that the countertheses evoke today, since they were invented specifically as a direct response to these types of social-epistemic practices, which claimed to usurp prevailing notions of expressivist and cognitive rhetorics. Vitanza explains: “The countertheses are counterresponses to the strong will of the field of composition; they are counterresponses to (1) the will to systematize (the) language (of composing), (2) the will to be its authority, and (3) the will to teach it to students” (140–41). While Vitanza has amassed many more works since the publication of “Three Countertheses,” his questions from that seminal essay serve as a very appropriate starting place for articulating participatory composition.

The countertheses did not advocate adding another category to the existing taxonomies; instead, through what is now considered a traumatic gesture, they worked to illuminate how creating categories at all excludes much of the potential available for writing, writing subjects, writing technologies, and writing communities. Rickert puts forth the notion that the countertheses initiated a trauma for Rhetoric and Composition and, years later, we are now in the midst of “the felt sense of crisis that necessitates a return to that traumatic event” (Acts of Enjoyment 9). This “felt sense,” I contend, consists of the widespread emergence of the electorate apparatus and particularly the rise of video and participatory cultures. In fact, Hawk suggests that the “Internet opened the way for completely new social and pedagogical contexts” (Counter-History 207).

Accordingly, the countertheses served as both a critique of prevailing articulations of postmodern theory and composition and, almost paradoxically, a performance of integrating postmodern theory and composition. This notion—merging critique and performance—is very important for this book, since, by the end, I will have put forward a notion of “participatory pedagogy” that aims to do just that. Aside from Stephen Yarborough’s book-length project After Rhetoric, and Michael Carter’s book Where Writing Begins, there has been little interrogation or analysis of, or response to, Vitanza’s scathing claims. Carter even suggests that the radical critique of the field in “Three Countertheses” has been systematically ignored (150, 139 n1). While Carter does go on to explicate and treat the countertheses, he does so from the vantage point of articulating a version of postmodernism: a “process postmodernism” that does not go far enough to create the changes Vitanza advocates.

Finally, returning to the countertheses and juxtaposing their contentions with the larger projects of electacy and video culture should push them toward what Hawk has called a “complex ecology” (Counter-History 224) for participatory composition, which is not another map, taxonomy, camp, or theory, but instead a series of live forces and forms that merge, converge, and change when practiced.

Chapter 3 was co-written with Cortney Kimoto (Smethurst), MA graduate of California State University, Long Beach, whose research inspired the revised direction of the chapter. Her projects have served as catalysts that pushed my thinking toward connecting theories that I have been working with for over a decade to video culture. Chapter 3 is centered on the first proposition in the Gorgian trilemma and Vitanza’s first counterthesis: nothing exists. “Nothing exists”—an ontological statement—is traditionally interpreted to mean that something is missing, lacking; if an essential or even contingent definition of objects is not possible, then there is no place to stand and thus achieve stasis, which, as a classical practice that remains relevant for invention purposes, bestows a kind of status. In chapter 3, we unpack the question raised by Vitanza’s first counterthesis, the question of definition, or What is it?, a question that allows us to examine the first of three theoretical constructs that serve as a framework for participatory composition. We pursue three ambitious goals: first, we connect the question of definition to stasis theory, which serves as the counterpart to chorography, Ulmer’s method of invention that is based on the ancient conception of
space, *chora*; second, we explore Barthes’s and Ulmer’s work on the punctum of recognition and seek to extend such work out into the participatory realm, eventually transitioning into a discussion of Brooke’s recasting of invention as *proairesis*; third, after juxtaposing scholarship on *chora* with Deleuze and Guattari’s dualisms for both spatiality and temporality, we turn to YouTube as our exemplar for choric invention and conclude by exploring how a particular meme, with its complex folds of remix and reappropriation, illustrates how spreadable and undefinable media can influence participation as well as global collaboration, interaction, and communication. This meme, as well as the cultural phenomena arising around it, sets the theoretical concepts discussed in the chapter in motion in order to create a complex and rich picture of invention for the electorate apparatus. Finally, two videos accompany chapter 3. The first, titled “The Dancing Floor,” (http://kairos .technorhetoric.net/17.2/topoi/vitanza-kuhn/arrowyo_alaei.html), was produced by Bahareh Alaei. This video aims to present the concepts discussed in this chapter visually and perform the theories and examples articulated here. The second video, “Phoenix—Lisztomania—Long Beach/Bolsa Chica, CA Brat Pack Mashup” (http://youtu.be/Wg2AlNaoeY), produced by Kimoto, presents our own participation in the meme that we describe in the chapter.

Chapter 4 treats the second Gorgian position and Vitanza’s counterthesis: if something were to exist, it would not be knowable. A central question becomes, Who speaks when something is spoken? This chapter engages the question of mastery over knowledge. I interrogate the theoretical implications from this question and transfer these implications to video and participatory cultures. “Relinquishing the discourse of mastery” and developing a discourse of “speaking as a listener” will be central; and yet, as we see, “speaking as a listener” in video culture is quite complex and has proven to have both trivial and deep consequences in the online and offline worlds. The chapter first attempts to make a series of theoretical connections: from the deoedipalized subject to Vitanza’s notion of “speaking as a listener”; from Lyotard’s alternative to the Lacanian “discourse of the master”; and from pedagogical perspectives on these concepts such as Marshall Alcorn’s “pedagogy of demand” and Kevin Porter’s “pedagogy of severity,” to Cynthia Haynes’s stunning articulation of “postconflict pedagogy.” I take a variety of twists and turns. Through it all, my goal is to apply these concepts to prevalent behavior found in participatory and video cultures in order to cast a wider net for the generative practices I advocate throughout the book. I also spend some time comparing the tenets from the second counterthesis with Thomas Kent’s Davidsonian notion of “passing theories” and “hermeneutic guesswork” as well as Stephen Yarborough’s pedagogical move toward “discourse studies,” both of which are attempts to respond to the questions raised in the second counterthesis. This comparison will bring me to how the concept of community is both redefined under the premises of the second counterthesis and reinvented in video culture, especially when directly compared Kent’s and Yarborough’s explanations. I then extrapolate on how these theories come to life in video culture. While it may be tempting to see this blending of electrate and participatory practices as only celebratory, it is crucial to also explore the darker and more ruthless side of participatory culture that emerges when the distance between public and private behaviors quickly shrinks and the axis of “joy/sadness,” articulated briefly in the discussion of videocy above, comes to light. I specifically turn to practices known online as “flaming” and “hating,” which present Lyotard’s listening game in a layered and complex manner and serve as a provocative complement to Haynes’s call for a postconflict pedagogy.

Chapter 5 is centered on the third Gorgian position and Vitanza’s counterthesis: if something can be knowable, it cannot be communicated. Thus, the third counterthesis also introduces the prevalence of the theory/practice split in rhetoric and composition, and I work with Vitanza’s claim that there can only be “postpedagogy.” Postpedagogy eliminates the idea of “turning” a theory into pedagogical practice, which has commonly been called the “pedagogical imperative” in rhetoric and composition. This responds to the question of “how to” teach something over which we can no longer claim authority, which I explored in chapter 4. I turn to both the first collection entitled *Post-Process Theory*, edited by Thomas Kent, and the follow-up collection aptly called *Beyond Postprocess*, edited by Sidney I. Dobrin, J. A. Rice, and Michael Vastola, to explore “turning” theories into practices, particularly since, in electracy, theories emerge as they are practiced. I first discuss Lee-Ann Kastman Breuch’s essay “Post-Process Pedagogy” as a lasting exemplar of pedagogy as we currently envision it. I have seen Breuch’s essay anthologized a number of times, and I know it has influenced many newcomers to the field. I then toggle between the first collection and the follow-up collection to see how, as Kent remarks, the “postprocess mindset” (Preface 16) works with and against electracy and participatory composition. As we will see, the follow-up collection certainly turns postprocess into something more like an ever-developing network.

I then turn to the concept of heuristics, developed by Ulmer and extended by many scholars, combine it with the preceding discussions of participatory culture, electracy, and postprocess, and put forward the concept of “participatory pedagogy,” appropriate for participatory composition, which Geof Carter first developed in our cowritten article “Tubing the Future:
YouTube U and Participatory Pedagogy in 2020.” I further develop participatory pedagogy by discussing it in terms of Vitanza’s third counterthesis and the pedagogical imperative. Participatory pedagogy enacts the de-eroticized, ever-morphing writing subject (chapter 2), encourages choric inventions and continuous remix (chapter 3), plays the listening game in all its manifestations (chapter 4) and engages in both critique and performance (chapter 5) with each act of composition. The final section of that chapter provides examples, or more accurately metaphors, for enacting a participatory pedagogy.

Chapter 6 is an afterword wherein I offer snippets of student examples engaging with participatory composition as well as commentary about the process. While including examples may seem contradictory, I wanted to show how students engage with the ideas presented throughout this book. I also refer to my social networking site, electracy.ning.com, wherein many more examples can be found. Both of the students represented in chapter 6 studied Ulmer, electracy, and participatory and video cultures in my graduate-level seminar on digital rhetoric.

2. Recasting Subjectivity for Electracy: From Singularities to Tubers

Two specters are haunting the discipline of Writing Studies. Those specters are the unified subject and the hegemony of communitarian thinking. These specters come in the guise of process theory and ideology critique.


Yet critical pedagogy has been part of composition for nearly twenty years now. Is it fair to ask: At what point are you no longer blundering for a change? At what point are you simply blundering?

—Russell Durst, “Interchanges”

Doesn’t she know people are making fun of her? She doesn’t even know the words! Why is she doing this? She should stop making videos.

students in a digital rhetoric seminar

In 2010, ToshBabyBoo’s video—dedicated to her friends on the live video chat site Stickcam and posted on YouTube—circulated around the Internet and created an instant buzz. This video, which is over six minutes long, simply features ToshBabyBoo singing along to a popular song coming from her headphones, so we only hear her voice and not the music from the song. What turned the video into an Internet meme was ToshBabyBoo’s unrelenting singing, mumbling, missing words of the song, and making up others with no seeming effort to improve. She also appears oblivious to the embarrassment her viewers vicariously feel for her. In effect, her video is the epitome of the rise of the amateur and what Alexandra Juhasz sees as the “shallow” content of YouTube that repels any type of serious learning (“Why Not (to) Teach on YouTube”). Yet, even though the video itself will most likely fall from popularity, I begin this chapter by referencing it because it offers a lasting exemplar for how subjectivity works in electracy.
NOTES

1. Introduction: Electracy, Videocracy, and Participatory Composition

1. Richard Fulkerson's essay "Composition at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century" offers a follow-up taxonomy to his 1980 effort "Four Philosophies of Composition." Interestingly, in updating his taxonomy for rhetoric and composition, Fulkerson points out in a note that he intentionally omitted practices he did not consider major "approaches" to composition: one of these practices was "computers and composition" (662 n 5). His move surprisingly aligns with what I aim to accomplish by placing participatory composition alongside prominent "approaches"; participatory composition aims to add cultural and technological complexity to "computers and composition," thereby not making it into a new approach, but rather inviting further exploration and participation in its emergence.

2. This skepticism can be dispelled by looking at the project of the EmerAgency, a virtual consultancy, which Ulmer has worked to create for over a decade. The EmerAgency aims to intervene in public policy problems using electracy reasoning. I will not discuss the EmerAgency at length in this book, but it has been a very helpful concept for study when teaching about electracy and civic issues. Additionally, as seen in the invention of my popcycle, the concept of the EmerAgency is a driving force behind my own engagement with the electracy apparatus.

3. Thanks to Dobbin, I was able to work with the second Postprocess collection before its official publication, so I am forever grateful to him for sharing it with me.

2. Recasting Subjectivity for Electracy: From Singularities to Tubers

1. Rickert also explains that "many Composition scholars have taken up the challenge to transform or at least critically engage student subjectivities, as well as the contested notion of what subjectivity is and how is it constructed discursively and ideologically" (Acts of Enjoyment 12–13). Rickert refers to James Berlin, Patricia Harkin and John Schib, Lester Faigley, and Sharon Crowley and suggests that much of the postmodern scholarship in rhetoric and composition from the early to mid-1990s focused on subjectivity, which responded to antifoundationalist, postmodern theory (13).

2. Lynn Worsham has provided a powerful explanation of the violence inherent in this misconception in "Going Postal: Pedagogic Violence and the Schooling of Emotion." It is in this article that Worsham defines the "oedipalized subject" upon which