Doing Feminist Theory Through Digital Video Portfolio

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Acknowledgements

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I am grateful for the work of my two research assistants, Rory Begin and Holly Chute, in developing this project during the summer of 2012. Holly took Feminist Theory in 2010, and Rory took it in 2011. Their deep knowledge of the course and feminist theory, their contributions to this portfolio, and their feedback on this assignment have been invaluable.
Doing Feminist Theory Through Digital Video – Summary of Assignment

The major learning objective of this course is to understand and explain how theory informs practice. Praxis is a word that describes the cyclical relationship between theory and practice. In order to take responsible action in the world, one’s actions needs to be informed by theories; likewise, through action and reflection upon action we develop and strengthen our theories.

The “Doing Feminist Theory Through Digital Video” assignment offers students an opportunity to reflect upon practice in order to develop and strengthen theory through a creative service learning assignment. In consultation with a community or university organization and course readings, you will create your own short digital video (3-5 minutes) about a key concept in feminist theory. A digital video is a video that is recorded in a digital format (rather than analog, like film) and can be edited using a computer. This assignment assumes no prior experience in video making. These short digital videos will be put into an online library that will be used in the various training and educational activities of university and community organizations in Antigonish.

You will work on this assignment for the entire semester, and the video and reflection paper will be the final project for this course. This assignment will unfold in four phases, and each phase is explained in detail in the “Doing Feminist Theory Through Digital Video” portfolio of materials. The phases of the assignment are:

a) Research and concept exploration,
b) Planning and writing,
c) Shooting and editing, and
d) Reflection.

Your short digital video and written reflection is due on Thursday, November 29th. The timeline for this assignment will be roughly as follows:

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In your short digital video, you will tell a story about the concept that you and your organization mutually agree upon from your own perspective. The story should incorporate what you have learned about the concept through the interconnections between your reading and the way the organization defines, develops, and uses that concept in their work. It is key that you focus on your understanding of the concept, rather than
try to represent how others understand the concept (the authors you study in the course, or the people that you learn from in your organization). Keep in mind that your unique understanding of your concept will be valuable for others learning about it through your video.

**Research and Concept Exploration - Detailed Description**

The research and concept exploration phase of the “Doing Feminist Theory Through Digital Video” project involves the following steps:

a) selecting a community or university organization to partner with for the project,

b) identifying a concept with individuals in your organization,

c) researching how your concept is defined through course readings, and

d) researching the work that your organization does and how that concept is significant to their work.

At the beginning of the course, you will receive a list of community and university organizations that you can partner with for your project. This list will contain suggestions of weeks in the course that might match up well with the work that the organization does. There will be a maximum of 2-3 students per organization, so you should come prepared with a list of the organizations that you are interested in because you might not be able to work with your first choice. You will be making your own video, even if there are others working with the same organization, so this is not a group project. Depending on the needs of your organization, you may make a video about the same concept as other students working in the same organization, or you might make a video about a different concept. You may also meet separately or individually with your organization, again depending on the needs and availability of the organization. You should communicate what you think would work best for you, to see if that can be accommodated.

Once you have selected an organization and met with a Service Learning staff member, you will meet with individuals in your organization to discuss your project. You should bring the assignment instructions and tell the organization about your learning objectives for this project. In your first meeting, you should ask them how they would use a short digital video in their work (Who will be the audience? Where will it be shown?). Together with the organization, you will come to an agreement on a concept in feminist theory that you will make a short digital video about. It is key that you are both satisfied with the concept you have chosen, which may require negotiation and further discussion. Please note that for each week of the course, there is a list of concepts noted on the syllabus underneath that week’s readings, assignments, and presentations. If you want to work on a concept that is not listed on the syllabus, you must consult with me before beginning your project.

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When you have selected a concept, you will do all the readings in the weeks of the course that are related to your concept. You should be noting how that concept is defined within the readings, and paying close attention to different definitions amongst the readings. It is wise to do this immediately after consulting with your organization, and before you begin learning about and participating in their activities, because you will have a clearer grounding in the concept. Since this assignment requires you to explore the relationship between the concept in theory and the concept in practice, you will be better informed if you do your reading before you work with the organization and will know what to look for when you are doing the service component.

Around the same time, you will begin working with the organization to learn what the organization does and how and why the concept is significant to their work. You should gather information about the organization (for example, through their web site, printed materials, participating in their activities). Throughout all of this, you should be reflecting upon and investigating how the concept is used and defined within the organization.

You must finish this phase by October 23. You will submit a short summary of your activities to me on this day. This summary should be verified (by signature) by an individual at your organization.
Webmapping
Holly Chute

Webmapping is an exercise that assists in coming up with ways of thinking about or representing your ideas that are different from what you usually come up with. This is a skill that you already have; it’s just a matter of learning how to access it.

“Webmapping” (web/mapping)
Something you’re trying to figure out is placed at the center of the webmap. Everything that comes to mind when you think about that topic is then written down around it, and everything that comes to mind when you think of those ideas is written down, and so on until the page is full. Through deciding on a minimum number of “ideas” to come up with each time, you’re pushed to dig deeper to “fill the quota”: coming up with different and more in-depth ideas than you normally would. Twenty initial ideas is a good place to start, then 3-5 ideas for each of those ideas, and so on. The idea is to not edit yourself too much as you go: it’s important to even write down ideas that you may initially think are ridiculous. If you’re laughing it’s probably a good thing! That means you’re thinking about things differently than usual or including things you wouldn’t normally. It’s also important to remember that it’s an exercise that’s just for you and you don’t need to show anyone what you’ve come up with.

Webmapping can help you learn to think of things visually because you can include many different types of ideas. For example, while “privilege” is something you have been talking about in class, it could also remind you of a colour, shape, place, texture, animal, person, etc. And if privilege does not directly remind you of something visual, it might indirectly: maybe privilege reminds you of “cold” which you could then represent with “grey” or “blue” or anything else you would normally use to represent “cold”. Your ideas also do not have to be limited to visuals; they could also be more abstract. You could include situations in your life, personal qualities, people you know or have heard of, concepts from class or other classes, etc. The webmap can also include sounds, music, or other audio. Webmapping not only helps you learn to include different types of ideas when brainstorming, it also helps you see how these different ideas can go together (like in a video).

The final step in the webmapping process, after you’ve filled your quota, is to take a different colour pen and draw lines connecting ideas you’ve come up with that could go together. You’ve likely come up with connected thoughts accidently while going off on two seemingly different thought tangents. Hopefully by the end, you’ve come up with a whole bunch of new ideas you otherwise would not have and can take a step back and see how they might end up together in your final project. Writing down or highlighting the best ideas and connections can be helpful at the end.
Suggestions
- Writing quickly and writing slowly are both good ways of coming up with ideas:
  o Writing ideas down quickly leaves less time to evaluate your idea as good or bad. Often ideas you might ordinarily dismiss right away can be more interesting than you think. Working quickly can have the benefit of helping you include these ideas.
  o Writing slowly can also be good because sometimes when you sit with an idea for longer, it can deepen or develop in thoughtful ways.
  o Sometimes experimenting with the method (quick or slow) you are usually less inclined to do can bring interesting results!
- Using paper without lines helps to avoid making lists
- Try making a webmap of just visual representations of concepts to encourage yourself to think in that way.
- This exercise is completely open and made to help you: the guidelines aren’t strict. One idea may prompt ten new ones right away or one. Coming back to ideas to add more can be helpful, or may not be. You can change the exercise to be whatever you it need it to be!

In this project webmapping can be used for:
- Concept exploration
- Organizing, thinking about, and finding connections in research
- Planning and writing
- Reflection

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Suggested Questions to Think About During Service Learning Component  
Rory Begin and Holly Chute

Part of working with your service learning organization will be learning how the organization defines and uses the concept you are working with. Some questions to keep in mind and possible strategies to use in learning about this include:

- What does your organization do?
- How does the organization’s work relate to your concept?
- Does the organization define your concept in any policy documents, training manuals, their mandate, etc.?
- Who in the community does your organization interact with?
- How do the members of the organization and the community members define, talk about, use, and relate to the concept? Are these definitions different/similar? How do these groups of people work together in relation to your concept?
- Does your organization have any resource lists, libraries, etc. that contain materials related to your concept?
- Look for information on your organization’s website and/or promotional materials which pertain to your concept.
- Consider discussing how the concept is important to the organization with the person or people you have contact with from the organization.
- Consider attending events or meetings the organization holds (that are open to you) and take note of how your concept is talked about (directly and indirectly) in these spaces.
- Be aware of ways that your concept is talked about from the varying sources directly and indirectly. Conversations and/or materials that involve your concept, but do not directly define it are still relevant to gaining an understanding of the organization’s definition of the concept and how they use it.
Planning and Writing – Detailed Description

Once you have completed your research, you will begin the fun middle part of this assignment – writing a script and planning the audio-visual components for your short digital video. You will use your research to come up with a definition for your concept that will guide your video.

The most important thing to remember when writing your script is that you should write about the concept in your own voice. Don’t try to sound like a theorist (whatever you think that means!), and don’t try to replicate the ways that the organization may have talked about the concept. Before your get started on the actual script, write down a one to two sentence answer to the following questions:

- Before you begin the assignment: How would you define your concept?
- What definitions existed in the course readings? Are these definitions similar, or are there different definitions amongst the readings?
- What definitions did the organization use? Were there different definitions? Note that you will likely need to infer how the organization might define your concept, and check in with them to see if it is accurate.
- If you had to tell your Dad, best friend, daughter, partner, teammate, RA (etc!) about your concept, what would you say?
- Why is this concept important to feminist theory?
- Why is this concept important to feminist practice?
- How is the concept different/similar in theory and practice? How does the organization develop and change the concept through practice?

In these answers, you will find that you have been developing a definition of your concept (maybe without even knowing it!). Now what you need to do is write a script to tell your audience about that concept. You should think of your script as a story that you are telling others about your concept. This will help you avoid trying to write it in ‘Academese,’ and instead in your own unique, real, and interesting voice. Your script can be anything you like – you can tell a story about an experience related to your concept, you can write a poem or short story that metaphorically defines your concept, or you can write a creative non-fiction piece about your concept. It is up to you! Your only restriction is that your script cannot be longer than 350 words. That’s going to be hard!

Once you have your script, you should record yourself reading it so that you can hear your own voice talk about your concept. Listening to it might evoke certain images or sounds that can assist you in telling your concept story. What images and sounds come to mind when you listen to yourself read your script? Make a list of these. What images, sounds, and video clips do you currently have for your video? What do you need to
make? You are responsible for creating your own material – that means no Google image search, no YouTube, and no songs by other people! Well, almost – if you significantly alter any of these, you can use them. Songs can steal the spotlight – while Ke$ha may say great things about the objectification of women in pop music, you probably have something to say that others haven’t heard before. Gather these materials, and make a list of materials that you need to create. There are cameras (and camera manuals!) available for you to take still and moving images, and you can sign them out in class on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

This phase should be completed by November 6. You will submit a short list of materials gathered and hand in your script to me on this date.
Digital Storytelling Flower – Adapted from drawing by Jennifer LaFontaine and Emmy Pantin in their digital storytelling workshop at North York Community House, June 2012.

This flower is a visual way of representing the process of constructing a digital story of your concept. While this is not a formula or a step-by-step instructions list, it is a holistic way of showing you the parts of an interesting story. It may help you to focus when you are writing your script and planning the audio-visual components of your story.

Theory always has a past, a present, and a future. In a sense, this project is asking you to study the history of a concept (through your readings and the written materials of your organization), experience the present of a concept (through your service to your organization), and project a concept into the future (through the use of your video in training and educational activities after the course is over). However, what you have to say about your concept should be very grounded in the present, because your ideas are embedded within a particular historical and cultural context that is different from what you will study and will be different from how you think about the concept even a year from you. Ask yourself: Why this story? Why now? In other words, what are your motivations to tell this story in the way you want to tell it, and how does it fit into the present?

You only have 350 words to write a story about your concept. This means that you are not going to be able to tell your audience everything you know about it, so you are going to have to select one or two moments that demonstrate your definition. Focusing on one or two moments will also ground you so that you don’t get too abstract or caught up in all the details. Keep those moments in your mind’s eye throughout the process.

No matter what form your story takes – whether it is a piece of creative non-fiction, a short story, a spoken word piece, or a poem – you are taking your audience on a journey. Where does your story start? Where does it end? You don’t need to craft a linear narrative, but since theory is in motion, your story needs to travel, too!

The story that you tell about your concept will be situated in a particular location – this may be a concrete location (Antigonish) or it may be a metaphorical location (a world where gender is not one of the first things we use to imagine what a new person will be like). Where does it take place? You may or may not tell the audience this information, but you should know the answer to this question as you write. Who is in your story? Your concept story is about your definition, and is told from your own point of view – in other words, you may be the only person in your story. However, think about others who may be present in your story (and consider whether you are trying to tell their story for...
them, or if you are telling your story from your own unique point of view).

All good stories solicit our emotions, drawing us closer to the narrator and making us more interested in knowing where the story is going. **What are the emotions** in your story? How are these connected to your concept? Be aware of the emotions that you are feeling, and that you want your audience to feel. Related to this, **what changes** in your story? This relates to the start and end of your story. You may want to revisit your notes on your concept to see how your ideas of your concept have changed and become richer. The emotions and the changes that happen in your story will make your audience feel connected to your video.

Finally, your digital story has **benefits to you and to others**. What are they? If you have a clear idea of what benefits that you might get out of telling your concept story (for example, a grounded understanding of feminist theory, a better understanding of your family relationships, etc.) and what benefits others will get in watching your video (an emotional and intellectual understanding of a concept relevant to their work, changing someone’s mind, feeling connected to another person through their story, etc.) these will come through in your video. Think of the benefits as an anchor that holds your work in place.
Example Stories
Rory Begin

The link (provided below) is a playlist of 7 videos. These are meant to be examples of digital stories to show some of the diversity of approach possible in telling digital stories. In this list I tried to include ones that were different from each other in various ways. Included are serious ones and more funny/silly/light ones to illustrate that no particular tone is required in telling your story. Included, as well, are ones that use still pictures, moving video, and/or a mixture. Some use a montage style; one uses more of a stop-motion feel with their photos; one mixes photo with animation. Some seem to directly illustrate the story, some don't. The videos exhibit different narration styles: poem, letter, more straight-forward chronicle of events. One is not narrated in English (this one does include English subtitles though). Some use music, some just have the narration voice-over. One includes more non-music sound effects including sounds that appear to have been recorded by the video-maker.

This is just a sample of some of the videos that other people have made. While they are intended to show a variety of approaches, they are not representative of everything it is possible for you to do with your video. Feel free to go with any ideas you have about how you want to communicate your story. It is your story. There is no wrong way, and there are infinite right ways to communicate it.

http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLE1823ADFF2D1FC22
Shooting and Editing – Detailed Description

Shooting and editing your digital video are the second half of the fun middle part of the assignment. However, for some of you they may be the most anxiety producing, especially if you don’t have prior experience making videos. Relax! This assignment assumes that you know nothing about video shooting and editing. In this phase, you will use the materials that you have gathered as well as your script to put together your video.

Most of you will want to shoot moving images for your project and create still images and sounds as well. You will do this during this phase of the project, but it is recommended that you begin this while you complete the second phase. You will not have a lot of time to create these materials, and there are a limited number of cameras available. So, the sooner you begin shooting, the better!

There will be four sessions on video editing. You can choose to come to all or none of them, but you are expected to know the material whether you are present or not in order to make your video. As the instructor, these sessions are a significant amount of additional work already, and I do not have time to individually instruct students on video editing. If you do not attend the sessions you will need to find another way of learning the material that does not rely on my assistance. The sessions are:

Learning how to use software and connecting script to images, video clips and sounds: November 6, 7-9pm and November 10, 2-4pm.

Advanced video editing and polishing your video: November 13, 7-9 pm and November 17, 2-4 pm.

In the first pair of sessions, we will do a one hour overview of how to use the editing software, focusing on basic elements like incorporating sound and still images, making clips of your video, adding your recorded voice, etc. The second hour will be devoted to a discussion and exploration of how image, video and sound can be used effectively to explain your concept in ways that can’t be captured by words (your script). Both of these are hands-on sessions, so you should bring all your materials on a USB key or saved on your H: drive. When you leave this session, you will have a basic cut of your video.

In the second pair of sessions, we will do a one hour overview of more ‘advanced’ video editing: transitions, adding text, credits, etc. The second hour will be devoted to individual feedback (peer and/or instructor, it’s your choice) and working on your video to get it closer to the final cut. Those attending the second pair of sessions must arrive with a basic cut of their video that includes the voiceover and most of the still images, video, and sounds. When you leave this session, you
should be very close to a final cut of your video, and have the knowledge to finish on your own.

**Resources for iMovie**

Unfortunately, there is no perfect manual or tutorial for using iMovie to create digital stories! This is because the software changes very quickly, and because we all have very different learning styles. Often using new software is a process that you can only learn by doing! You are being offered a few options to learn how to use the software: two different guides to using iMovie ’11 for digital storytelling (contained in this portfolio), the hands-on sessions, and two online resources that include video tutorials.

The first online resource is the iMovie ’11 help page on the Apple website. It guides you through the software, including how to import your video, audio and photo materials, creating a new project, adding video, audio and photo elements to your project, using transitions, titles and special effects, and how to export and save your movie. This resource uses text and video. You will probably find it more helpful after you have attended the first hands-on session. It is located at: [http://help.apple.com/imovie/index.html](http://help.apple.com/imovie/index.html)

The second online resource is a YouTube channel belonging to the Central California Writing Project. It contains three videos on using iMovie for digital storytelling. All of them are less than 4 minutes long, so you might find it helpful to watch them before you come to the first hands-on session, so that you can get a sense of what the software looks like and some of the things it can do. It is located at: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aSe10Nwaua4&feature=plcp](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aSe10Nwaua4&feature=plcp)
Reflection – Detailed Description

The reflection paper will relate your creative process to the course as a whole, and will be in two parts. The first part will describe what you learned through doing the creative service learning assignment, and the second part will relate those insights to your reflection on the course overall (including students in the course, the course instructor, and the theorists we’ve studied).

In the first part of the reflection, you will return to the questions you answered in the planning and writing phase of the project. In particular, you should consider how your understanding of the concept has changed through doing this project. The questions that this section should answer are:

a) How and why did your work with the organization change your understanding?
b) How and why did the readings change your definition?
c) How and why did expressing your concept creatively and as a story develop your definition into something unique?
d) Why is this concept important to feminist theory?
e) How is your concept connected to the course as a whole? (The reflection on d) and e) will serve as a transition to reflecting on your major insights in the course as a whole.)

The first part of the reflection that focuses on your concept should be approximately 2-3 pages in length.

The core question you will be considering for the second half of this reflection is: What have I learned about feminist theory? This question may be answered in a variety of ways, and will demonstrate your learning in the course. You will need to focus on a few key insights you have made over the semester and explain how you came to these insights, situating them in relation to your concept. Note that these are the same skills that you use every week to write the short response papers for individual articles. In other words, you have been doing this kind of writing all semester long, only now you are stepping back and looking at the bigger picture using your concept and video as a focal point.

To write this part of the reflection, it will help if you begin by reviewing your weekly response papers, your class notes, your notes on the readings, your presentation portfolio, and your small in-class participation assignments. These will give you a more ‘wide angle’ lens on the course and your development throughout the term. Reflect upon how your thinking has changed or remained the same. Some questions you may want to consider are:
a) Why do you think your thoughts have traveled in the direction they have?
b) What is different about your earlier work in the course from your later work?
c) Are there recurring themes in your work for the course?
d) How do you see the insights you have made in your coursework reflected in your everyday life outside the course?

As you reflect on these questions, you will begin to notice general insights about feminist theory that you have made over the term. How are these general insights connected to what you learned through the creative service learning assignment?

The second part of your assignment should be 4-5 pages in length.

While this reflection requires some description, you should focus on the impact of your creative service learning project and the course material we have studied, rather than describing the project and material itself. Your reflection must make specific reference to your written and in-class work, including course readings, lectures, class discussions, notes, and presentations. You should use your concept as the central thread that ties together the entire paper, and use it to connect your insights together. Note that this assignment does not require additional research outside of the course material.

Your reflection paper should be 6-8 pages in length and include an introduction and a conclusion. Please include ALL of your graded written material AND a DVD copy of your video with your reflection.