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The Ethics of Research and the CCCC Ethical Guidelines: An Electronic Interview with Ellen Cushman and Peter Mortensen

Robert Brooke and Amy Goodburn

In the following e-interview, two of our leading scholars on research ethics discuss the current state of ethical research in relation to the 2001 CCCC "Guidelines for the Ethical Treatment of Students and Student Writing in Composition Studies." Ellen Cushman teaches at Michigan State University and is the author of The Struggle and the Tools: Oral and Literate Strategies in an Inner City Community. *Peter Mortensen teaches at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and is the editor (with Gesa E. Kirsch) of* Ethics and Representation in Qualitative Studies of Literacy. *To produce this interview, both scholars replied to a set of questions posed by Guest Editors Robert Brooke and Amy Goodburn and then responded to each other's answers. We produced this interview by excerpting from the answers and addressing, first, the creation and effect of the 2001 CCCC "Guidelines," and second, the continuing exploration of ethics in the scholars' practices.*

WOE: What issues in our field's professional practice were the "CCCC Guidelines for the Ethical Treatment of Students and Student Writing" intended to address? How successful do you think the Guidelines were in addressing them?

MORTENSEN: Let me answer the first question—about intention—by taking a broad view of professional practice. In other words, I want to talk generally about what had been happening in the field before the ad hoc committee was formed, and I want to defer (for a few paragraphs, anyway) claims about what specific events or trends in practice the Guidelines were meant to address.

More than anything, I'd say that the Guidelines picked up ongoing conversations about ethics in composition studies and sought a wider audience for them. By the time the ad hoc committee got its charge, these conversations were already quite robust. But robust as they were, they involved fairly circumscribed groups and so could be ignored.

(More on this in a moment.) There were calls for resituating both researchers and the people whose lives and literacies they research (e.g., Bishop; Brodkey; Brueggemann; McCarthy and Fishman; Cushman "The Rhetorician"; Herndl; Kirsch; Mountford; Mahiri, "Writing"; Sunstein, "Culture"). More important, there was published research that anticipated or coincided with these calls: work that explored the subjectivity of the researcher (e.g., Schaafsma), work that wove researcher and researched voices together in the field and on the page (e.g., Cintron, Chiseri-Strater; Goldblatt; Mahiri, *Shooting;* Sunstein, *Composing*), work that defined its objective as achieving social justice as well as contributing knowledge to an academic field (e.g. Cushman, *The Struggle;* Sternglass; Taylor).

Among the increasing number of scholars attracted to qualitative studies of literacy some declared their position to be ethical (Williams), prompting those who described their research in other terms—say, empirical—to argue that their projects shouldn't, by implication, be tagged as unethical (Charney; Ray and Barton). In a separate but related conversation, advice was given about the obligations of researchers to open their work to institutional oversight (Anderson, "Ethics" and "Simple Gifts"), and the response came that professional responsibility (as a function of academic freedom) should motivate the protection of research participants, not regulations set forth by the federal government and enforced with increasing zeal but decreasing discernment by college and university administrators (Mountford and Hansberger; Cook). Alongside these conversations was another. It raised the question: How might the changing nature of intellectual property affect researchers' use of student writing in published reports of research (Hunter; Lunsford and West; see also Porter, "Developing").

Now to pull this together. Colleagues who make claims for the ethics of qualitative research and those who assert the ethical potential of empirical inquiry still argue—and productively, I'd add (see Barton, "More" and "The Implications"; Kahn). But they do so in less isolation than they once did because the changes in institutional oversight alluded to above have broadened the definition of research, thereby increasing the number of composition scholars for whom questions about ethics are relevant—like it or not (see the AAUP's report on "Protecting Human Beings"). The same goes for colleagues interested in problems of intellectual property. Given the aggressive narrowing of "fair use" and the refiguring of textual ownership under regimes ushered in by new media technologies (and their corporate benefactors), hardly a soul in the field can afford to ignore the legal constraints on using student writing in published research (see Lessig; Porter, *Rhetorical Ethics;* and Vaidhyanathan).

It was at the intersection of the aforementioned conversations internal to the field, complicated by legal and regulatory pressures from without, that the ad hoc committee found itself at its moment of inception. Given the complexity of that moment, it's hard to say just what, in particular, the CCCC Executive Committee believed the committee should address. Sure, the committee's explicit charge was to address research involving students and student writing. That's easily enough understood. But it's the context in which that charge had to be carried out that's most important, and getting a handle on that context isn't easy. So, if anything, I'd say that our charge was about addressing issues in the conduct of research that our institutions and the government would have been (and remain) happy to address without a word from us. But this doesn't mean the Guidelines are merely responsive or defensive, or that they're meant to be paternalistic. Rather, they anticipate a future in which academic disciplines that don't take an affirmative stance on good research practices won't find themselves with much footing should it be necessary—as some claim it is now—to push back against regulation that's intrusive: insensitive to the particulars of our work and ultimately counter to the interests of those "human subjects" such regulations ostensibly protect.

Now, how to gauge the Guidelines' success? It's premature to say, really. It's clear, though, that they've provoked a response. A number of articles have appeared that take issue with the Guidelines, finding them unnecessarily restrictive (e.g., Haswell, Hourigan, and Sun). That's a matter of perspective. Take my situation at the University of Illinois, for example. As currently constituted, the Institutional Review Board here puts demands on composition researchers that go well beyond what the Guidelines suggest. The Guidelines give me a place to start arguing for less restrictive oversight.

CUSHMAN: It's a strange role that the CCCC's ethical Guidelines play in research, one that can be easily dismissed as too paternalistic or too liberal or too affirming or too constraining of research depending on the position and situation from which they're viewed. And here's an important move that you make: you contextualize these Guidelines in the historical moment of their institutional formation. Here we see the reasons behind the decisions that generated a regulatory structure that defends against other regulatory structures; the Guidelines have the potential to be permissive and constraining even as they offer those who need it leverage for their positions, justification for their practices, and guidance in those practices.

MORTENSEN: This interview has put me in the odd rhetorical position of representing the work of colleagues whose labors together can't

possibly be inferred from the final text—the Guidelines—they produced. I want to be clear that I'm not speaking for anyone but myself, and I'm taking care not to detail the negotiations that led to one or another statement being included in the document that the Executive Committee accepted. Indeed, I've resisted the temptation to plow through the accumulated e-mail messages that track our collective effort: a few false starts, the occasional miscue, and, of course, the serious exchanges that we sustained over a period of months. Through these exchanges we defined our differences on matters ideological and methodological—some of them significant, to be sure. Yet we found pathways to consensus, sometimes through compromise, sometimes by concession to the better argument. Those compromises and concessions most often came when we reminded ourselves of our primary objective: to do right by the students whose writing and lives inform so much composition research. (For the record, the ad hoc committee included Paul Anderson, who chaired the committee, Davida Charney, Marilyn Cooper, Cristina Kirklighter, Mark Reynolds, and me.)

WOE: How do you think the issues addressed by the CCCC Guidelines extend beyond the field of Composition and Rhetoric? How are they also important for English Studies more widely, for the Humanities even more widely, for Education?

MORTENSEN: The issues addressed by the Guidelines ought to be of interest to colleagues working in all facets of English Studies and the Humanities, not least because we all exist in the same regulatory environment. Take the case of MLA, for example. The association has begun encouraging literature faculty to research their teaching and to share their findings in published form. (It sponsored a Forum on the subject and a related session on research practices at its 2001 convention.) All fine and good. But few literature faculty have had occasion to learn about the obligations of researchers who study student performance and student writing. The CCCC Guidelines are helpful in this regard, especially because they alert researchers to the fact that their work may be subject to Institutional Review Board oversight. The CCCC Guidelines may not answer every question literature faculty have about research on pedagogy, and certainly aren't a substitute for advanced training in research methods. Perhaps MLA will consider amending its "Statement of Professional Ethics" to address the association's interest in promoting classroom inquiry—with attention to both preparation for and the conduct of such research

CUSHMAN: Interesting to note that the MLA held a forum on literature faculty studying their own classrooms. But I don't think that one workshop or forum on methodology will allow scholars to understand

how to make knowledge using that perspective, and it surely does not appear that literature faculty get much training in methodologies that would be useful for classroom study. I think teacher educators doing research would surely profit from the CCCC's Guidelines, but I believe that we have to understand AERA's, APAs and AAAs as well since methodologies from these fields so influence the work done in rhetoric and writing. Perhaps one of the best outcomes of all this talk on methodology has been the fact that writers and scholars are taking methodology seriously as they try on new forms of knowledge making.

MORTENSEN: Practitioners of creative nonfiction who have university appointments may also find the CCCC Guidelines helpful. Depending on institutional affiliation, their work may or may not be defined as research, and so they may or may not have projects screened by an IRB. (At Illinois, the status of creative nonfiction vis-à-vis the IRB remains unclear.) IRBs aside, creative nonfiction writers and the professional organization many belong to, the Associated Writing Programs, have begun to consider the ethics of the form. At the 2003 national conference there's a panel scheduled that's titled, "The Ethics of Creative Nonfiction: Defining Honest Writing, Gray Areas, and Outright Dishonesty." In addition, several guides to writing creative nonfiction take up ethical issues (see Cheney 221-36, Gutkind 117-25, and Forché 110-11).

Researchers in Education have a long lead on us in considering the ethical dimensions of research practices. The American Educational Research Association adopted "Ethical Standards of the AERA" in 1992. Earlier this year, the association published its standards along with a set of cases and commentaries. Recall, too, that many educational researchers are affiliated with professional societies other than AERA (e.g., the American Psychological Association) that have published well-articulated research standards. We have a lot to learn from the AERA standards, most notably those of us who conduct research in the schools. Conversely, researchers in Education might profit from what the Guidelines have to say about studying student writing.

WOE: If you could rewrite the CCCC Guidelines now, what would you add, delete, change? Why?

MORTENSEN: If I had my druthers, I'd make clearer the potential price of noncompliance with campus IRBs. And then I'd turn right around and suggest that CCCC members who are displeased with IRB regulation not remain silent. The time is right for working with university administrations to delineate more crisply the scope and responsibility of IRBs. My colleague C. K. Gunsalus has argued that IRBs at many institutions currently suffer from "mission creep" and are now regulating scholarship that they shouldn't be. Another colleague, some-

one with extensive IRB service behind her, contends that institutions should let well-trained and audited department- and college-level review committees oversee unfunded research that poses little risk to participants—precisely the kind of scholarship many of us do. The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign is planning a small conference in the spring to explore how the protection of human subjects in non-biomedical research might be assured outside of the cumbersome framework we deal with now.

CUSHMAN: The amount and kind of oversight now influencing research can present obstacles for researchers interested in postmodern and other forms of empirical research. The American Anthropological Association, AERA, and NCTE all present guidelines for the treatment of participants in studies, though these guidelines may provide contradictory "rules" for research. In addition to research oversight provided by national professional organizations, universities have guidelines that must be taken into account. Finally, in the researcher's areas of study, methodological debates must be taken into account to some extent when conducting research. Small wonder, then, that Barton and MacDonald have suggested that empirical research is slowly being dismantled—surely the sheer weight and extent of research oversight mitigates against many empirical research projects from even coming off the design board. Consider again, for example, dissertation research proposed by Michelle Comstock and Joanne Addison (discussed in Porter 1998). They wanted to study the coming out narratives of teen women to better understand how to ease this process. While these narratives would have been within postmodern and AAA guidelines for ethical research, they were asked to study women over the age of 18 by the IRB at Purdue; and they would likely have had problems publishing this within NCTE journals and books because the study would have compromised the integrity of the NCTE guidelines.

Another problem emerging in the essays I review for the journals in the field (JAC, WC, CCC, CE, and RTE) is a mismatch between questions of research and the methodologies used to understand them. Case studies of classrooms often claim to be ethnographies, for example, or phenomenological studies are called case studies. My concern is that a researcher will have a question that does not lend itself to the methodology chosen, but the researcher is compelled by the cachet of the methodology to be using it (everyone wants to be doing ethnography).

Ruth Ray's *Teacher Research* offers a particularly elegant way of handling the oddities of researching in a classroom. This book is both overview of and justification for a hybrid research methodology that draws from case study, feminist activist research, and, to my mind,

grounded theory. It defies easy categorization even as it maintains a purity of line between research question and subsequent design. *Opening Spaces: Writing Technologies and Critical Research Practices* offers another example of feminist case study critical methodology for studying internetworked environments; and Laurie Nelson's book, *Knowing Her Place*, reflects on her bridge of methodological frameworks from humanities and social science to reveal the changing nature of research paradigms and the kinds of knowledge making these offer.

WOE: In your own research practice, what are the most significant issues of ethical treatment and representation you face? How do you address these issues? To what extent do you think your practices can be models for the field more generally? (What effect has the CCCC Guidelines had on your own practice, if any?)

CUSHMAN: I've been dogged by two ethical problems in my research, the first related to the activist ethnographic fieldwork I did in Quayville, NY, and the second related to the community literacy research I've been doing since then.

How can—and to what extent can—researchers involved in interventionary research continue to contribute to a community once researchers up and leave the community? Since I left the area in 1996 after completing my degree, the community members in Quayville and I have maintained our connections to the best of our abilities. On both sides, we've sent holiday and birthday care packages; I've visited twice in the interim years for four or five days, or an overnight; we talk on the phone for at least an hour, often more, every three to four weeks; I send all the royalties (such as they are) from the book to Lucy Cadens; and I send cash, not much, but what I can manage, with every care package, but especially when times are bad for them and over the holidays. Tokens of our closeness, these are, and hollow in light of the very real needs in the community and in the Cadens family (that's now grown to over 100 members in the area). At least, that's how these feel to me, but maybe Lucy would tell you otherwise. Two things trouble me most about this distance from the Cadens family: We're not able to contribute to each other's social networks in the ongoing ways that socially reflexive research might (Cushman and Guinsatao Monberg 1998); and when the Cadens family asked me to write an update about their progress and set backs, I hemmed and hawed, knowing that the distance would not permit the kind of writing that would do justice to the changed contexts of their lives. Sure, I could report news of their lives using informal interviews over the phone, but this would do little to show their daily strivings or trace the history of their accomplishments. The disjointed connection we have to each other suggests that

social reflexivity is hard won, limited by proximity, and short lived—in this case of activist research at least.

The second ethical issue that's dogging my days relates to the kinds of data gathered during service learning initiatives, data that has been tricky to report, especially given NCTE's Guidelines for the Ethical Treatment of Students and Student Writing. University students enrolled in service learning classes are often asked to consent to the inclusion of their writing in the research of the teacher. These students then ask for consent to include the writing of the youths and teens they may be working with in after-school programs as part of the learning that the university students do (Cushman and Emmons 2002; Cushman 2002). In essence, there are two levels of consent here that necessarily fly in the face of the NCTE guidelines: first, we see a teacher asking students enrolled in her classes to participate in a study, a request that section E. of the guidelines addresses: "to avoid situations in which students feel that their decision to participate...might affect their treatment by their instructors, composition specialists recruit student participants from other *classes*" (*Guidelines*), not from their own classes. Second, we see university students asking for permission from the youths in the after school program to write about the literacy and learning practices of the youths without asking their parents for permission. Parents did consent to their children attending the program and they knew that the program included university student-tutors. The youths' writing could not be included given section G of the Guidelines that asks for parental permission when the students are minors. Thus, in the write-up of these studies, the youths' writing could not be published, though it was woven throughout the university students' writing, and though no harm was caused to the youths, and though the youths themselves gave permission to use the writing.

In subsequent versions of this service learning class, I will write consent forms for the youths that are included into the permission-to-attend forms for an after-school project, but many concerns remain: a. university students who are enrolled in this class may not need permissions to quote and cite the youths' writing because it is not the object of my study and their study of it will likely not be published—the youths' writing is a catalyst for the pre-service teachers' learning, but they're not the primary participants in the study; b. recruitment of students into the after-school project will be more difficult; c. minors who give consent should be allowed to participate in studies that do them no harm and where ethical guidelines that apply to adults have been followed—I'm thinking here of Joanne Addison and Michelle Comstock's studies of teens' coming out stories that they wanted to study on-line, but could not (see Porter 1998).

MORTENSEN: While drafting the CCCC Guidelines, ad hoc committee members repeatedly discussed how we thought the IRBs on our campuses would treat one or another composition research project submitted for review. We learned that IRB oversight varies from campus to campus more than one (and the federal government) might expect. Some of the variation is accounted for by the kind assurance an institution has given the federal government (e.g., is it guaranteeing to protect only participants in federally funded research, or does the pledge to protect extend to all participants in all studies, regardless of funding source, if any?). Other variations may be attributable to whether a campus is involved in biomedical research; campuses with medical schools and centers tend to regulate all "human subjects" research more thoroughly (more rigidly?) than those without a medical complex.

So it's not a surprise to hear you describe research you're doing at MSU—fascinating and important research—that I'm certain would not win IRB approval at Illinois. To be specific, the review board here generally won't let teachers study their own classrooms, and it doesn't consider consent from minors to be informed. And as you know, there's currently no practical way to appeal IRB decisions in matters like these. I appreciate your frustration with the Guidelines. You believe that your research is ethical, your IRB concurs, but your professional organization seems to be blocking your way, especially regarding the use of writing done by the youths your students tutor. On this point I think you'll find that the Guidelines merely reflect a longstanding practice of all NCTE publications: authors must get students' permission to quote from their unpublished writing. For example, the *CCC* "Permission Request" form reads in part: "So that journals published by the National Council of Teachers of English can be protected by copyright against unauthorized use, it is necessary that consent to publish be obtained from persons who contribute to this work. By signing this form you give your consent for your writing or illustrations to be published" A minor must have a parent or guardian sign the form. I gather that from NCTE's perspective this is primarily an intellectual property issue, not a matter of protecting research participants from harm, but I could be wrong.

My concern about the "Permission Request" form is that having to file it with NCTE as a condition of publication may, under certain circumstances, force a researcher to violate the assurance of anonymity she has given to research participants. If I've promised a participant that I won't reveal her identity to anyone, and if my IRB has stipulated that I must stick by that promise, it's problematic to have NCTE require that I divulge a participant's identity on a piece of paper that I can't keep custody of. Gesa Kirsch and I ran into this problem with a couple of chapters in *Ethics and Representation in Qualitative Studies of Literacy*. The

chapter authors and NCTE eventually negotiated a solution to the problem—one to which we weren't privy—and the chapters went to press.

CUSHMAN: I got up-close and personal with that very guideline when Joe Harris asked me to get a signed consent form from the community member whose identity I had already gone to great lengths to protect (using AAA guidelines and postmodern mandates). I brought her the consent form, and she decided to sign it in the pseudonym that she chose as part of the study. Now was that really consent? And legally would NCTE have been protected? I'm in no way criticizing Joe here as he was a messenger for an organization, and he was helpful in letting it slide to the extent he did. But this gets us right back to the point that perhaps there is so much oversight that one set of rules overrides others? And your other point that a guideline should be felt subtly?—in that case Joe was flexing the Guideline in ways that made it more nuanced for the situation.

MORTENSEN: Three projects that are just getting underway keep me thinking about the ethics of research and representation.

I'm directing the dissertation of a doctoral student who's interested in how issues relevant to GLBTQ students are treated in first-year composition readers. He'd like to glean information on the subject from a couple of online chatrooms in which Illinois students participate. We've been thinking a lot about how informed consent will work for this study, and to what extent anonymity, if desired, can be assured. We don't know to what extent the campus IRB is familiar with this mode of inquiry, and we wonder how panel members will respond to the interview schedule and the consent form that we'll propose. Going in, it'll be prudent to argue that the research conforms to disciplinary norms as articulated in the Guidelines.

Throughout the fall semester I've been participating in a campus-wide seminar whose members intend to mount an ethnography of the University of Illinois. (The project takes its cue from a fascinating ethnographic study of Illinois students conducted by sociologist Florian Znaniecki back in the early 1940s.) The project leaders are two colleagues in anthropology, and, as the project moves forward, students in the Freshman Rhetoric program I direct may become involved, both as researchers and subjects of research. Their participation may lead to their writing being published on the web, and later included in print publications developed out of the project. Loads of ethical questions come to the fore. Here are just a few: What will it mean for students to be both researchers and researched? To what extent will they collaborate in the authorship of the ethnography—and how will they be credited and compensated? How will we arrange for students to give

informed consent when we don't fully know where their efforts as ethnographers might lead them?

Finally, as I mentioned before, there's an initiative on campus to rethink the role and responsibilities of the IRB. It's possible that I'll be contributing to this project with several colleagues in English. Our contribution will probably survey the types of scholarship in literature, writing studies, and creative writing that are currently regulated by the IRB, and, most likely, will propose a tempering of this regulation. Our potential contribution is motivated by local events as well as general interest, and so we face the question of how to address the former in the context of the latter (see Gunsalus). We possess some local knowledge because we participated in meetings where confidential information was shared. As things have unfolded, much of this information has become public knowledge, but not officially so. What, then, are we free to say? Put more abstractly: How does one do research in which a campus IRB is both subject and overseer?

CUSHMAN: I loved your example of researching the IRB as a subject and overseer. That's the kind of complexity that postmodern research is uniquely able to handle because of the demands it makes on self-reflexivity: the researchers will be positioned in unique ways that may well hinder or facilitate their knowledge making practices, and postmodern research calls for some disclosure about this positionality. This is not to say that a strictly empirical researcher might not be able to do a good job of studying the IRB, but the demands of self-disclosure on a postmodern researcher will allow outsiders to understand the environment of that research as seen from the researcher's vested perspective. Such understandings present a kind of research that's potentially more illuminating of and changing of the institutional structures that impact the very research being conducted. How does a professor use the knowledge making practice as an intervention in the institution to make change? This question is open only to postmodern researchers because intervention in the knowledge making process isn't available to empirical researchers.

MORTENSEN: Your comments also raise the larger question of how the CCCC Guidelines actually work. My understanding is that while they "apply to all efforts . . . that are directed toward publication of a book or journal article," only CCCC publications are directly affected, namely *CCC* and the Series in Writing and Rhetoric. How their editors—currently Marilyn Cooper and Robert Brooke—treat the Guidelines, I don't really know. And to what extent NCTE publications outside CCCC observe the Guidelines, again I don't know. Both editors report to the CCCC Executive Committee, which has the authority to shape policy that governs the organization's publications, or so I believe.

Our exchange so far puts me in mind of Roxanne Mountford and Rich Hansberger's response in *CCC Online* to Paul Anderson's "Simple Gifts." Mountford and Hansberger contend, in essence, that our competence as researchers, honed in our chosen fields of inquiry and ratified by peers each time we speak at a conference or publish in a journal, should guide ethical practice. No system of ethics imposed from above—by CCCC, by an IRB—is sufficiently sensitive to local context and is likely to lead to choices that are more harmful than beneficial to research participants. The CCCC Guidelines attempt to incorporate this critique, but, as a practical matter, the tension between competence and regulation remains unresolved.

WOE: How do these ethical issues shape your practice in the other areas of our professional lives, that is, in teaching, community outreach, faculty mentoring, and administration? Conversely, how do other areas of our professional lives put pressure on ethical issues, beyond those we've already identified?

MORTENSEN: Being on the ad hoc committee drafting the Guidelines, I had the opportunity to think out loud about the Guidelines' underlying principles in the (virtual) presence of colleagues who brought a tremendous array of experiences and perspectives to our discussions. I carry these discussions with me, and there's no doubt that they influence choices I make in other parts of my professional life.

I'll touch on one example that's much on my mind these days: how to fashion a departmental appointment and evaluation policy for full-time, non-tenure-track instructional staff, many of whom teach in the two writing programs I direct. I'm chairing a committee that is charged with recommending such a policy to the department head. Needless to say, members of the committee represent a range of vested interests: NTT instructors who are former graduate students and those who aren't; faculty whose interest in a certain segment of the graduate instructor population might be advanced by curtailing NTT hiring; faculty who see the growth of NTT hiring as an assault on academic freedom; and graduate students who want NTT positions as a safety net should they exhaust their assistantship support or, degrees in hand, have no luck on the academic job market. My sense is that meaningful deliberations can't be had without everyone being informed of what's likely (and unlikely) to happen during our negotiations, and without everyone consenting to respect the confidentiality of at least some of our conversations. Without this process of informed consent in place, it's impossible to imagine the committee's NTT membership being willing to articulate fully their needs and frustrations—and their hopes for the future.

CUSHMAN: Postmodern research, in addition to making knowledge more ethically, has had the added bonus of creating a tight weaving of

my three duties as professor and public intellectual: research, teaching, and service (Cushman 1999). As it stands, I believe that this weave is possible in courses that do not involve high-end technology. Yet, in the service-learning courses that I've taught using multimedia compositions, I've had the unfortunate experience of centering almost all my energies on teaching students a fluency (skills and critical) with multimedia software. Because this software (Adobe Premiere, Photoshop) was so complicated to learn, the students often felt under-prepared to produce digital compositions for audiences of state legislatures and city managers in Denver. Since I spent so much time in the classroom, I was not able to research deeply the organizations with which we were collaborating, The Denver City and County Commission on Aging, and the National Council of State Legislatures. Another rub: the knowledge of this software, the training of people able to use it, and the resources for using it was never transferred to these non-profits, so when I left the area, no capacity was built within the community to continue on with new media literacy practices. I was able—small consolation—to train three professors to use this software in the hopes that they would continue to be able to teach the course. This experience has made me rethink the role of the public intellectual, to consider the possibility that some models of service learning are better than others (Cushman 2002), and to believe that technologies for meaning making in service learning can monopolize a professor's time and intellectual energy. And yet, I remain foolishly optimistic that the digital divide can be bridged with the university/community divide, and will continue to try to accomplish just this.

WOE: For a journal like *Writing on the Edge* that invites exploratory writing in composition research, do you have specific issues you would like to raise? Are there special ethical concerns that emerge when compositionists explicitly craft their scholarship using collage forms, strong personal voice, narrative anecdote, creative nonfiction devices?

MORTENSEN: My inclination is to say that there may be special ethical concerns that attach to the exploratory forms featured in *Writing on the Edge*, but I don't think that such forms call for a new or separate ethics of research. How should we show respect to those about whom we write? How can the academic privilege we possess be offered or applied (or withheld) so that those who participate in our scholarly studies are helped (in ways they desire)? It strikes me that the relevance of these fundamental questions isn't dependent on how we choose to express ourselves, though our choice of form or genre may be influenced by how best we think we can address these questions.

CUSHMAN: I worry when exploratory writing draws more attention to its own style than to the findings or the participants' lived realities.

I worry when exploratory writing uses participants' voices as little more than sensational museum pieces. I worry about ethnographies that begin and end with the researcher's self-disclosures, as if to say, "it's all about me."

I have hope for exploratory writing when I read work like Julie Lindquist's *A Place to Stand,* an auto-ethnography of working class bar rhetoric. Lindquist's use of personal voice engages, edifies, and expands salient methodological issues raised during her research, but it never overshadows the participants' discursive strategies. Indeed, in many ways, readers see the researcher and participants jockeying for position as each try to gain some purchase on the contested political terrain of a working class neighborhood bar. (And isn't contested political terrain a worn-out redundancy? I mean puh-lease). Lindquist's work is the hard-won blend of personal voice and ethnographic detail that elucidate working-class rhetorics.

I learned another sort of exploratory writing necessary for the study of new media from Anne Wysocki's (2001) phenomenological "read" of museums' installations of sculptures and paintings. As some phenomenological studies do, Wysocki walks readers through her experience of two cd roms created by museums and explains the ways these virtual layouts and designs create a consciousness for readers, one that compromises the readerly/writerly awareness of form and content. Wysocki's tour of these museums is both personal experience and distanced analysis—a method useful for studying digital experiences created by new media. With this methodology, Wysocki exemplifies how new media is changing literacy practices when what counts as reading shifts as the boundaries between form/content and image/text dissolve.

Many more examples of exploratory writing exist in this field (whatever this field is), writing that is at once methodologically rich and stylistically beautiful; that crafts new knowledge as it pushes at how this knowledge comes to be made; that has fun as it takes no prisoners. But I know too that this writing scares people into not hiring, or not promoting, or not tenuring those who do it. I think the field will not reach its full potential in knowledge making until a critical mass of rhetoric and composition scholars have tenure and thus the luxury to take license with their writing as they craft socially just research.

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