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ENGL 696: Independent Readings (Digital Video)
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Personal Digivid Reflection
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“Ordinary Day”

As I taught my Multimedia Production students video production, I always emphasized planning and often advocated a heavily scripted approach to creating a digital video project. I utilized this pedagogical approach because my students were not only mastering the mechanics of operating digital video equipment but were also learning a composition process. By requiring storyboards (and occasionally full scripts), I could critique not only their “story” but also their mastery of video “grammar” (use of the Rule of Thirds, shot establishment, use of appropriate sight lines, etc.). By encouraging my students to be conscious of the medium (to look “at” it in Lanham’s terminology), they could better ensure that the medium would be transparent to their audience. Their viewers would be able to look “through” the medium and focus solely on the rhetorical message.

When composing digital video for my own purposes, I tend to use a more organic approach (unless it is a long work). I attribute this tendency to two things: First, as a professional writer, I have long since learned to take notes and organize components in my head to see how a story should develop. Second, I have studied enough video production and critiqued enough student work to have a better-than-average instinct for video grammar. I understand the need to vary shot types and utilize proper framing techniques. While I would not claim to be the next

Spielberg, I do think that the medium has become transparent enough for me that I can claim to be video “literate.”

The purpose of this digivid was to inform an audience about myself. This project lends itself particularly to an organic approach because it wants to be “real.” In fact, the rhetorical success of the digivid relies on commentary seeming natural. Phony or contrived dialogue would destroy believability. For that reason, I interviewed Kevin using a few simple questions such as “How did you meet your partner?” and “How did you know this relationship would last?” This video project also employs a persuasive component as well. I want to convince the audience that two men in a committed relationship can have an “ordinary day” (or life, for that matter) just like theirs; the challenges and the daily tasks are not that much different. I chose the vehicle of a music video to support these rhetorical motives. I selected the song because it was both popular on the radio at the time and it lyrically supported my argument. Besides, since the video project was, in essence, a romance, a “sappy” love song seemed appropriate.

In producing the video, I had two competing aims — conveying a slice of our ordinary life while also presenting a sense of “history” and longevity to our relationship. The still images were culled from various collections of photos. The video segments were intentionally shot in one afternoon to capture the mundane, every day tasks. Indeed, I purposely waited to interview Kevin until he was in the middle of preparing dinner to underscore just how “average” or common our daily existence can be. By presenting common household chores, I hoped to underscore the “ordinary day” theme of the lyrics while also allowing the audience to easily identify with my “gay existence.” By showcasing the mundane, I hoped to convince my viewers that although this relationship involves two men it is very similar to their own experience.

To soften the difference between the static images and the dynamic video, I recorded a segment of Kevin and I doing a silly dance in the backyard. I then captured several still images in sequence and put them together to mimic a drop-frame technique. By utilizing this sequence of shots, the audience experiences a jerky persistence of motion that acts as a bridge between a single photo and the 30 frame/second experience that is video. In effect, the single images speed up into “video” which serves as a transition into the candid interviews.

As a final note, I would like to comment on the importance of capitalizing on serendipity in short video production such as this. While there were some conscious choices to place particular images at a certain point to coincide with a lyric or change in music, it is critical to use a recursive process to look for alternatives. As I composed, I would constantly play segments back to evaluate their effectiveness. During these periodic reviews, it would become apparent that a transition needed to be delayed or hastened by a second or two to capitalize on a certain beat or change in the music; a sequence of still images needed to be ordered differently so that a particular photo appeared just as a particular lyric was sung. Fortunately, the non-linear nature of digital video production allows for this type of on-the-fly revision.