Video is everywhere," the 2008 edition of The Horizon Report boldly announced, noting that the lower costs associated with video production mean that "faculty have more options than ever before to incorporate video into their curricula." The sentence might also have read: "Bad video is everywhere!" Indeed, as Flip video camcorders and YouTube clips grow increasingly prevalent on campuses and in classrooms, and as citizen journalism vies with professional media production, it is time to examine how those of us in higher education use—and how we ought to use—video, both in teaching and within emerging modes of scholarly production. It is also time to debunk some of the entrenched assumptions regarding the supposed divide between the word and the image, as well as the harsh distinction between amateur and professional production.

What is video bringing to educational and scholarly production? Thomas Burkdall, in his EDUCAUSE Review column "The Persistence of Writing," argued that video, rather than simply undermining or displacing reading, writing, and critical analysis (as it is so often accused of doing), can be used in concert with these key activities, since video production relies on a good deal of practical writing. However, this argument needs to go further: as video becomes increasingly pervasive, how important is it for students—and, by extension, faculty—to be visually literate in the composition of moving images? And how should higher education articulate expectations regarding proficiency with video, especially when it is being used to make visual and aural arguments in classrooms far removed from media or filmmaking courses?

Video assignments across the college/university curriculum generally invite students to adopt a standard documentary form in which they can craft a specific argument with a clear thesis—a mode that the documentary theorist Bill Nichols has dubbed the "expository." This form "feels" correct, since it echoes the hundreds of hours of television viewed by both students and professors, and it reinscribes the need for the thesis-driven argumentation that is so central to scholarly communication. However, in many cases, this form remains taken for granted. It is adopted with little awareness of the broader range of possibilities or of the ideological implications inherent in every decision, from framing and voice-over to editing practices and the ethical requirements for a balanced perspective. Greater exposure to the basic "language" of video would undoubtedly help push video as a scholarly form to new heights, but it is unreasonable to expect this to happen quickly.

At the most basic level, then, the keys to the success of these assignments are (1) the clear relationship between the course content and the assignment, (2) faculty members' experience with video, and (3) some discussion, before production, regarding the need for students to understand the video form and content. An important question for faculty to consider centers on what video brings to the assignment that writing would not. Further, faculty members need to really look at moving images as they are structured through editing and, ideally, work with video themselves to understand its possibilities and its complexities. Finally, offering and explaining a grading rubric beforehand is critical. What will be privileged: An argument? Production quality? Both?

Beyond course assignments, video is also being used by faculty members to enhance their courses. Elizabeth Losh's "Digital Rhetorics" class at the University of California, Irvine, emphasizes the translation of time-honored principles of written and textual rhetoric and their analogues in digital media, teaching students to take advantage of the power of carefully selected voice, stance, and occasion for speech in the digital realm. Coming to this work from a background in composition and rhetoric rather than film and video production leads Losh to explore a mode of digital "writing" that is less burdened by the commercial vernaculars of the film, television, and music video industries than most undergraduate production classes. Losh's work veers toward political analysis and critique, seeking to use visual and networked media to expose the functioning of institutions (including government and educational institutions) and social infrastructures at the most basic levels. This kind of critical attention is crucial as video is adopted more broadly in educational contexts.
Analysis was also central to a recent project undertaken by Alexandra Juhasz, a filmmaker and professor at Pitzer College. In her now widely known class “Learning from YouTube,” Juhasz invited her students to perform a critique of YouTube, the social video website, entirely within YouTube itself—with all commentaries, student- and professor-made videos, and strings of discussion and debate hosted and posted inside YouTube. Her conclusion? The very formal properties and architecture of YouTube resist sustained analysis? The very formal properties and architecture of YouTube resist sustained examination? The very formal properties and architecture of YouTube resist sustained analysis? The very formal properties and architecture of YouTube resist sustained analysis? The very formal properties and architecture of YouTube resist sustained analysis? The very formal properties and architecture of YouTube resist sustained analysis? The very formal properties and architecture of YouTube resist sustained analysis? The very formal properties and architecture of YouTube resist sustained analysis? The very formal properties and architecture of YouTube resist sustained analysis? The very formal properties and architecture of YouTube resist sustained analysis? The very formal properties and architecture of YouTube resist sustained analysis? The very formal properties and architecture of YouTube resist sustained analysis? The very formal properties and architecture of YouTube resist sustained analysis? The very formal properties and architecture of YouTube resist sustained analysis? The very formal properties and architecture of YouTube resist sustained analysis? The very formal properties and architecture of YouTube resist sustained analysis? The very formal properties and architecture of YouTube resist sustained analysis? The very formal properties and architecture of YouTube resist sustained analysis? The very formal properties and architecture of YouTube resist sustained analysis? The very formal properties and architecture of YouTube resist sustained analysis? The very formal properties and architecture of YouTube resist sustained analysis?

Video is also turning up in more unusual ways within academia. The journal Southern Spaces (http://www.southernspaces.org), an Emory University Digital Library Research Initiative, publishes scholarly digital media projects, including a form dubbed “Timescapes,” which are short videos focusing on a particular space or place in the South. Some scholars are using video to craft graphics-based projects, in the vein of Kansas State University Professor Michael Wesch’s well-known “Web 2.0: The Machine Is Us/ing Us” (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NLlGopyXT_g). This video—which might better be dubbed a screen-cast, since the moving images are captured from the computer screen and then edited together to create the video—has enjoyed tremendous exposure through its thousands of viewers on YouTube, conveying a smart argument about the role of media. And moving in a slightly different direction, the film scholar Eric Faden has been exploring a form he calls the “media stylo,” in which scholars adopt various media forms to create visual arguments. In his project “Tracking Theory,” for example, Faden examines the parallel histories of early cinema and the railroad in a twelve-minute video that allows him to make a series of assertions visually rather than only through language.4

A strong proponent of video as a tool for manifesting scholarship, Faden has also bemoaned the lack of rigor in scholarly video production. Most pointedly, in “A Manifesto for Critical Media” published in the journal Mediascape in 2008, he noted that many students are learning how to shoot and edit video when they are in high school, if they’re lucky, or on their own using increasingly available software options. He asserts: “Especially for creating media, more people are learning the technical ability to create works but fewer are learning the aesthetic sensibilities to create interesting works. This gap between technique and aesthetics presents a crucial opportunity for critical media.” He adds: “Our job as educators now turns on the teaching of critical innovation over technical skills.”

But how do we teach this kind of critical innovation? The answer in part is to help learners actually see the myriad forms and possibilities of video, as well as the limitations. Students often come to video assignments with a long history of watching many forms of video argumentation, from the fast-paced commercials that sell products to TV-based documentaries. Even the contradictory information in The Colbert Report’s “The Word” sequences, in which Stephen Colbert speaks while onscreen text argues with him, teaches a kind of doubled argumentation, showing how video can be very complex in what it conveys. Thanks to this lengthy exposure to video forms, students are often able to quickly mobilize a video “vernacular” reminiscent of TV commercials and music videos, skillfully weaving together sound, image, and other elements to make claims. However, key to educators’ success is the act of defamiliarization, in which conventional patterns and vernaculars are disrupted in order to illustrate how the separate components of argument formation function in video and how students can move well beyond the forms they know from pop culture.

Given the growing pervasiveness of video and the fact that videos are produced within disparate contexts, for differing audiences and for a range of reasons, what might constitute a set of guidelines to support faculty and students in producing videos in so many differing contexts? First, students and faculty using video must be aware of the foundations of rhetoric, with attention given to the occasion for the video, the audience for the video, and the form of the video. However, it is also helpful to consider the existing genres of video expression and to be attentive to these often-overlooked structures as they become naturalized, with their ideological implications ignored. Further, as Faden advocates, students composing with video should innovate. Although it is imperative to understand and be able to control—and articulate—decisions regarding the relationship between form and content, it is also time to invent new genres and forms, merging image, text, graphics, and audio in ways that are attentive to the specificity of the medium.

Excellent writing asks nothing less than an understanding of the expressive power of language, alongside an awareness of the choices made in structuring an argument. With video, we must ask the same. Students, faculty, and support staff need to grapple with the creative potential of the form—from framing, camera movement, and editing structures to the uses of sound, music, and text—and need to invent new and powerful modes suited to the particular requirements of scholarly endeavors. In short, while video is everywhere, the mandate for educators should be to direct creative and critical attention to its emergent forms and possibilities.

Notes

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