The “I” of the Text: A Psychoanalytic Theory Perspective on Students’ Television Criticism Writing, Subjectivity, and Critical Consciousness in Visual Culture Art Education

Dissertation

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By

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Abstract

This qualitative, interpretive case study uses a psychoanalytically informed theory base to examine students’ perceptions of television criticism essays and writing processes created in the undergraduate course *Criticizing Television*, which was developed and taught by the researcher from 2005—2009. The impetus for this research emerges from gaps in the art education literature on the issue of visual culture criticism writing pedagogies. In this case study, the focal concepts *critical consciousness* and *subjectivity* guide consideration of multiple data sources, including students’ criticism essays, E-mail correspondence, online survey, researcher’s teaching journal, and literature from art education, composition studies, and psychoanalytic studies in education. Resulting from this research of students’ criticism writing is the development of an *impasse methodology*, a psychoanalytically informed perspective on reflexive readings of, and responses to, students’ criticism writing. The case study conceptualizes the research results as *consequences*, within which are embedded suggestions for future research and practice. By problematizing visual culture criticism writing within existing, traditional art criticism paradigms, the research addresses a significant gap in art education theory and practice in regard to student writing and subjectivity in contemporary visual culture art education.
Dedicated to Edward and Barbara Daiello
Acknowledgments

This dissertation research would not have been possible without the support and encouragement of many people, over many years. There were numerous possibilities for re-presenting my experiences of teaching writing in the Criticizing Television course, myriad choices for storying the case study data and its evocations into texts that might gesture toward, as well as demonstrate, the complicated tasks of writing criticism and thinking critically. I am first and foremost grateful to the students who shared so generously their personal experiences with television and their thoughts about writing criticism in the course.

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As a result of my own dissertation journey, and listening to the experiences of other graduate student researchers, I’ve learned that performing doctoral research not only necessitates mastering a body of knowledge but also involves managing the condition of being lost and learning to build structures of sense within the lost-ness. Mindi Rhodes, an artist, art education scholar, and researcher herself, once referred to research as “losing.” I am grateful to Mindi for her wise and imaginative observations and her buoyant good cheer throughout the years. Other friends and fellow graduate students provided support and inspiration during the ‘losing process’: I am indebted to Loring Resler, Laura Hetrick, and Katie Linder for their ever-present friendship and optimism.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction: Visualizing the I of the Text

I mean, I mean and that is not what I mean, I mean that not any one is saying what they are meaning, I mean that I am feeling something, I mean that I mean something and I mean that not any one is thinking, is feeling, is saying, is certain of that thing, I mean that not any one can be saying, thinking, feeling, not any one can be certain of that thing, I mean I am not certain of that thing, I am not ever saying, thinking, feeling, being certain of this thing, I mean, I mean,

I know what I mean.

~Gertrude Stein, 1925, p. 89

What I cannot imagine stands guard over everything that I must/can do, think, live.

~Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 1993, p. 22

Caught between not seeing and seeing too much

In a study of psychoanalytic histories of learning, Deborah Britzman (2003a, p. 75) contemplates complexity and uncertainty in education, asking: “[w]hat happens when our pedagogy is caught somewhere between ignorance and
knowledge, between not knowing what to do but still having to act, and between not seeing and seeing too much?” Considered through a psychoanalytic perspective on pedagogy, Britzman’s question sounds the depths of education discourse, going directly to murky, ambivalent aspects of teaching and learning: the spaces and gaps where curricula unravel to reveal fragile suppositions and shifting subjectivities. An interpretive enterprise shaped through teachers’ and students’ enmeshed experiences and expectations, pedagogy is, by nature, contingent and uncertain. This study explores contingencies and uncertainties in relation to student criticism writing in an art education context, speculating on what might be learned from getting caught between knowing and not knowing, sense and nonsense. As this research demonstrates, when doubt pushes against certainty, questions are unfurled and possibilities are evoked.

Emerging from ambivalence and uncertainty around my experiences of teaching criticism writing in the undergraduate Criticizing Television course, this qualitative, interpretive\(^1\) case study raises questions about purposes, expectations, and possibilities for teaching critical writing practices in contemporary art education. Within this context, I examine relationships among criticism writing, subjectivity, and critical consciousness in visual culture pedagogies, using psychoanalytic theory as a sensitizing guide to follow traces of resonance and evocation in the written texts of this study. Following from composition theorist James Berlin’s (1982) observation that, in teaching writing, “we are

\(^1\) In contrast to a positivist perspective on knowledge, the qualitative, interpretive approach is concerned with the “conditions for the possibility of multiple ways of knowing, with a focus on the ontological” or the “knowledge that is gained through, and of, experience” (Jones & Borbasi, 2003, p. 85). Importantly, the qualitative interpretive study proceeds from the realization that “reality” is not separate from the actions and language within which people create and account for meaning.
tacitly teaching a version of reality and the student's place and mode of operation in it” (p. 766), I explore the idea that an undergraduate television critical essay may function in a capacity beyond demonstration of cultural critique\(^2\). Specifically, I explore the possibility that this form of critical writing about the common visual culture phenomenon, television, may be used by both students and their instructor as a site of psychoanalytic informed reflection upon subjectivities in transition.

Development of critical consciousness\(^3\) is implicit in the goals of most visual culture pedagogy in art education (Duncum, 2006), yet the effects of these pedagogical aims upon student and teacher subjectivities are often given scant mention in the literature. The development of critical consciousness is a delicate matter. Moreover, such transitions of perception and affect may be difficult to detect and measure, much less articulate in words. Yet, when students write a critical essay about television, this is a challenge they face. From my own teaching experience, I learned that students respond to these challenges in various ways. Some discern what the teacher is looking for and write what they believe the teacher wants to read. Others choose a path of refusal by pushing

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\(^2\) Just as visual images not only communicate information, but also shape one’s sense of reality, writing performs a similar function, albeit a performance that is often taken for granted. The disciplinary context within which writing is taught is an important place to begin asking questions about the relationship of writing instruction and the shaping of realities. As teachers of writing, “we are not simply offering training in a useful technical skill that is meant as a simple complement to the more important studies of other areas. We are teaching a way of experiencing the world, a way of ordering and making sense of it...(S)ubtly informing our statements about invention, arrangement, and even style are assumptions about the nature of reality” (Berlin, 1982, p. 776).

\(^3\) The term critical consciousness is used in this research to describe a reflexive, progressive awareness of the social, historical, political contexts that constitute subjectivities and influence perceptions of, responses to, and expectations for visual culture phenomena. The concept of critical consciousness is discussed throughout this chapter and longer definition of this term can be found near the end of this chapter, in the section entitled (K)nots: Key Concepts in the Research.
against, stretching, or even puncturing parameters of an assignment. This study views the undergraduate television criticism essay as a site of transitions and tensions within critically conscious learning objectives of visual culture art education. Specifically, the research looks to examples of students’ critical writing that push at and challenge expectations for, and definitions of, subjectivity in transition toward critical consciousness.

In exploring critical writing created by undergraduate students, this qualitative, interpretive case study raises questions about the tradition and function of writing in art education. Two questions initially motivated this research: How is student subjectivity positioned and constructed in relationship to their criticism writing in *Criticizing Television*? And, in what ways does my own subjectivity, as an instructor, shape my assumptions and expectations regarding students’ subjectivities, their writing, and the definition of critical consciousness in the context of this course? These questions led to other, related queries which are addressed in this research: What does a writing-intensive visual culture pedagogy bring to the discipline of art education? What unique challenges do students and teachers encounter in relation to writing assignments that deal with personal experiences of visual culture phenomena?

A search of the art education literature produced few examples research on writing pedagogies in the discipline. Other than studies of art criticism writing and literature on arts-informed methodologies, writing is seldom discussed as a form of critically conscious expression. This absence of studies on writing in art education stands in contradistinction to the important role that written communications play in our visual
culture. In response to the research gap, this case study is developed within contexts and questions of several disciplinary areas and topics:

- Subjectivity\(^4\) and visual culture in art education;
- Writing and subjectivity in English composition and writing across the curriculum (WAC);
- Contemporary psychoanalytic theories in education.

Working within multiple disciplinary areas, and working with the unruliness of the case’s data taught me how closely entwined are my desires to lock down and secure meaning in writing, yet also, conversely, set meaning free from the containment of rigid, grasping signifiers. Further, the interpretive work of this research and the struggle to articulate my experience of the data, have led me to conclude that critical consciousness may be more closely aligned with failures of representation than satisfactory achievement of expression. As I discovered through my experience of developing this case study, critical consciousness is more than a pedagogical concept or a learning outcome. Critical consciousness is a spirit of critical inquiry created and sustained by the tensions and uncertainties of being an indeterminate “I” in the midst of pressures to name, explain, and clarify the world for self and others. In a spirit of critical inquiry and in the company of uncertainty, questions and tensions abound in this study, seeping out beyond the words here, seeking to push against and engage with your own questions.

\(^4\) *Subject* and *subjectivity*, as they are used in the research, refer, in a general sense, to the human person who acts and is acted upon in the world, and who generates and perceives phenomenological experiences within particular socio-historical contexts. Specifically, *subject* is used here as term of identification for a person, in this case, student and/or instructor. *Subjectivity* refers to the multiple qualities and manifestations of what is perceived as the subject’s self—as an individual, and in relation to other subjects, a phenomenon called *intersubjectivity*. 
Introduction: Situating the Research

The question “How can I open myself to what I do not yet know?” (Somerville, 2008, p. 210) represents a point of entry into the conceptualization of a qualitative case study of undergraduate students’ criticism writing in Criticizing Television, a writing intensive visual culture art education course which I developed and taught from 2005-2009. Opening one’s self to the unknown is the genesis of learning and research; in both endeavors there can be risk and uncertainty, for one never can predict the ways in which knowledge may be gained or unraveled in the process. Like most efforts to signify unformulated experiences (Stern, 1997, 2002, 2010), the case study did not begin with logic but emerged from a place of not knowing (Somerville, 2008), a place of evocation, resonance, and questioning, and a desire to write the impossible.

Education researchers working within the seventh moment of qualitative inquiry understand that research is freighted with contingencies and uncertainties, a context that beckons a patient, reflexive approach to the development of a qualitative case study.

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5 From my Researcher’s Journal: I sense such (im)possibilities in writing—a leap beyond the sense of signification… the beyond of identity where distinctions of self and other break down and what is familiar twists and slips into the unfamiliar. I seek these leaps and breaking points in myself and in others—in my teaching, in my classroom, in the assignments. I want for students and for myself the experience of encountering the rough edges, solid ground, ephemeral motion, and dizzying contradiction of intersecting discourses. I want something in and through writing that is more than writing” (Daiello, 2008).

6 The “seventh moment” of qualitative research follows from years of debate, tumult, and disillusionment often summarized as “the crisis in representation” (Flaherty, Denzin, Manning, & Snow, 2002; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Marcus & Fisher, 1986). Beginning with the contestation of “truths” and suspicion of meta-narratives heralded by postmodernism in the early 1970’s, the crisis in representation refers to the context of epistemological indeterminacy that qualitative researchers grapple with in their endeavors to articulate and explain experience. If there is “no single correct interpretation because one’s interpretation of the facts—indeed, the facts themselves—are products of one’s interpretive stance” (Flaherty, Denzin, Manning, & Snow, 2002, p. 479), then not only is representation in crisis, but also validity, reliability, and generalizability are suspect.
Thusly, Lauren Berlant advises, “patience…is something to teach: it’s related to pacing, and to taking the time to acknowledge being overwhelmed by, and to become scholars of the complexity of, the distillate that appears as the satisfying object” (2007, p. 437). Like Berlant, I am drawn to, and take seriously, the impatience, anxieties, and uncertainties inherent in symbolizing an impossible-to-express “satisfying object.” In fact, this study represents a struggle to understand and articulate what counts as research, the satisfying object of the social sciences. This case study, then, exemplifies “difficult knowledge” (Pitt & Britzman, 2003), an experience of an impasse wherein my efforts to narrativize the shapes and textures of the case produced knotted threads and layers that, instead of settling into the structure of a logical, clear story, exposed paradox and indeterminacy. The difficult knowledge of this case is the genesis of the impasse methodology, sensitizing me to shifting, contingent relationships among subjectivities.

The feeling of encountering an impasse, and the perception of embodying an impasse myself, evolved into a thematic trope in the research. This trope is a thread of continuity emerging inductively through interactions among texts, contexts, theories, experiences, and people within and around this case. While the concept of impasse is woven through the activities and affects in and around the research, connecting all experiences of doing, being, and making meaning, it also represents a deliberate move to translate the concept of psychoanalysis from its clinical, therapeutic origins into a

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7 Signifying both “representations of social traumas in curriculum and the individual’s encounters with them in pedagogy” (Pitt & Britzman, 2003, p. 755), the concept of difficult knowledge applies specifically to the affects and experiences in the education process that resist expression, or the ruptures in education narratives that reveal traces of inconsistency, fragmentation, and incoherence.
reflexive research perspective. Specifically, this reflexive research perspective is attuned to impasses of expression and interpretation within and around students’ critical writing processes and artifacts in the Criticizing Television course, as well as the impasses perceived within the conceptualization and writing of this case study.

Stretching beyond the local, contextual parameters of this case study, this research is concerned not only with writing criticism about television, but also critical writing created in response to other forms of popular, contemporary culture in the discipline of art education. Of focal interest is the way in which the process of writing a critical essay translates evocative, fleeting moments of personal experience into the form of a critical analysis. Moreover, I am interested in the remainders and excesses of criticism, “that difference within the story, informing how the story is told, the imperatives produced within its tellings, and the subject positions made possible and impossible there” (Britzman, 2003b, p. 253). Thus, this research is attuned to the political and ethical effects of students’ efforts to articulate personal experience through the critical, analytical perspective of a written criticism essay. Finally, this study explores relationships among reflexivity, writing in visual culture art education, and psychoanalytically informed research methods. As I discovered through this study, it is within these relationships that possibilities may be glimpsed for a mode of critical writing which expands traditional art criticism discourse in art education. If, as Desai & Chalmers, (2007, p. 9) posit, art criticism methods still rely upon “both ‘expert’ judgment and disengaged engagement with form rather than content,” then how might we conceptualize criticism of visual culture phenomena differently?
Background of the *Criticizing Television* Course

*Criticizing Television* is a Second Level Writing and Social Diversity General Education Curriculum [GEC] art education course available to undergraduate students at a large Midwestern university\(^8\). I developed this course in 2005 and served as the instructor for six sections of the course between 2005 and 2009. My research of *Criticizing Television* grew out of an ongoing curiosity and uneasiness about the complexities, tensions, and affective investments inherent in the critical writing process, and my discovery that there is scant literature in art education which considers written responses to visual culture phenomena from a pedagogical perspective. For example, while creating curricula for the course, I was troubled by the disconnect I perceived between existing art criticism writing models in art education and the complex issues of representation, subjectivity, and power that were frequent topics in the literature on visual culture studies in art education. Further, a familiarity with poststructuralist, psychoanalytic, and cultural studies theories led me to an uneasiness about the possible hidden curricula\(^9\) and unintended consequences of teaching criticism writing.

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\(^8\) A requirement of all undergraduate students, Second-Level Writing courses are offered in a range of disciplines and departments and students choose the Second-Level Writing course which best suits their academic major or personal interest. While each writing course is tailored to a discipline’s content, the university mandates that all Second-Level Writing courses “acquaint students with the issues of diversity that influence and shape their discipline” as well as “deal with some aspect of the “American experience” (Center for the Study and Teaching of Writing [CSTW], n.d.). As a result of its availability to students across the university, the *Criticizing Television* course was populated by students from a variety of disciplines. A comprehensive list of Second-Level Writing course criteria can be found in Appendix XX.

\(^9\) A “conceptual tool for politically oriented curriculum scholars,” the term *hidden curriculum* refers to the tacit knowledge and “network of assumptions that, when internalized by students,
unreflexively within a visual culture art education context\textsuperscript{10}. Given my deepening awareness of the ways in which acts of writing and writing systems\textsuperscript{11} can often be implicated in the positioning, encoding, and performance of subjectivities (Alcorn, 2002; Bracher, 1999, 2002; Brooke, 1987; 2006b; Derrida, 1974; Eisenhauer, 2006a; Harris, 2001; Lather, 1991, 1994; Laws, 2004; LeCourt, 2006; Phelan, 1993; Pollock, 2007), I found it problematic that the writing pedagogies I used in the *Criticizing Television* course had the potential to be complicit in establishing, reinforcing, or perpetuating the very inequities of representation the students’ television criticism writings were intended to problematize and question.

From my experiences of teaching writing in the *Criticizing Television* course and my work as a university Writing Across the Curriculum [WAC] consultant, I am aware that writing pedagogy, and particularly the process of responding to student writing, is a frequent source of angst and ambivalence for instructors. In addition to the enormous time commitment involved in assessing and responding to student writing, there can be perplexing resistances to the responsibility of assessing the work. For me, the most difficult-to-express aspect of my experience with student writing was my resistance to establish the boundaries of legitimacy” in a given culture (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery & Taubman, 2002, p. 248).

\textsuperscript{10} Visual culture art education, or VCAE, refers to an approach to teaching art which “sees making and critique as symbiotic” (Duncum, 2002a, p. 6). VCAE perspectives are also grounded in the assumptions that art is not inherently valuable, nor are visual representations apolitical. Rather, VCAE sees images as “sites of ideological struggle that can be as deplorable as they can be praiseworthy” (Duncum, 2002a, p. 8).

\textsuperscript{11} Writing researcher Gary Schumacher (1986) defines *writing systems* as “the properties, structure, and organization of the symbols and marks used by writers to convey information. Writing systems can involve pictographic images, syllabic characters, or alphabetic characters, among others” (p. 52). Expanding upon Schumacher’s definition, I consider socio-historical context and subjectivity to be constitutive of writing systems and equally constitutive of the ways in which writing systems are conceptualized, valued, and employed in the conveyance of information.
categorizing writing in a rubric or quantification with a grade. I discovered that the clarity and structural organization of the best rubrics are unable to contain or discipline the profusion of expectations, assumptions, and projections set in motion through the encounter of writer and reader in an essay text. It is this unwieldy profusion of affect that I couldn’t ignore. In teaching the Criticizing Television course, I held stubbornly to the desire for a way of teaching writing that neither diminished the complexity of the relationships, affects, and contexts from which writing emerges, nor strangled the potential unthought unknowns that emerge in the process of developing of critical consciousness.

**Origin of the Research**

Years of teaching criticism writing methods in an undergraduate art education course, combined with years of personal experience as a student writer in college courses, offered me an intimate glimpse of some of writing’s inherent challenges. Writing in an academic setting can be fraught with anxieties and difficulties for many people, whether one is the student who writes or the instructor who is responsible for creating and assessing the writing assignments. As an instructor, the complexities I perceived around writing were, in part, amplified by the context of my teaching a writing-intensive course, Criticizing Television, in art education, a discipline which tends to focus on art viewing and art making practices rather than the practice of writing. Therefore, since art educators do not usually teach writing skills, there are few resources in the art education literature that address basic components of art writing pedagogy. While the lack of resources was at times frustrating, the questions that plagued me, and the issues that I returned to again and again, were not about the mechanics of writing. Crafting an effective sentence or
refining a thesis statement were less a concern to me than the power dynamics of the student—teacher writing relationship, specifically in the context of an assignment that is meant to facilitate the development of critical consciousness. When students write about personal experiences with visual culture phenomena, the assignment that summons the writing, the teacher who creates the assignment, and myriad other contextual issues are implicated in the cultivation of a distinctive dynamic that influences the content and form of the writing.

While Robert, a student in the course, believed that writing is a substantive statement of personal involvement, functioning as an extension of the self, a few students experienced criticism writing as ineffectual, or pandering to the interests of capitalist ideologies. Nihilism and cynicism were sometimes palpable in students’ writings, such as Alix’s essay, *Critical Impenetrability*, in which he scoffs at the assumption that writing criticism about television will effect critical consciousness in youth, or create knowledge of value:

The thesis at the end of this paragraph will prove the inevitable failure of this essay. I only reveal this so as to eliminate the expectation that what I am trying to achieve with this will in any way expand your worldview, enlighten you to the obvious, or the invisible… I could write an equally “effective” or “productive” analysis of an empty plastic bag… You see, if capitalism is the ultimate enemy of every young punk in the USA then criticism is only going to help the enemy proceed as planned. Without the rebellious opinions of the “disenfranchised”

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12 Throughout the dissertation, students and their writings are identified by pseudonyms. Respondents to the anonymous, online survey, are identified as “Anonymous.”
youth, there would be no youth market.

Alix’s essay offers a direct commentary on the irony inherent in writing criticism. His point was that, if writing television criticism was meant to produce critical consciousness and push back against the rampant growth of capitalist production, perhaps critique only furthered the influence of television and growth of designer capitalism. As Alix wondered, perhaps the production of rebellious critical discourse might have an ironic, unintended effect of providing merchants in the youth market yet another slice of youth resistance culture to package and market in the guise of rebellion-chic programming. In a media culture that celebrates—and profits from—the irony and exploitation of cultural critique, of what value is academic criticism, particularly if it is perceived to be a part of the larger problematic of hegemonic capitalist ideologies? As one student puts it, “there are plenty of intelligent, sensitive individuals who nonetheless indulge by watching television shows which are exploitative...But that comes from a mutual recognition that no one is more or less culpable than the other. That is just the world we live in.”

Alix’s essay is just one example of a student questioning the purpose of criticism, and his questions were the most direct. However, on occasion, other students raised related questions in their essays or in our class discussions. Over time, what began to interest me was the absence of such questions. I wondered why more students weren’t questioning the act of criticism itself. As this case study endeavors to demonstrate

13 The PBS documentary Merchants of Cool is an exposé of MTV’s strategies for marketing “youth rebellion.” In this 2004 film, we learn that MTV employs consultants called “cool-hunters” who seek out and study the habits, interests, and desires of teens who are considered cool or edgy. MTV’s consultants mine these material objects and affective experiences of teen rebellion for the purpose of creating “cool” programming (and related products) to appeal to the youth market.
through exploration of student writing exemplars, some questions and doubts about criticism may have been present, but perhaps are not as overt, nor expressed as directly, as Alix’s statements. As a result of the explicit and implicit questions around criticism in the course, I began to question my own motivations, and, by extension, art education’s disciplinary interest, in cultivating critical consciousness in others. I began to wonder if perhaps a more nuanced sensitivity and acknowledgement of the unique textures and intensities of academic television criticism writing might contribute to an understanding of both the objectifying and the political potentials of teaching writing in art education.

My questions about criticism writing practices in art education became fused with questions about my ability to create a curriculum for *Criticizing Television* that was relevant and meaningful within students’ lives as well as ethically responsible in its approach to visual culture writing pedagogy. Moreover, the process of creating the course brought me face to face with my deep sensitivities about writing. While at first not coherent or easily articulated, a retrospective review of my feedback on students’ writing led me to notice patterns in my feedback on students’ writing. I began to suspect that my deepest questions about writing in the course were tied to my uncertainty about how to respond to criticism writing assignments which evoked questions in myself about the way in which critical consciousness was demonstrated in the essays. It wasn’t the concept of critical consciousness itself that was sensitive for me, but rather the ways in which

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14 The course readings in television criticism were derived primarily from academic criticism journals as well as television studies textbooks and visual and media studies journals.
15 In the early years of the course, I did not use the phrase “critical consciousness” in my teaching. Instead, I referred generally to objects and phenomena that were characterized by a critical orientation. “Critical essay” and “critical perspective” are terms that I employed at that
critical consciousness were expressed and interpreted by students in the assignments, and the responsibility I felt in responding to and assigning a grade to their work.

Over time, I began to find interesting and curious the disconnects and juxtapositions between the joking, dismissive, and ironic attitude assumed by many people in relation to television phenomena in American culture, and the depth of serious, personal reaction expressed in students’ television criticism writing. Because irony and cynicism are common stances in popular culture, the forms of cultural critique offered by programs like The Colbert Report, The John Stewart Show, and The Soup are successful because “the interpretive schema of irony is so widely shared, such an informal and comfortable part of everyday life” (Magill, Jr., 2007, p. 28). Further, the ironic stance described in postmodernist theoretical perspectives on television (Bignell, 2004; O’Donnell, 2007) is not only a quality of television programming, but has become a critical veneer through which many people view the world. Interestingly, the result of immersion in a steady flow of cultural irony is paradoxically not a more sophisticated critical facility in relation to cultural texts, but is instead the development of distanced attitude that preempts or neutralizes affect. Therefore, within the gap between experiencing and thinking about television there is often the smug, ironic consciousness of a cultural insider who believes they are unable (or are too sophisticated) to feel or think deeply in relation to television. What I experienced, however, in reading students’ criticism essays, was a tangle of ironic stance and affective engagement, and I began to time. I now wonder if these terms provided a distanced and neutralizing veneer that distracted me from having to deal with my anxieties around the concept of “critical consciousness,” a phase that, early in my experience with the course, may have seemed too intimate (and perhaps invasive, or colonizing) to me.
suspect that this entanglement might be the result of students’ immersion in writing processes that placed critical analysis in dialogue with emotional response in relation to television.

The findings of this case study suggest that the most crucial aspect of critical consciousness may be the affects, denials, and uncertainties mobilized by unconscious aspects of subjectivity. In fact, the research reconceptualizes critical consciousness through psychoanalytic theory as the feelings of ambivalence, anxiety, and impasse which fill, and even exceed, the structure of a curriculum while remaining curiously invisible and inexpressible in words. As conceptualized through psychoanalytic theory, writing, as an expression of critical consciousness, can be a form of interference which threatens the stability and coherence of the writer’s subjectivity. In other words, a student writer’s unconscious subjectivity may ultimately interfere with the goal of mastering signification and representation. A psychoanalytic perspective on art education exposes teachers and learners as “difficult and fragile” persons (Britzman, 1998, p. 4) who struggle with a desire to learn and a passion for ignorance (Felman, 1987, 1997). As this research argues, the work of critical consciousness is, necessarily, embedded within and constitutive of the uncertainties, messiness, and disorder of students’ and instructor subjectivities, as they encounter one another through criticism writing activities.

Early, Emergent Questions

Questions about students’ criticism writing in the Criticizing Television course emerged as I studied psychoanalytic perspectives on writing (Alcorn, 2002; Bracher, 1993, 1994a, 1994b; Samuels, 2002; Tobin, 1989, 1991, 1996) subjectivity and society (Felman, 1987, 1997; Parker, 2003; Rogers, 2006, 2009), and education (Bracher, 1999, 16
2006; Cho, 2009; McWilliam, 1996; Pitt & Britzman, 2003). These studies compelled me to consider how criticism writing in art education might be used as locus of reflection on the unconscious desires that complicate the aims of a critically conscious visual culture pedagogy. In addition, I wondered how writing functioned to help move students to a subject position of critical consciousness. What is intrinsically worthwhile about unraveling the threads, and thus disrupting, the structure of one’s existing affective investments in popular culture? What compels students to risk destabilization of subjectivity through criticism writing endeavors? And, I sometimes wondered about the authenticity of critical consciousness. Were the critical perspectives argued in students’ essays merely a performance to earn a particular grade? Was the process of criticism only strengthening and deepening unconscious affective investments in the pleasures of television?

Composition scholar Rochelle Harris (2004) contends that writing is complex, critical work for both students and teachers; students’ essays are sites where critical pedagogy comes to life through the emergence of personal, critical consciousness and social critique. She notes,

> hundreds of decisions are made in each text, and many of them have to do with the ways in which students feel enabled, constrained, limited, and/or threatened by the textual territory into which they have written themselves. A writing teacher following the tenets of critical pedagogy would not just help the student find a transition sentence for the second paragraph or a public audience for that text; this teacher would ask that student what is at stake in that paragraph and offer the
student readings that have different cultural, political, or social paradigms to help
the student re-see his or her own text. (Harris, 2004, p. 402)

Another aspect of power and authority mobilized through criticism writing holds
relevance for this study: The relationships among students and instructor effected through
implicit beliefs surrounding writing assignments. Teachers often assign writing projects
and students respond, without giving thought to the ways in which assignments and
responses are culturally constructed. For instance, in their study of poststructuralism and
English classrooms, composition educators and researchers Bronwyn Mellor & Annette
Patterson (2004) identify contradictions inherent in educational practices that laud
personal interpretations yet “assess students’ answers within normative parameters” (p.
84). Drawing upon their own classroom observations, along with theory and research
from other scholars (Sinfield, 1985; Eagleton 1976, 1985), Mellor & Patterson explain
what is at stake in unreflective use of assignments that elicit personal responses from
students:

[Q]uestions which appear to invite a personal response are often all the more
tyrranical; candidates are invited to interrogate their experience to discover a
response which has in actuality been learnt…[S]uch ‘personal responses’ actually
blocked analysis of how interpretations of texts were actually produced. Students
had been taught to feel that they were finding a meaning ‘in’ the text while
bringing to the reading their own personal experience, an approach, we argued,
that appeared to make the reading process curiously invisible. Approaches that
emphasized the personal, the individual, the empathic response…produced
readers who were unaware of the ways in which they operated to construct
meanings and who were unable to ‘read’ not only the terms of their own interpretations but those of others as well. Such practices, far from being inclusive, we argued, disenfranchised those students whose experiences and values were not the ‘dominant’ ones. (2004, p. 84, italics in original)

While Mellor’s and Patterson’s observations above refer to readings, they are relevant to this study, for even though students’ critical writing responses to television are of focal interest, it is important to note that written expressions are inextricably linked to reading practices. Specifically, the ways in which students write are always shaped by their relationship to their perceived audience. Therefore, students’ beliefs about how their writing will be read, and who will read it are a significant factors to be considered in this study. As a result, the instructor’s subjectivity and the emotional and ideological investments of her own textual interpretations must be considered as constitutive of the dynamics of the student— instructor writing relationship. This inclusive approach to the study of writing follows from scholar of rhetoric and writing Jane Hindman’s (2003) work who believes educators must be more critically reflective about their textual consumption, not just in theory, but in how they structure and consume students’ texts within the material practices of teaching writing. Hindman advocates for “using experience critically” as we “instruct students how to write their difference and learn ourselves how to read through our own difference and evaluate their work justly, effectively” (2003, p. 10).

Also, constitutive of the power structures inherent in the instructor–student relationships effected through writing assignments is the nature of the students’ personal expressions themselves that either (or both) student and instructor might perceive as
private or confessional. Television programming which blurs boundaries between private and public worlds and celebrates daring exposures of personal experiences is only one example of visual culture phenomena that present a challenge for educators who seek to engage students in authentic dialogues about the very real effects of visual culture in their lifeworlds. The affective investments of visual culture phenomena are increasingly being theorized by art educators (Freedman & Stuhr, 2004; Jagodzinski, 2004; Walker, Daiello, Hathaway, & Rhoades, 2006) and others (Dean, 2006; McGowan, 2004; Samuels, 2002; Žižek, 1989, 2006) who connect the pleasures and resistances generated through visual experiences with the construction and maintenance of identity structures. As a result, I am compelled to question the ways in which visual culture critique is often unreflectively used to establish the conditions for confessionally-driven expressions about visual culture lifeworld experiences. The power imbalance inherent in instructor—student relationships can exacerbate the compulsion for students to confess, and stimulate the good intentions (or perhaps in some cases, unintentional, exploitative motivations) of instructors to encourage deeply personal writing about affective investments in visual culture phenomena.

Desiring | Writing: The Shape and Texture of Critical Consciousness

Writing processes and textual artifacts are inextricably intertwined with visual culture issues. For example, texts and writing systems are not only the means by which ideas about visual culture may be represented and communicated, but in themselves are visual entities, existing within, as well as extending, complex visual and verbal discursive relationships. The idea that the relationship between writing and images can be a site of struggle for issues of class, gender, race is not new (Mitchell, 1994). However, this idea,
when placed in the context of teaching writing about the visual culture phenomenon of television, creates some new questions for art education and its positions on writing. For example, a question that prompted my research is *Are existing art criticism pedagogies in art education sufficient for the purposes of writing critical responses about visual culture, and is existing discourse on writing in art education adequate for engaging students in the kind of reflexive awareness that complements emancipatory pedagogies?*

Even though images and experiences of visual culture are a frequent focus of inquiry, writing is an important mode of expression used to communicate the inquiries—thus writing is an ever-present phenomenon existing within and alongside visual culture studies in art education. A ubiquitous form of communicative exchange among people and ideas across time and spaces, writing silently shapes and confirms discourses. Writing contains, writing releases; writing attempts, but fails to hold significations and their excesses (Cixous & Calle-Gruber, 1997; Derrida, 1974, 1978, 1981); writing inscribes individuals, learning communities, and institutional discourse (Hayles, 1999). Writing also performs (Phelan, 1993). This performance might be loosely choreographed, tightly structured, or unresolved. Writing reveals, as well as masks, subjectivities (Alcorn, 2002; Bracher, 1999, 2002, 2006). Writing can be truthfully deceptive and deceptively truthful (Harris, 2001). Writing usually does its work unobtrusively until a disruption catches attention and refuses to return writing to a placid, transparent surface.

In visual culture art education, developing an informed awareness of the ways in which personal, socio-historical, and political contexts function to shape perceptions of visual culture phenomena is a foundational aspect of the pedagogical concept *critical consciousness*. Critical consciousness, however, is an expansive and multivalent idea,
referring not only to development of an enlightened awareness about visual culture phenomena, but also the expression of these critical perspectives. This research looks to students’ written responses to television for insight into the ways in which desires for critical consciousness complicate students’ and instructor perceptions of criticism writing assignments. The research argues that the pedagogical goal of critical consciousness might be realistically and helpfully reconceptualized in visual culture art education through the incorporation of psychoanalytic perspectives on subjectivity.

The “I” of the Text

As a result of my experiences with students who wrote through and within entangled ironies and affects in critical responses to television, I suspected that critical consciousness was a much more complex and unruly text than what was implied in my assignment objectives and rubrics. It seemed that, between those unruly criticism texts and the structure of the writing assignment and its rubric, was another text—a shifting, fluid, and evocative, relational text, the resonance of which I began to call the “I of the text” in an effort to begin to articulate the complexity of the television criticism writing encounter between students and instructor.

In this study, questions about the relationships among criticism writing, subjectivity, and the desire of the Other originate at the I of the text. This “I” of the criticism text is a metaphorical intersection, a point of recognition and witnessing of the Other and the otherness of the self in the production and reception of criticism. As such, the I of the text is a contingent, relational site where the first person, I-subject of students’ written criticism encounters my own subject-I as the reader of, witness to, and respondent to, their criticism texts. The intersections of subjectivity in the students’ writing and my
responses to these texts began to represent for me points of disruption, points where desires for the coherence, logic, and objectivity of a critical perspective in relation to television seemed to unravel under the weight of the emotional labor of criticism. As a result of these perceived disruptions, I began to question how the affects and unconscious aspects of subjectivity were implicated in the development of the students’ and my own critically conscious perspectives toward television. Further, I began to question how my own subjectivity and desire, and, indirectly, the circulation of unconscious desires for particular pedagogical experiences within the discipline of art education, might be implicated in the flows of desire and resistance within students’ criticism texts. Finally, I began to think of that “I,” and my complicity in the production of subject positions, as a points de capiton\textsuperscript{16}, an ideological site and valid object of critical analysis in its own right. In summary, the I of the text represents, for me, an opening to inquiries rarely posed in relation to criticism of visual culture in art education, and rarely considered in relation to writing processes in art education: Inquiries which locate the possibilities of critical consciousness within the unconscious, intersubjective relationships among students, instructors, and disciplinary contexts.

\textsuperscript{16}Points de capiton is translated into English as a “quilting point” or “anchoring point,” literally meaning an “upholstery button, a device which pins down the stuffing in upholstery work” (Atkinson, 2003, p. 191). Lacan’s notion of the points de capiton (Fink, 1995; Lacan, 1973) refers to the way in which actions and desires attach to one another in the production of a person’s subjectivity or in producing a group’s, culture’s, or discipline’s key signifiers of identity. As a mode of attachment or suture, the points de capiton relates to Althusser’s idea of interpellation, which theorizes how subjects are hailed or called to take up particular subject positions. In other words, the points de capiton, a key nodal point among signifiers, “articulate the truth of a particular ideological discourse,” in addition to indicating the primary coordinates of a subject’s identity (Atkinson, 2003, p. 192).
The Paradoxical I/Eye of the Text: Writing Intersubjectivity and Relational Space

The phrase “I of the text” is used in the research as a sensitizing concept and an analytical orientation to data meant to bring attention to the slippery significations of subjectivity within students’ written criticism. Thus, the first person I in students’ criticism writing is not read as a simple marker of presence that maps out the location and subjectivity of the writer. Instead, the phonetic congruence of I and eye offers a way of thinking about relational spaces in the texts, where the I/eye of the student writer meets the I/eye of the instructor reader. As a relational space where student and instructor subjectivities meet to recognize and misrecognize one another in the text, the I/eye is a complex site of communicative negotiation among self, and Other. As such, the I of the text is a relational space wherein reflexive critical consciousness might be explored.

The criticism writing in the course is viewed as a relational space among students, instructor, curriculum, television, and socio-historic contexts. The relational spaces effected through the student— instructor writing relationship and the student—pedagogy relationship stand out as significant for the study of student writing in the course, for it is within these dynamic fields that subjectivities are constituted and meanings are evoked and perceived. In developing a critical response to visual culture, it is common for a student to write from the first person perspective, to act as agent within the critical, reflective experience. Art educators’ work with critical discourses is unique in that they do not usually insist upon a distanced, objective position in the way that other disciplines, such as history, art history, or disciplines within the social sciences often do. This research views the “I” of a text, a figure of speech which usually signifies an individual author-subject, as a guiding frame for exploring the slippery nature of subjectivity and
intersubjectivity.

Crucially, questions about the desires of the Other and the otherness of the self, as conceptualized through a Lacanian perspective, begin to address the unruly, irrational, affective aspects of subjectivity that are inevitably entangled with the rational, procedural processes of writing critical responses to visual culture. Moreover, questions about the affective, personal engagements of criticism writing processes in art education courses bring an opportunity to build upon existing ideas about students’ production of visual culture critique with consideration of the way in which these critical perspectives are negotiated, lived, and become meaningful for both students and instructor.

Constructing critiques of popular, ubiquitous, and personal visual culture experiences such as television viewing is rational, political, and emotional work for students. Similarly, teaching critical writing within the context of visual culture studies in art education is rational, political, and emotional labor that, at its most resonant and disruptive moments, can present challenges to systematic, evidence-based structures of critical inquiry. Such teaching and learning processes, notes composition scholar Julie Lindquist, “reach down into pockets of deep experiential contradiction that are largely inaccessible to systematic inquiry” (2004, p. 194). If critical consciousness is a matter of desire, affect, and unpredictable, unconscious aspects of subjectivity as well as rational, systematic inquiry, then of what pedagogical consequence for art education is acknowledging and teaching with these complexities and contingencies? How might visual culture pedagogy that explores the otherness of desire, and the deep contradictions and resistances within subjectivity, inform the development of critical consciousness for both students and teachers? These questions contribute to the impetus of this qualitative,
interpretive case study of criticism writing in the *Criticizing Television* course.

In written criticism, the production of coherence and meaning is as much a reader-based phenomenon as it is a writer-based endeavor (Fleckenstein, 1992). Thus, the critical essay is an intersubjective creation wherein a student-writer provides linguistic cues, while an instructor-reader bridges gaps in meaning and coherence by building relationships among ideas (Fleckenstein, 1992). Of interest in this research are the processes by which unconscious desires shape a writer’s creation of linguistic cues and influence a reader’s perception and interpretation of these texts. The social construction of meanings, through the production of and response to texts, is a complex pedagogical experience in itself, however, freighted this process with the responsibility of effecting critical consciousness adds even greater complexity. Writing, as a form of critical pedagogy in art education, presents many methodological dilemmas for teachers and their students. Aside from the methodological challenges I experienced in teaching writing in a disciplinary context which offered few resources for writing instruction, I was acutely aware that both the coherence and ethics of the criticism writing methodology in the course was inextricable from my responsibility to “recognize and respect the autonomy, privacy, subjectivity, situatedness, and agency of other people” (Grumet, Anderson, & Osmond, 2008, p. 137)

As the instructor of *Criticizing Television*, I read many student criticism texts which dealt with personal experiences of television as it was situated within the dynamics of family relationships, implicated in the development of self-image, and positioned within the physical and metaphorical landscapes of people and cultures. I discovered that academic television criticism texts, the focal form of criticism studied in the course,
sometimes missed the subtle yet remarkable ways that television structured relationships among people, as in, for example, the experience of one student whose perpetually angry father could only interact with him civilly when they watched television programs together. For many students, writing critically about the influence of television in their lives was a unique opportunity for sorting through and contextualizing memories of, and present day experiences with, television. The experience of gathering up in language the bits and pieces of remembered, mundane moments spent in front of Saturday morning cartoons, or watching forbidden television programming such as *The Simpsons* or *MTV* at a friend’s house, was a form of personally resonant writing that most students may not have experienced previously in an academic setting. With the representation of their own subjectivities at stake, and concerns about achieving a good grade in the course, students took the writing seriously. As Robert (2009), a participant in the research, explains, “Writing is, obviously, a substantive statement of personal involvement if and when you care about it. I do feel that when I make a good piece of writing, or a piece or artwork, that it can stand in for an extension of myself—presence.”

At times, the writing assignments seemed to provide a means for students to come to terms with unsettling, new awarenesses about television’s integral role in the constitution of their subjectivities: One student confided, “(u)ntil this class, I don't think I fully realized how much television has integrated itself into my life, even though I am not an avid television viewer. In (the process of) studying my past, personal experience with television, I discovered how much of my Self had been repressed--blanketed beneath television's beguilement. Some of this self-discovering was a bit unnerving”

(Anonymous)
By focusing on television, a form of visual culture that is woven so deeply into the personal and social psyche, the television criticism writing endeavors were, by nature, dealing with complexities of subjectivity as well as intersubjectivity. However, in spite of the clear markers of subjectivity in students’ writing, and in spite of discussions of subjectivity and identity in the classroom, the complexity of writing through the lens of personal subjectivity was a topic that was difficult to address, especially in the assessment and grading of student work. Over time, I began to question the source of these complexities of subjectivity and my complicity in creating as well as identifying them. As Brannon & Knoblauch explain (1982), writing assignments are inherently collaborative and complicit because

(t)he teacher more often than the student determines what the writing will be about, the form it will take, and the criteria that will determine its success. Student writers, then, are put into the awkward position of having to accommodate, not only the personal intentions that guide their choice-making, but also the teacher-reader's expectations about how the assignment should be completed. (p. 158)

Whose desire for critical consciousness, then, was represented in the criticism writing created in the Criticizing Television course? The students”? Mine? Both? These recurring questions were evocative and thorny, suffusing an already challenging project of creating and grading the writing assignments with the complicating issue of ethical responsibility in responding to someone’s personal journey of critical consciousness. Eventually, my questions about the writing created in the course became entangled with questions about another “Other”: The discipline of art education. I wondered, What does art education
desire of writing? What might a focus on writing and subjectivity offer art education pedagogies? This case study begins to address these questions.

Other questions of import in the research consider the value of writing within critically conscious art education pedagogies. For instance, of what pedagogical and personal significance is a written critical analysis of television phenomena in popular, visual culture? How does a critical writing assignment effect development of critical consciousness in students? In art education courses, students are often asked to write about visual images in critical, analytical ways. As a mode of inquiry (Richardson, 1999, 2003), writing facilitates connections between self and visual phenomena, self and other, and in the context of a course that emphasizes critical consciousness, writing can also be a site of reflexivity. Writing is thinking made visible, the tangible mark of relationship among selves, others, and ideas; writing is, perhaps, the visible trace of a learning experience. Conversely, we might also consider questions of invisibility and writing within the context of critically conscious pedagogies: For example, should art educators contend with the invisible, ineffable aspects of a learning experience? Moreover, What might be learned from the mis-written and mis-read, and the anxieties and exhilarations experienced around writing about visual phenomena? Might an exploration of felt difficulties and impasses around writing be a learning experience in itself? Going further, what if the silences, gaps, and elisions encountered in translating visual experiences into words were considered to be a pedagogy of thick perception and interpretation aimed toward opening reflection and reflexivity toward critical consciousness within written responses to visual culture?

In summary, this research of student criticism writing in the Criticizing Television
course situates questions about subjectivity, critical consciousness, and the desires of the Other within a guiding, analytic concept “I of the text.” Thus, a space is created for exploring the fluid, contingent sites within and around critical writing processes and artifacts. At these sites, the subjectivities of student-writer and instructor-reader join with disciplinary concerns to exceed and complicate the signifiers of critical consciousness. Among other issues, the research explores the pedagogical possibilities and ethical issues inherent in the creation and assessment of students’ visual culture criticism writing assignments. To this end, the research considers the significance of students’ and instructor’s experiences of evocation and resonance in relation to television criticism writing assignments, subjectivity, and critical consciousness.

Psychoanalytic Research Methodology and the Case Study

Psychoanalytic theory, conceptualized in the teachings of Jacques Lacan (1973) presents a compelling scenario of how speaking, writing subjects come into being, and offers a way of understanding how unconscious registers shape subjectivity. Lacan’s theories are important to an exploration of writing processes, for they have the potential to offer new insights into student and teacher subjectivities, particularly aspects of subjectivity that circulate beneath conscious awareness (Bracher, 1999; Brooke, 1987a; Harris, 2001). Contextual and contingent, writing processes and artifacts both produce and are produced by norms and ideologies within disciplines of study. Psychoanalytic theory enlarges the possibilities for thinking about how these norms and ideologies operate affectively and materially, on both the individual and collective level.

The motivation for using psychoanalytic theory in this research derives from my interest in the disruptions, gaps, and silences perceived within written expressions and a
belief that these awarenesses are a significant aspect of teaching and learning processes. Further, psychoanalytic theory-informed methods of research can lead to significant insights on subjectivity, and I believe that a comprehensive and generative conceptualization of writing and subjectivity will benefit visual culture studies in art education. Gillian Rose (2001) argues that psychoanalysis accomplishes what other approaches that engage with the emotions do not—which is to acknowledge that emotional reactions to visual culture are not always “working at a wholly conscious level” (p. 103). Psychoanalytic theory holds potential for exploring the complexities of visual images and subjectivity, particularly because the role of the unconscious entails the pursuit of understandings that circulate beneath the rational, logical explanations of socio-cultural theories. Further, psychoanalytic theory brings a distinctive quality to the study of education contexts: “(A)cess to information which is unavailable through any other mode of learning” (Felman, 1997, p. 23). Indeed, the foundational premise of Lacanian psychoanalysis unsettles assumptions about the concepts of ignorance and knowledge, bringing a new perspective to “the understanding of what ‘to know’ and ‘not know’ may really mean” (Felman, 1997, p. 23).

Specifically, there is a need for additional ways of expressing and learning from the complex and unpredictable ways in which students’ and teachers’ subjectivities are shaped by writing about visualities of popular culture. Deeply personal, psychic investments in visual culture are not confined to individuals but are developed in relationship to others, relationships that are inevitably implicated in the dynamics of teaching and learning, and hold significance for students’ and instructors’ perceptions of writing assignments. Thus, an impetus for the psychoanalytically-informed approach
used in this study is an interest in exploring the complex relationships among lived experiences and words, not only those experiences of students who write critical essays about television, but also the experiences of the instructor who must respond to these writing assignments.

**Transference and Countertransference: The Hidden Curriculum**

A conceptual term used by politically oriented curriculum scholars, *hidden curriculum* refers to the tacit knowledge and “network of assumptions that, when internalized by students, establish the boundaries of legitimacy” in a given culture (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery & Taubman, 2002, p. 248). Although I availed myself of writing-related resources within and outside of the discipline of art education, I developed the *Criticizing Television* course and spent several years teaching it with only tentative, speculative ideas about writing’s relationship to the development of critical consciousness. During these years, I speculated that the critical writings that students created in my course might be complicit in perpetuating a hidden curriculum. Through the process of teaching the course and reflecting on my teaching experiences, receiving feedback from students, I began to suspect that the hidden curriculum was writing’s affective resonance. More to the point, I suspected that an unreflective use of personal writing in the course could be a source of unintended intrusion into students’ lives.

While the affective, personal qualities of writing about television were acknowledged during the course, emotion and privacy were rarely topics of explicit focus. Students seemed to accept, without questioning, the parameters of the assignments, which often asked them to incorporate discussion of personal experience into their cultural analyses of television. The appropriateness of personal writing in college courses
has been argued both ways. Swartzlander, Pace, & Stamler (1993) point out that some advocates of personal writing “contend that having students write on what they care about most and know best is the only way to get them to write well” (para. 4). But “opponents argue that such assignments not only fail to help students improve their writing, but also may even deter them from acquiring the skills in critical thinking, research, and writing that are necessary in an academic setting” (Swartzlander, Pace, & Stamler, 1993, para. 4). Uncertain of how to deal with affective qualities of writing as they relate to teaching and learning toward critical consciousness, I identified several issues that seemed particularly problematic in the context of the course: the problem of assigning grades to essays that involve substantive self-revelations, the problem of students not being able to judge how much to reveal, and the possible, unintentional colonization of subjectivities through the unequal power dynamics of the student—teacher relationship.

As I studied post-Freudian psychoanalytic theories17 and sought to connect the theories with writing pedagogy and critical consciousness, I began to suspect that one of the key influences on the process of writing toward critical consciousness is the relationship of transference and countertransference. In the early 1900’s, Sigmund Freud introduced the concept of Übertragung which was translated into “transference,” yet

17 The research is informed primarily by Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, however, literature in relational psychoanalysis, which emphasizes the interactive, affective qualities of the analytic relationship has contributed additional insights. Relational psychoanalysis refers to a form of post-Freudian psychoanalytic practice that moves away from classical, Freudian drive theory, and linguistically based Lacanian theory toward mind and development models that are informed by object relations theories. (Mitchell, 1993, 1998; Mitchell & Aron, 1997; Stern, 1997a, 1997b, 2002, 2010).
literally means transmission, translation, transposition, or application of feelings and meanings from a past experience into one’s perceptions of a present experience. In the analytic situation, transference means that a series of affective or linguistic sign systems operate in the analysand’s (patient’s) unconscious to remind them of a person, relationship, or context from their past (Fink, 2007). Transference and countertransference are interwoven. Therefore, countertransference refers to the unconscious processes that are activated in the analyst, influencing her response to the analysand’s transference.

The psychoanalytic concepts of transference and countertransference are considered in several noteworthy examples of literature that bring together psychoanalysis and writing pedagogy (Alcorn, 1994a, 2002; Bracher, 2002; Brooke, 1987a; Tobin, 1991, 1993). These examples address, through various emphases, the interactional dynamics of students and teacher interactions, particularly in the complexities of subjectivity and identity and the way in which student—teacher relationships shape teaching and learning agendas. Moreover, composition theorist Robert Yagelski (1999) asserts that teaching is a decidedly psychological endeavor... (O)ur efforts to address our students' needs are wrapped up in the complex interpersonal relationships we inevitably have with our students, which are wrapped up in our identities and agendas not only as teachers but also as people. (pp. 43)

While writing instruction can be fraught with difficulties stemming from complex interpersonal relationships, I believe that the difficulties are increased when adding critical consciousness to a course’s pedagogical goals. Our curriculum is not neutral, and
the writing feedback we give students is not neutral or objective (Yagelski, 1999).

Therefore, as Lad Tobin argues, it is imperative that teachers learn to identify “the extent to which countertransference responses interfere with our ability to help students improve their writing” (1993, p. 32).

**Contextualizing the Research: Desire for/as Disruptive Methodology**

The psychoanalytic methodology employed in the case study is not used as a mechanism for analyzing students’ subjectivities nor does it aim to provide therapeutic intervention. Instead, this methodology is conceptualized as a space of emergence for a disruptive methodology. This is a methodology that pursues insights into a problem, yet admits the fallibility of knowledge. In addition, it problematizes the subjectivity of the researcher, the conceptualization of the research problem, and the context within which the research appears. Because psychoanalysis produces and validates itself through the subjectivities it produces, a disruptive research methodology must be relentlessly self-critical. Taking seriously perceived absences, uncertainties, disruptions, and impasses as valid modes of expression and valid forms of data, this methodology generates distinctive perspectives on human motivations and resistances through the recognition of a psychoanalytic unconscious.

The conceptualization of the research methodology originated in my encounters with students’ criticism writing while teaching the *Criticizing Television* course. At that time, I noticed certain criticism essays affected me deeply, making the process of grading and giving feedback unnerving. On some occasions, I felt awkward and uncertain about responding to essays that were deeply personal in content, or that triggered in me unnamable resistances or unruly, ambiguous passions. Within these disruptions, I began
to wonder if pedagogical imperatives of coherence, logic, clarity, and objectivity in students’ television criticism texts were unraveling within the emotional residue of the subject matter. I began to question how the affects and unconscious aspects of subjectivity were implicated in the development of the students’ and my own critically conscious perspectives toward television and in relation to criticism writing. Further, I began to question how my own subjectivity and desire, and, indirectly, the circulation of conscious and unconscious desires for particular pedagogical experiences within the discipline of art education, might be implicated in the flows of engagement and resistance within students’ criticism texts.

A deepening curiosity about the uncertainties of and around the criticism writing endeavor, and lingering questions about students’ experiences of analyzing their own and others’ attachments and resistances to television, led me to question my presumptions about the relationship of critical consciousness and writing. Aware of the powerful affects which shape writing processes both unconsciously and consciously, I began to look to the criticism writing in the course as site where the desires and resistances of students intersected with those of an instructor, and by extension, the desires of a discipline. The notion of critical consciousness became much more complex for me, it became linked, in my perspective, with questions about the ways in which conscious desires for critical, analytical assessments of television intersected with unconscious desires for ego-stability and self-coherence. While I’d like to believe that most of the Criticizing Television students moved to a new or expanded level of consciousness in regard to television, I really can’t be certain if the course had any immediate or enduring effect in their lives. On the other hand, I have sensed that certain writing experiences in
the course were resonant and meaningful, not only for students, but also for me.

Feelings of “meaningfulness” can often be difficult to define or translate into words. Thus, familiar terms, concepts, and narratives of criticism discourse can become a convenient container for awarenesses and affects perceived as too messy, tangled, and personal to express. In some cases, linking affect and criticism is believed to take cultural critique unhelpfully in the direction of solipsism. However, in the process of minimizing affect, important shades and textures of critical awareness may be lost, becoming a form of ideological censorship within the criticism writing pedagogy. In the perspective of composition scholar Lynn Worsham, this form of ideology creates a binary opposition of individual and culture by working to mystify emotion as a purely personal and private matter; it actively conceals the fact that emotions are prevailing forms of social life, that so-called personal life always takes shape in social and cultural terms. (2003, p. 162)

While I’ve sensed disruption and resonance in my interactions with students’ criticism writings, I couldn’t express with any precision where these feelings originated or what they meant. I could only perceive an uncomfortable excess that seemed to overflow and cloud my presumptions about the writing assignment objectives, the meaning of critical consciousness, and my role in facilitating a critically conscious writing pedagogy. As Mark C. Taylor (1997) has observed, sometimes “everything seems too full of significance, but puzzlingly so. The puzzle is not the lack of meaning, but its excess” (p. 38). As a result of my encounters with excess and disruption, the notion of critical consciousness became much more complex for me. It became overdetermined, a slippery signifier which represented certain learning objectives for the criticism writing,
yet also referred ambiguously to an un-named quality that I intuited as something like resonance, evocation, or passionate engagement in regard to the writing endeavors. Critical consciousness also became imbued with resistance, anxiety, ambivalence, and disassociation. Eventually, the idea of critical consciousness became for me a knot comprised of many unnamable strands woven in and through the frequently conflicted awarenesses I experienced in relation to my work with students’ television criticism writing in the course.

**Putting Theory to Work**

This case study of student writing in the *Criticizing Television* course puts into motion questions about positivism, empiricism, and objectivism in education research of human relationships and perceptions. Specifically, this study responds to education theorist and researcher Patti Lather’s (2003) challenging remarks regarding the Federal government’s “incursion into legislating scientific method in the realm of educational research via the ‘evidence-based’ movement” (p. 1). As Lather (2003) reminds, a typical measure of quality in scientific research, replicability, is unhelpful in addressing the complex webs of relationships that characterize education settings. Although education research which seeks transparent accountability may be more about politics than about the quality of a teaching and learning experience, the positivist desire for evidence-based studies may be instructive for qualitative researchers.

Lather (2003) advocates putting humanistic critical theory to work by moving from a “narrowly defined epistemic science to...a social science that integrates context-dependency with practical deliberation” (p. 8). An integration of context-dependency and practical deliberation is a step toward abolishing the “self-defeating ‘physics envy’ of
objectivist-leanings in the social sciences” by contributing to society’s practical sense of “where we are and where we want to be” (2003, p. 8). Research in the social sciences should not “divest experience of its rich ambiguity,” but instead it must be attuned to the “complexities and contradictions of existence” (Lather, 2003, p. 8).

Instead of emulating the natural or, in Foucauldian terms, “exact” sciences, the goal is getting people to no longer know what to do so that things might be done differently. This is the yes of the setting-to-work mode of post-foundational theory that faces unanswerable questions, the necessary experience of the impossible, in an effort to foster understanding, reflection and action instead of a narrow translation of research into practice. (Lather, 2003, pp. 8, italics added)

Context dependency, practical deliberation, acknowledgement of the ineffable qualities of human experience, and the impossibility of representing these experiences are hallmarks of this case study of student criticism writing.

The activities of generating, identifying, and analyzing the case study’s data, conceptualized through a Lacanian psychoanalytic perspective, originate within contextually constituted subjectivities of the participants and the researcher. Thus, this study’s data and the analyses-in-context are not replicable in any empiricist sense. It is these contingent, contextual, and replicability-resistant experiences with the data of this case that led me to the realization of my role in the constitution of a research impasse. This experience of impasse, its difficult lesson of accepting and working with the impossibilities of representation are a pragmatic paradox of sorts, a lived-theory in action. Put another way, the impasse is a “practical philosophy of ethics” that views the “context of practice as a disciplining of interpretation” (Lather, 2003, p. 8). In this case study of
writing in the *Criticizing Television* course, *disciplining of interpretation* refers not to a template-driven approach to an interpretive analysis, but the ongoing efforts to hold interpretation and reflexivity accountable for what they know and do not know. In other words, interpretation and reflexivity are human, fallible experiences which are most meaningful and useful when taken as critical perspectives on subjectivities in context, and not as the evidence for, or final determination of, the validity of an experience.

Of what use is a non-replicable study? If a clear trajectory connecting research to practice cannot be drawn, is this research irrelevant to educators? In response to questions about the utility of the research, I argue for the use of this case study as an evocative instance, which, when combined with other evocations experienced by a reader of education research, could be mapped, reflected upon, and experienced as guiding themes for one’s own work as an educator. As this research illustrates, it is within a developing awareness of the repetition of desires for, assumptions about, and understandings of what counts as critical consciousness in students’ written criticism, that I discovered my own impossibilities—unanswerable questions that became the setting-to-work (Lather, 2003) of seeking an ethical route toward the idea of critical consciousness in relation to students’ writing. As I discovered though the research, efforts made toward the generation, naming, and analysis of data is the clearest instance of the impossibility of knowing and re-presenting the motivations and desires of others. This impossibility brings with it an ethical imperative to acknowledge and respect the impossibilities that constitute a self, the impossibilities also known in psychoanalytic theory as the unconscious or otherness of the self.

It is precisely the *certainty of uncertainty and conflict*—referred to as an *impasse*
methodology in this research—that is the most realistic and pragmatic perspective on the impossibility of accurately wording the world for one another. Uncertainty and its concomitant slippage of signifiers and signifieds keep questions moving and keep possibility in play while engaging desire to keep the movement going. The impossibilities of writing, of wording the world for one another, are knots of conflict which keep critical consciousness in perpetual impasse, necessitating that educators constantly negotiate the challenges of a changing terrain of irresolvable difference. If *critical consciousness is a tensioning space* “between ignorance and knowledge, between not knowing what to do but still having to act, and between not seeing and seeing too much” (Britzman, 2003, p. 75), then we must learn to live in the middle of things. We must learn to live in the tension of conflict and confusion and possibility…we must become adept at making do with the messiness of that condition and at finding agency within rather than assuming it in advance…We can never get off the hook by appealing to a transcendental Ethics. We are always on the hook, responsible, everywhere, all the time. (St. Pierre, 1997, pp. 176-177)

In shaping the case study through a psychoanalytic perspective, and by demonstrating a psychoanalytically informed creation and interpretation of data, I argue implicitly for the recontextualization of select psychoanalytic ideas into the discipline of art education. Additionally, through discussion of the data and explication of theoretical concepts in the study, I explain how an appropriation and usage of these psychoanalytic concepts in relation to criticism writing may offer insights into students’ and instructor’s development of critical consciousness within a visual culture pedagogy. Finally, I identify how this appropriation and recontextualization of the psychoanalytic concepts
outlined in this study might inform a visual culture criticism writing pedagogy in art education. Finally, and in summary, by situating the case study within multiple theoretical issues and research literature that intersect with the *Criticizing Television* course and the discipline of art education, I explore some of the contextual, methodological and theoretical implications of an art education writing-intensive pedagogy. In the sections below I sketch out, in turn, the research purpose, research questions, background issues that inform and shape the research, and the scope of the study, including a discussion of its limitations.

**Statement of Research Purpose**

My aim in this research is to trace the significance and complexity of subjectivity as it is perceived and represented within the context of students’ television criticism writing in the undergraduate art education course, *Criticizing Television*. The concept of subjectivity, derived from Lacanian theories of psychoanalysis, functions within this qualitative, interpretive case study as a flexible frame through which students’ and instructor’s perceptions of writing in the course are explored for resonant and evocative insights in the development of critical consciousness about television phenomena. By introducing questions about subjectivity considerations of criticism writing and critical consciousness in art education, this research joins conversations about visual culture and social justice issues currently in progress in art education (Darts, 2008; Delacruz, 2009; Desai, 2010; Desai & Chalmers, 2007; Duncum, 2006, 2008, 2009; Eisenhauer, 2007; Gude, 2009; Keifer-Boyd, Amburgy, & Knight, 2007; Nordlund, Speirs, & Stewart, 2010; Payne, 2010). However, this research aims to add to these existing conversations by bringing focus to the potential, multiple uses of writing in art education, including
writing’s function as

- a critical response to visual culture;
- site of reflexivity for students and instructors;
- and, a sensitizing instrument for tracing subtle, intricate negotiations of subjectivity in the development of critically conscious perspectives.

The research problem originated within the context of my experience of developing and teaching the undergraduate art education course *Criticizing Television* in 2005 through 2007 and in 2009. The study raises questions about past and current expectations of art criticism and writing in art education and explores ways in which criticism writing might be used to engage instructors and their students in sensitive, reflexive responses to visual culture phenomena. To this end, the research brings together three topical contexts and places them in dialogue with art education discourses on visual culture and art criticism. These topics, postmodern television phenomena, disciplinary writing genres, and psychoanalytic theory approaches to subjectivity frame an exploration of student and instructor perceptions of criticism writing in the *Criticizing Television* course. Finally, the phrase “I of the text” is explored in the research as a potential metaphor and site of reflexivity as well as a sensitizing analytic concept for

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18 Theorist Michel Foucault (1972) conceptualizes discourse as a practice that produces the very objects and subjects of which a person can speak. Elaborating on this concept, Peters & Burbules (2004) summarize Foucault’s idea of *discursive formation* as a unity of the following criteria: “reference to common objects of analysis, types of statement, systems of concepts, and theoretical orientation” (p. 61). Burbules & Peters (2004) take care to emphasize that the power/knowledge arrangements in a discourse are not simply “instruments of repression and control, wielded by some over others” (p. 63), but instead are relationships that, even if asymmetrical at times, are also productive. Further, they stress that discourse is not “just a political concept, but an epistemic one, therefore, “we witness power in ruling institutions and authorities, and even in ways of thinking and speaking” (p. 64).
tracing and articulating the complex ways in which students’ and instructor’s desires for critical consciousness align, conflict, and accrue meanings perhaps unanticipated and unintended in the original critical writing endeavors. Using a psychoanalytically informed perspective on writing and subjectivity, this case study explores how writing functions for individuals in the development of criticism responses to television phenomena. Two initial, prospective, and progressive issue questions (Stake, 1995, p. 20) guided the inductive development of the study:

1. How is student subjectivity positioned and constructed in relationship to their criticism writing in *Criticizing Television*?

2. In what ways does my own subjectivity, as an instructor, shape my assumptions and expectations regarding students’ subjectivities, their writing, and the understanding of critical consciousness in the context of this course?

Ultimately, this case study endeavors to question and complicate the relationships among subjectivity, criticism writing, and critical consciousness in art education. To this end, the research offers descriptive, interpretive views of criticism writing as it was situated in the course, and as it is read and perceived retrospectively in the present.

Although this research of students’ writing in the *Criticizing Television* course is expansive in its contextual ground, and conceptually poetic in its framing, explication, and analysis of data, the focus and intent of the research are clear: To employ select theoretical and pragmatic tools of psychoanalysis in articulating some of the complex and contradictory desires that circulate in and around criticism writing processes in visual culture art education. In exploring the complexities of the case, the research aims to bring attention to the evocative and resonant relational spaces and subjectivities created
through writing processes and criticism pedagogies in art education. These relational spaces and their muffled or silent discourses are the unconscious Other of criticism writing which are implicated in the development of a critically conscious interaction with visual culture phenomena.

The data of the study are somewhat difficult to pin down, for this research is concerned with slippery ideas and ephemeral experiences such as resonance, evocation, silence, and impasses. To this end, the study seeks to parse out disruptions, uncertainties, gaps, repetitions, and resistances around criticism writing as experienced in the course and as experienced in the research interactions, situating both within the disciplinary context of art education. In doing so, the research aims to expand and enrich current ideas about criticism writing in art education through a psychoanalytic approach which raises questions of how and why critical consciousness may be effected or resisted through written criticism responses to visual culture phenomena.

This case study views critical writing processes in the Criticizing Television course as a relationship19 (Tobin, 1993), a shared transaction, a composing and witnessing of subjectivities (Felman, 1997; Felman & Laub, 2002; Tougaw, 2003), a “contact zone” (Skorczewski, 2000, p. 225), a relational space20 (Murdoch, 2005), and a resonant site of

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19 Composition scholar Lad Tobin (1989, 1991, 1993, 1996) has written extensively on the influence of interpersonal relationships on the writing process. Tobin is careful to point out that, while a focus on relationships among student-teacher, teacher-teacher, student-student should be prioritized, the composition classroom must not be turned into a site of “pseudo-sociology or amateur psychology” (1993, p. 14).

20 Poststructuralist geographers derive the concept of relational space from the socio-spatial relationships among people, practices, and knowledge. Jonathan Murdoch (2005) explains the way in which relationships are constituted through space and spatiality: “Power, knowledge, and space mutually compose one another…they co-evolve in complex ways, coiling around one another until some kind of stability emerges…Knowledge is materialized in practice, practice is
“response-ability” (Ellsworth, 1996, 1997; Oliver, 2000) created through students’ and the instructor’s assumptions and expectations of the criticism endeavor. Importantly, this research takes a significant departure from most considerations of written criticism in art education through its emphasis on subjectivity and its attention to unconscious drives which shape subjective experiences of visual culture. Specifically, the study is concerned with the unconscious subtexts of student and teacher subjectivities and how the unspoken, affective resonance of these hidden discourses inhabit and shape the act of composing television criticism texts and the students’ and instructor’s perceptions of these texts.

**Research Questions**

The research aims to develop understanding of the ways in which students’ critical writing processes and artifacts in the undergraduate *Criticizing Television* course relate to, diverge from, or bring new awarenesses to established criticism writing practices in art education and to contextualize and problematize this understanding within visual culture discourse in art education. Conceptualized through a psychoanalytic theory perspective, this qualitative interpretive case study considers students’ perceptions of their critical writing in the course through data in the form of students’ essays, instructor’s teaching journal, an online student survey, and two in-depth interviews with materialized in the body, and the body is immersed in modes of spatial organization that in turn ‘perform’ systems of knowledge” (p. 56). Lacan’s ideas about the formation of one’s self, or “I” within the imaginary register explain how a subject’s drive for coherence, autonomy and completion are dependent upon their relationships with other subjects. Thus, intersubjectivity is a factor in the constitution and significance of relational spaces. Embedded within, and constituted through the discourse of art education and the *Criticizing Television* course, relational space, as it is used in the context of this research, provides a way of thinking through and talking about the locus of sensitivities and nuances of the dynamic, contingent, and emergent qualities of a subject’s conscious and unconscious relationships to television phenomena and criticism writing.
former students enrolled in the *Criticizing Television* course. A content analysis of research literature identifies themes and patterns in past and current research on writing, art criticism, and visual culture in art education, and research on writing and subjectivity in English and composition studies.

The research is focally concerned with how and why students wrote their critical essays as they did. Specifically, I seek to understand where, how, and when expectations and perceptions, implicit beliefs, and tacit awarenesses about the nature of writing, subjectivity, and self-disclosure come to bear on the processes of writing critical analyses of the visual culture phenomenon of television in the course. I’ve translated these focal concerns into a holist research question which establishes the contextual scope of the case and creates a foundation for the questions which guide generation and analysis of data. The holistic research question asks:

*Within the critical writing processes and textual artifacts in this case, how are the sedimented practices and resources of art education criticism pedagogies and visual culture studies dynamically emergent and problematized at the intersections of personal, interpersonal, disciplinary, and sociocultural contexts?*

Next, derived from the holistic research question, a specific query guides the interpretive reading of data in this study:

*How are unconscious subjectivities visible in the texts of this case and how might these evocations of the unconscious, referred to in the research as the “I of the text,” evidence the presence, complexities, and contradictions of critical consciousness?*

Finally, three questions dealing with the ontological and epistemological nature of
subjects and subjectivities (Doucet & Mauthner, 2008) overlay an interpretive reading of
data in the case. These questions, inextricably intertwined with my desire to see and
describe the presence and effects of unconscious subjectivities within students’ television
criticism writing processes, are

1. *Within the writings of this case, what can be known about subjectivity and
critical consciousness?*

2. *How do I know what I know about subjectivities within and around the
writings in this case?*

3. *Of what pedagogical value is the exploration of subjectivity, the unconscious,
and critical consciousness within the context of students’ television criticism
writing?*

The first philosophical question, *Within the writings of this case, what can be known
about subjectivity and critical consciousness?* motivates the data analysis of this study
and informs the development of the psychoanalytic research methodology. In focusing on
the problem of what can and cannot be known about subjectivity—one’s own and the
subjectivities of others—this research argues for the consideration of unconscious
subjectivity as a core constituent of a critically conscious writing pedagogy for art
education.

In summary, this qualitative case study involves students’ perceptions of the
writing they created in the *Criticizing Television* course, situating their perceptions within
the context of Lacanian psychoanalytic theory and in relation to my instructor’s and
researcher’s perceptions of the course and this case. An impressionist (Van Manen, 1988)
view in regard to research analysis highlights relationships with and among the data,
attempting to be as “hesitant and open to contingency and interpretation as the concrete experiences on which they are based” (Van Manen, 1988, p. 119).

**Writing: Disciplinary Practices and Dilemmas of Estrangement**

Wei Zhu (2004), researcher of ESL writing practices, examined socio-cultural influences that shape instructors’ writing assignments and students’ performance in writing tasks across disciplines. Like Bazerman (2004), Carter (2007), Lea & Street (2006), and Prior (2006), Zhu found that academic writing is not only shaped by a discipline’s subject foci and scholarly conventions, it also requires students to take up different social roles or subject positions. In fact, while a discipline’s modes and conventions of expression are inextricably intertwined with the discipline’s content and the expectations for students’ roles in writing, these conventions are often taught without reflection or critique by either the students themselves or their instructor. Zhu cites Ann Herrington’s studies (1985a, 1985b) of chemical engineering courses as an example of students not only assuming course-specific subject positions, but also working within these positions to develop discipline-specific modes of reasoning, while providing different types of evidence, depending on the role of the writer in relation to the task at hand.

Writing assignments in the *Criticizing Television* course are distinctive when compared to writing assignments of other disciplines in that the subjectivity of a student writer is considered to be an inextricable aspect of the student writer’s perceptions of the writing assignment, perceptions of the subject matter and/or task of the assignment, and perceptions of the instructor’s expectations of the student’s response to the assignment. In
short, subjectivity in and around the assignments of the *Criticizing Television* course posed some unique challenges and opportunities for the goals of the course. As I was to discover, when students’ critiques of television collide with their attachments and resistances to television in the context of a writing assignment, perhaps questions are in order about ethics and responsibilities around the teaching of criticism writing in this as well as other contemporary art education courses. Madeline Grumet describes a dilemma of estrangement caused by an overtly personal and declarative cultural criticism which, ironically, can preclude engagement and conversation (Grumet, 2001). Referencing Seyla Benhabib’s (1992) concerns regarding “situated criticism,” Grumet identifies issues that were of concern to me as I taught criticism writing within the context of a visual culture-themed course in the discipline of art education. A significant concern for me was the responsibility I felt in responding to students’ writing. I struggled with the task of helping students improve the clarity and persuasiveness of their writing while not appearing to be unfairly critical of their personhood. I was aware of the delicacy of signifier-signified relationships, and the sensitive hinge between one’s personal, lived experience with television and the perception/interpretation of one’s identity through television’s subject positioning. The “I” of a student’s criticism essay was, for me, fraught with sensitivity, particularly when I had to assess and grade the writing. How could pointed, evaluative feedback on an essay which made its critical arguments through the student’s disclosure of deeply personal revelations, be considered anything but personal? As Grumet (2001) explains, criticism of a personal nature exacts demands on both the critic as well as their audience:

We are worried about offending each other. If a text is an expression of identity,
then what is it we criticize when we find it boring, or offer an interpretation that is not the author’s, or take issue with the way that someone has constructed the narrative of her or his own formation? And, if that formation is situated explicitly as an expression of gender or ethnicity, how can we take issue with its assertions, if we do not share those characteristics. Our narratives have estranged us because they are defensively declarative…their confessions display an intimacy that their rhetoric forbids. (p. 175)

In identifying a paradox inherent in eliciting critique within an educational context that may well constrain responses to that critique, Grumet brings our attention to pedagogical spaces of uncertainty where a psychoanalytic perspective may be productive. As a mode of expression and communication in visual culture, writing takes many forms, serves myriad personal needs and institutional goals, and cuts across disciplinary boundaries. Therefore, as a social, cultural, individual, or collaborative phenomenon, “writing is wrapped up in complicated ways with epistemology and notions of the self” (Yagelski, 1999, p 44-45). As a result, those who teach writing “must negotiate some treacherous territory that other teachers may not need to traverse” (Yagelski, 1999, p 44-45). This research not only traverses the difficult terrain of teaching writing, but identifies some of the perplexing qualities of the landscape that present challenges for teaching toward critical consciousness in art education. Moreover, the research presents psychoanalytic perspectives on subjectivity and education which hold promise for negotiating some of the challenges of visual culture criticism writing.
Disruptive Junctures

As educators who spend a considerable amount of time constructing, or working in close proximity to, both visual and textual artifacts, art educators are in a unique position to understand the felt difficulty of bridging gaps between the visible and invisible, the literal and metaphorical, the confusion of translating one form of expression into another. However, without having an extensive background in practices of academic writing or composition studies, many art educators are reluctant or uncomfortable in to use or teach writing beyond its use as an informal response to artwork (the student’s own work, or that of peers or professional artists). As a consequence of this unfamiliarity and lack of confidence about writing, most art educators will not see the benefits or possibilities that writing affords. Hesitation and awkwardness in relation to writing is an advantage, I believe. It can create a situation wherein writing’s purpose and forms might be challenged and imagined anew.

This case study follows from the effects of disruptive junctures in my own teaching and writing experiences in *Criticizing Television*. One of the disruptive junctures I experienced in developing a writing pedagogy for the course is the realization that the critical analyses of television texts undertaken with my students were being uncritically channeled into written essay texts. I began to view writing as one of the cultural practices that, not unlike the television texts being examined, was a system of representations which functioned within my classroom in a seemingly “natural” way. I began to question the validity and the hidden effects of the academic discourse of writing used in my classroom. I began to wonder, why do we write as we do in art education? What, or whom, is made visible, and what, or whom, is hidden within this particular discursive
act? Moreover, I wondered, if the goal of my course was to help students acquire methodologies for reading the rhetorical mechanisms and content of television’s cultural texts with greater sensitivity, might it also be prudent to critically examine the rhetorical mechanisms I made available to them for the expression of their learning?

Another significant, disruptive juncture leading to the conceptualization of this research involved the student writing itself and my responses to it. I began to develop questions around the issue of students’ personal expressions that I perceived might be private or confessional in nature. Given the propensity of television programming that blurs boundaries between private and public worlds and celebrates daring exposures of personal experiences, I wondered about the assumptions that my students and I held regarding the cultural capital of private experience. When visual culture phenomena, with all its affective investments is placed at the center of art education academic discourse, how shall we formulate a critical reading of it? When students’ writing dealt with intensely personal aspects of their lives, I was greatly concerned about responding to their disclosures ethically and respectfully. I wondered: Would I acknowledge and encourage exploration of what I perceived to be a student’s private world? How would I support these explorations in an ethical way so as not to co-opt or colonize personal worlds of others? And, I wondered: How did my discursive positioning as authority and respondent, as well as the assignments I constructed for the course, enable or constrain the expressions of students?

Related to the issue of disclosure and ethics, and intersecting with my questions regarding students’ and instructors’ beliefs about writing and affective investments in visual culture, I began to question how transference and countertransference within the
writing process affected the construction of critical consciousness for both students and instructor. As theorized in psychoanalysis, transference refers to a subject’s unconscious belief that an authority figure, or “subject supposed to know” holds the key to interpreting the subject’s own baffling behavior. Composition theorist Robert Brooke explains the relationship between a subject’s divided self (divided as conscious and unconscious) and the “subject supposed to know” in the context of a writing class:

The baffling behavior involved is writing. The student writer is (all but) universally assumed *not to understand* what he has written, how it operates or how it should work. The writing teacher is fancied…to *understand* writing, to *know* what writing should look like, how it’s supposed to work, what the student’s errors “mean” and how to fix them. (1987, p. 682 *italics in original*)

Brooke’s theorizations of writing and transference held particular resonance for me; his observations pointed me to, and helped me articulate, my chief concern about teaching critical writing about television and culture in the course: That is, if my students were considering me to be their “subject supposed to know” in regard to the writing I assigned in my course, then I had a problem, because while students were looking to me as the translator and guide to their writing, I was seeking my own “subject supposed to know” through my attempts to locate writing theories and pedagogies within the discipline of art education, pedagogies that would help me to teach a reflexive, ethical, and critically engaged visual culture writing course.

**Seeking Pragmatic Paradox**

Relational spaces of criticism writing and their muffled or silent discourses are conceptualized in the study as sites of *pragmatic paradox* where vagaries and failures of
representation might serve as sources of realistic insight and practical pedagogical action in regard to the contradictory nature of critical consciousness. In this perspective, the validity and writerly craftsmanship of a students’ criticism essay is of less interest in this research than the ways in which the writing functions as a manifestation of unconscious desire, failure of signification, and occasion of conflicted subjectivities.

From a psychoanalytic perspective, the paradox of criticism writing arises from the reality that, in wording the world for ourselves and for one another through the production of critical perspectives, we are inevitably saying and hearing more and less than we know. Further, the pedagogical spaces we’ve created for these exchanges often deny or distract from the absences and excesses that circulate within language, yet the unruliness of the unconscious ensures that disruptions, sensitivities, and resistances will return again and again. Pedagogical contexts of uncertainty, disruption, and contradiction are spaces where a psychoanalytic perspective on criticism may be of productive use, in particular, for facilitating awareness of criticism writing, or expression in general, as pragmatic paradox. Working within the idea of pragmatic paradox means acknowledging that conflictual relationships among language, subjectivity, and critical consciousness do exist, while creating conditions within curriculum (and research) for exploring and learning through these relational spaces.

The limits of language and discourse, as understood through a psychoanalytic theory perspective, are inextricable from the constitution of subjectivities. Importantly,

Speech wells up
and we can only do
what we can to rein it in,
a process that
demonstrates time and
again quite how fragile is
our control over our own
being.
~Stephen Frosh, 2008
however, the objective of a psychoanalytic perspective on writing is not to excavate deep, hidden truths of a subject or lead teachers and students to secret, repressed knowledge about the self and others, but to create the conditions for a pragmatic, albeit paradoxical, reflexivity in the writing process. Thus, pragmatic paradox is not meant as an obscurantist, idealized theoretical concept, but is a signifier that points to what actually occurs in relationships between people, and in an education encounter. In a Lacanian pedagogical perspective, the failure of language in creating a one to one correspondence with reality or in securing a precision of communication between people is a pragmatic paradox. Pragmatic in that language, images, or other tools of the symbolic are the materials with which we must work; paradoxical in that the tools, however alluring and seemingly efficient, do not quite fit the intricate machinations of reality.

**Significance of the Study**

By bringing together the topics of psychoanalytic theory, writing, and visual culture art education, this research creates a space of layered complexities, punctuated by questions. In the process, I’ve endeavored to uncover and explain, as clearly as possible, the dense layers of theory and experience that characterize this particular case. However, I am caught within the limitations of language; I’m attempting to capture, translate, and express awarenesses that are often ephemeral, slippery, and in the process of becoming. Of course, complete congruence of language, experience, and interpretation is only imaginary. It is this impossible congruence that has defined my experience of students’ criticism writing.

This case study’s contribution to the literature on art education, composition studies, and psychoanalytic perspectives in education derives not from its stated research
goals and findings, but in the peripheral spaces, in the shapes and feelings of paths taken in constructing this case study, and in the reader’s encounter with this case study. I attempt in this dissertation to express my experience of a resonant teaching and research landscape where sensitivities, evocations, flux, and contingencies led me to understand better the value of impasses and impossibilities in pedagogy. My goal then, in this study, is not to create an air-tight theory or recommend a prescriptive writing pedagogy, but to create the conditions for a pedagogy of patience and periphery that raises questions about the meaning of teaching critical writing in a visually-oriented field.

Of issue in the research is the abundant, contingent flux of meanings, the multiple possibilities for naming and expressing experience. From a psychoanalytic perspective, excess and remainders of meanings are the condition of a language which is an amalgam of conscious awareness and unconscious drives. In wording the world for ourselves and for one another, we are inevitably saying and hearing more and less than we know. Seeing too much and not seeing enough. Language is more and less than we need. It is within, between, and because of, these (im)possibilities that this case study was developed.

A focus on subjectivity and criticism writing in art education is both timely and significant in that the status of criticism writing is undergoing change, causing shifts in the access, functions, and relevance of criticism in postmodern culture (Roundtable: The present conditions of art criticism, 2002; Jarvis, 2006; Princenthal, 2006). Scholars are questioning the value of written criticism of art and visual phenomena in a contemporary culture where YouTube videos are a form of critical discourse (Spigel, 2009). Additionally, while criticism and critical discourse are undergoing changes within
contemporary media contexts, disciplinary interests are also shifting and evolving. For example, the discourse on visual culture in art education evidences increasing interest in the concept of subjectivity which is approached both directly and obliquely within research literature on visual culture-themed topics including aesthetics, (Tavin, 2007), critical pedagogy (Tavin, 2003), language and representation (Eisenhauer, 2006a, 2006b), mapping curriculum content (Wilson, 2003); media and surveillance (Sweeney, 2006), and psychoanalysis (Jagodzinski, 2004, 2005; Walker, Daiello, Hathaway, & Rhoades, 2006). Building upon existing research of and around subjectivity in the art education literature, this research of students’ criticism writing in Criticizing Television complicates notions of subjectivity by using a psychoanalytic perspective to explicate the intersubjective, social constitution of subjectivities. Further, by creating a dialogue among art criticism and visual culture literature in art education, research of writing in composition studies, and psychoanalytic research methodology, this case study offers an updated view of writing in art education which addresses writing’s potential for use in critically conscious pedagogies.

**Implications of the Study**

A study of the criticism writing in the Criticizing Television is implicitly a rationale for inquiry into writing pedagogies in art education. Currently, outside of a rich and expanding body of research on writing methods occurring in arts-based inquiry in and around art education, there are few discussions of writing theories and practices, in relation to student writing, within art education pedagogies. Not since Stout’s series of investigations of student writing practices in art education (1990, 1993, 1995, 1997, 2000), has there been an intensive focus on the pedagogical use of writing as a method of
thinking and reflection in art education. This research gap is surprising, given the frequency with which art educators rely upon writing activities to facilitate discussion and express interpretations (Barrett, 2000b, 2003a, 2006a; Stout, 1995a), engage critical thinking (Geahigan, 1980, 1999; Stout, 1995a, 1995b), or teach about professional criticism practices (Barrett, 1991, 1994; Lee & Barrett, 1991).

This research takes up the issues of subjectivity and television criticism writing, yet the implications of these topics have significance beyond the written criticism essay. What is at stake in this research is an opportunity to consider how people explain to themselves and to others their relationships with visual culture phenomena through the use of writing. Moreover, also at stake is the opportunity to explore how the distinctive affordances of writing within an art education context create occasions for reflexive exploration of one’s perceptions of self and others, not just on the part of the student, but also the instructor. This research inquiry on writing and subjectivity offers an opportunity to blur, soften, and stretch the focus of criticism, which is usually directed toward an object or phenomenon such as television, to encompass considerations of the choices made in formulating and communicating the critical response. Moreover, this research creates an opportunity for art educators to explore the silent subtexts of criticism and critical consciousness through consideration of a psychoanalytic perspective on subjectivity.
Relevance of the Study of Writing in Art Education

"Language is something that we throw ahead of us in order to gather up
what we have left behind. As we throw it beyond us to bridge the gap, we
recuperate our losses through communication, through texts”

~M. Grumet, 1999, p. 152-153

Among all the choices for expression in the postmodern world, and given all the media tools and social networking and multimedia, why think about writing in art education? As I see it, the answer is clear: As boundaries around disciplinary knowledge stretch and dissolve, writing remains one of the most prevalent tools for processing, expressing, creating, and distributing information within and among disciplines. From the biological sciences to the sociological disciplines, to mathematics, engineering, and architecture, writing is a ubiquitous, as well as often predominant, mode of communication. Even disciplines considered to be visually-oriented such as design and fine arts rely upon textual or hybrid textual-visual forms of expression, documentation, and distribution of knowledge.

However, given the ubiquity of writing across disciplines and the increasing popularity of visual modes of communication, why is a study of writing so relevant and pressing now? Moreover, and of crucial relevance for this case study, why should research of writing matter within the present context of art education? This question can be answered with a survey of literature in art education, and some reflection on the practices of artists and teachers: While visual images and visual phenomena are of focal interest in art education, writing is perhaps the most ubiquitous form of communication in regard to reflection about, and critical discourse about, visual phenomena in art.
education. Yet, interestingly, however prevalent the presence of writing, as a form of expression, it is somewhat invisible. Writing, as a container of expression, hides in plain sight, fading into the background within analyses of visual images and receding behind the conveyance of research or the documentation of practice.

While writing may take a backseat to other topics in art education, it can be a powerful site of learning in art education, and a valuable pedagogical tool. The study of visual culture in art education helps students critically evaluate and contextualize the multiple meanings of and around images, and writing can be a crucial part of working through and explicating the meaning of images for oneself and for others. In addition, writing creates opportunities in a curriculum for students to “slow down a bit, reflect on what they’re doing and why, and think about the language they’re using to represent it” (Rose & McClafferty, 2001). Finally, the use of writing in an art education curriculum can provide distinctive opportunities for making thinking visible and visual within a pedagogical context while also raising important questions about the ideological issues involved in rendering subjectivities visible and invisible in visual culture.

To illustrate the important role that writing might play in visual culture pedagogies in art education, consider the statement, “the picture should never speak for itself” (Tavin, 2009, p. 7), expressed in a public dialogue about the importance of visual culture pedagogies in contemporary art education. While images can’t literally “speak for themselves,” this personifying metaphor implies that images are imbued with a communicative power that must be mediated by language. Curiously, the social justice concerns within which many visual culture pedagogies originate tend not to scrutinize how language itself—as in, for example, written responses to television, can be as
ideologically freighted as the images to which the writing refers. This study of student writing in *Criticizing Television* takes written responses to visual culture seriously, not only in regard to what students write, but as a relational space where reflexivity on the part of both student and instructor can bring opportunities for thinking through the personal and social investments involved when one speaks for, or about, images.

Writing, like artmaking or the creation of visual culture objects and experiences (Freedman, 2003b), is a mode of production, and one that carries ideological baggage (Baum-Brunner, 1997; Bazerman, 2004; Bloom, 1996; Devitt, Bawarshi, & Reiff, 2003; Selfe, 1999; Wood, 1998) as well as the stamp of personal subjectivity. However, because writing is generally used across a diverse spectrum of disciplines and in everyday acts of communication, it is often sensed as natural, an unremarkable, neutral tool for expressing meaning (Bazerman, 2004; Thaiss & Zawacki, 2006). Along with interest in the ideological underpinnings and pedagogical consequences of students’ written responses to visual culture, it is the seeming neutrality or naturalness of criticism writing processes and textual artifacts that the case study of student writing in the *Criticizing Television* course seeks to understand. This research considers writing to be a site of contestation where subjectivities and interpretations struggle with the articulations of a visual experience—articulations not only for oneself, but for others. It is this intersection where the self writes for an other that drew my attention as a teacher of writing in the *Criticizing Television* course, and that initially motivated the research.

**Writing, Visual Culture, and Critical Consciousness: Defining the Intersections**

This case study of student writing in the *Criticizing Television* course looks at several, interrelated aspects of a visual culture curriculum which are in need of new and
expanded research in art education: students’ criticism writing assignments, subjectivity, and critical consciousness. A familiar activity in many art education curricula, criticism writing offers a fruitful site for a fine-grained study of the complex negotiations of subjectivities in relation to critical consciousness and popular visual culture. As a co-constructed endeavor between teacher and student, writing assignments are relational spaces which tend to absorb and hide the powerful, ideological underpinnings of an expression and its interpretations. The Lacanian and relational psychoanalytic (Stern, 1997, 2002, 2009) approaches used in this case study offer theory and vocabulary for articulating the significance of these relational spaces. For example, the concepts transference and countertransference address the distinctive relationships that form between people in situations where there is disparity in power or knowledge. In questioning what’s missing or silenced in a critically conscious, liberatory pedagogy, Ellsworth and Duncum have opened up a necessary conversation about the ethical responsibilities of educators in situations that are heavily freighted with personal and affective investments for both students and teachers.

There is now and will likely always be a need for art education curricula that engages and inspires people to formulate questions about how and why visual experiences are so moving, so compelling, so much a part of our perceptions of personal and cultural identity. There is a need for curricula that does not merely transgress current art education practices and sensibilities (Duncum, 2009), but curriculum methods that are capable of translating the seductiveness of transgression into reflexivity, and are capable of motivating sensitive, sustained engagement with others and civic life. Freire’s idea of critical consciousness (1970), which has informed many variations of critical pedagogy
over the years both within and outside of art education, is still a meaningful and valid project. In a world flooded with images, and where critical positions on popular culture are often difficult to separate from capitalist celebrations of popular culture, the complexity of the critical consciousness project and its potential entwinement with reproduction of oppressive social practices cannot be overstated. Hildebrand-Nilshon, Motzkau, & Papadopoulos (2001) offer the observation that “the power to colonize thought and lives is not in the hands of an omnipotent colonizer…,” thus, even as educators strive toward articulating and enacting critically conscious pedagogies, “we have to face being a kind of ‘colonizer’ and ‘decolonizer’ at the same time” (pp. 297-298).

As a mode of expression in art education, writing is familiar, taken for granted, even unremarkable. However, the most unremarkable of activities, like writing, may be capable of facilitating some of the most surprising pedagogical insights and potential. On the other hand, the mundane, taken-for-grantedness of writing as a mode of expression may actually conceal and perpetuate acts of colonization. For example, the implicit and explicit expectations for what counts as appropriate or inappropriate critical responses to visual culture experiences may be a subtle yet powerful communication of what types of subjects and subjectivities are valued within a discipline. Or, a lack of dialogue on the aspects of self that desire, resist, or subvert critical consciousness may shut down opportunities to explore the differences and otherness which are the origin of all subjectivities. This research, then, aims to open up conversations on the ways that writing toward critical consciousness might be conceptualized as a critical questioning of writing itself, a reflexive “writing to unlearn” (Kleinsasser, 2000) the neat, contained subject
positions set forth by some forms of writing curricula.

Pursuit of critical consciousness and social justice are, I believe, valid and vital goals in art education. However, working with students to bring about shifts in consciousness is a complicated endeavor. One such complexity affecting pedagogical pursuits of critical consciousness is the object of criticism itself. That is, the criticism writer’s relationship to the phenomenon of television is often deep, diffuse, and entangled with other cultural texts, extending into one’s family history as well the as unconscious desires that shape subjectivity. Thus, contemporary television criticism can be quite personal in topic and tenor. For students, a constellation of issues including beliefs regarding their writing abilities, their relationship with the assignment topic, and their perceptions of what the assignment and the instructor want of them can create an affectively charged learning experience. From the instructors’ point of view, the endeavor of assigning and assessing student criticism writing is affectively charged as well, particularly when the writing is embedded in a curriculum that emphasizes reflexivity and critical consciousness. Attention to these complex, affective resonances of the criticism writing process is a distinguishing aspect of this research.

Visual culture discourse in art education has sensitized me to the ways in which artifacts and experiences perform meanings within contexts. When faced with creating a curriculum for the Criticizing Television course, I found I couldn’t ignore the art education disciplinary context within which my curriculum choices would be experienced. I contemplated the tacit assumptions and expectations hidden within my assignment choices, finding it difficult to separate visual culture curriculum content from the material practices of teaching that this content would be embedded and experienced
within. The material practice of writing, a focal activity of this course, is a compelling issue for research, not only because of the power structures effected though writing relationships among students and instructor, but also because of the need for developing an understanding of how writing as a form of inquiry and expression might be used in critically conscious ways within visual culture pedagogies in art education. In summary, there is a need for a visual culture writing pedagogy that problematizes and explores intersections among students’ writing about their personal, life world experiences, the flux of desires and resistances around visual culture phenomena, and the pedagogical goals of critical consciousness.

**Knots: Identifying Key Concepts in the Research**

*You tie yourself to what comes untied — to what unties you within your ties.*

*You are a knot of correspondences.* ~Edmond Jabès, 1990

The *knot of correspondences* (Jabès, 1990, p. 9) described in the quote that opens this section is an apt characterization of subjectivity and its constitution through desire and language. Knots of correspondences are analogous to “(k)nots” among conscious and unconscious aspects of subjectivity. (K)nots are connectors among signifiers that, in straining to secure fixity and clarity of meaning, reveal the points where coherence may be most tenuous. Thus, the ties that (seemingly) bind subjects into coherent beings are, paradoxically, also “nods” and subversions of coherence. Lacan’s notion of the *points de capiton* (Fink, 1995; Lacan, 1973) explains how the knots of resonant affect that I experienced in my encounters with the students’ texts became both the structure and the undoing of coherence in my perceptions of the study data. The *points de capiton*, a key nodal point among signifiers, functions to freeze the play of signifieds to “articulate the
truth of a particular ideological discourse,” trace the primary coordinates of a subject’s identity, or “capture and thereby totalize the field of meaning” (Atkinson, 2003, p. 192). Points de capiton refers to the way in which the texts in this study attach to particular affects, leading to the generation of key signifiers, such as “impasse” or the labeling of certain affects as “data.”

Other points de capiton in a study are its key concepts, the primary topics and terms through which a researcher attempts to construct a coherent research narrative or trajectory. Select concepts and topics are used in this study to illuminate and explicate the research problem and to facilitate generation and analysis of data. The following concepts, which figure prominently in subsequent chapters, are explained below:

Subjectivity and Desire; The Other; Difficult Knowledge and Deferred Action; Thick Interpretation; Critical Consciousness; Resistance; Psychoanalytic Theory in Education; Evocation and Resonance.

Subjectivity and Desire

Subjectivity in, of, and around the texts written by students and instructor in the Criticizing Television course is a core concept around which this research has developed. In art education, issues of identity and subjectivity are of no small consequence, particularly in their manifestations in and around the images and activities of popular, visual culture. Freedman and Stuhr (2004) comment on the pervasiveness of popular culture and posit that “addressing aspects of visual communication, identity formation, and cultural mediation has become a vital issue in art education” (p. 826).

Subjectivity cuts across a variety of disciplines and qualitative research discourses. In this essay, subject and subjectivity refer to the human person who acts and
is acted upon in the world, and who generates phenomenological experiences within particular socio-historical contexts. Further, *subjectivity* encompasses the multiple qualities and manifestations of what is perceived as the subject’s self, as an individual person and in relation to other subjects. The phenomena of interpersonal interactions called *intersubjectivity* are knots of correspondences among many others, and many selves, woven from threads both conscious and unconscious.

In agreement with social psychologist Margaret Wetherell (2008), I use the concept of subjectivity with caution and some ambivalence, noting that definitions of subjectivity and identity are contested; these concepts carry ideological burdens from their deployment within multiple disciplinary sites and they are often implicated in myriad political and pedagogical agendas. In refining the research focus, the study sets aside the concept of identity, which is often used to define the characteristics of an individual and pursues instead the concept of subjectivity which by definition underpins the individual and social connectedness of human experience. Explaining the social, communal origin of the self, Nick Mansfield (2000) describes subjectivity as an “abstract or general principle that defies our separation into distinct selves and…helps us to understand why our interior lives inevitably seem to involve other people, either as objects of need, desire, and interest or as necessary sharers of common experience” (p. 3). In summary, the research views subjectivity, and the “I” of the text, as a kind of conceptual vocabulary for articulating the complexity of human experiences, both conscious and unconscious.

Like subjectivity, *desire* is not a private affair but a social accomplishment, constituted in a dialectical relationship with the perceived desires of other subjects. As Lacanian theory posits, desire is never one’s own but is the *desire of the other*. For
example, the most fundamental desire, and also subjectivity’s *raison d’être*, is the desire for recognition. Having a sense of one’s self as a force that matters in the world is a form of recognition (Bracher, 2006). Relatedly, the sense of being a “self” is inseparable from a desire to know what others want, so as to be positioned better to be the object of their desire. Therefore, when Lacan avers that desire is the desire of the other, he is referring to the longing that is woven into and is caused by another person’s desires. In other words, we want to know what the other person wants “in order to best satisfy or thwart them in their purposes, discover where we fit into their schemes and plans, and find a niche for ourselves in their desire” (Fink, 1997, p. 54). Problematic, however, is that acknowledgement, recognition, and desire are conceptualized, expressed, perceived, and lived through language—a symbolic structure which shapes us as subjects while also shaping our thoughts, needs, and desires. Lacanian psychoanalytic theory conceptualizes language as slippery, imprecise, and alienating: Words cannot be fastened securely to meaning(s), because all words can have multiple meanings—not just among members of a culture, but also across temporal and spatial contexts. All that is not expressible in language circulates and percolates in the unconscious, sometimes surfacing as feelings of emotional resonance, other times emerging through slips of the tongue or inconsistencies of expression. By introducing the unconscious into considerations of language, psychoanalytic theory opens up an avenue for the exploration of writing, particularly those aspects of writing that cannot be described or theorized empirically, such as felt experiences of evocativeness or inexplicable resistances and desires.
The Other

Lacan’s psychoanalytic discourse on the desire of the Other, and by extension, the otherness of language and subjectivity (Lacan, 2006) reinforces the relational nature of critical consciousness. In Lacanian theory, the term “Other” is a complex concept, and its meaning has undergone development over time. In the 1930’s, Lacan’s use of the term referred generally to “other people,” however, in the 1950s, Lacan began to distinguish between “other” with a small “o” (“little other”) and Other with a capital “O” (“big Other”) (Evans, 1996). In Lacan’s perspective, the little “other” is not another person, but is the internalized ego, and thus is a specular image, or a reflection and projection which is inscribed in the imaginary order (Evans, 1996). Thus, the little other is what we know as the self, or self-image. The big "Other” is also not a person but refers, metaphorically, to language and the symbolic order, within which subjectivity and the unconscious are constituted. The big Other, then, is dual: It is the larger socio-symbolic context that functions according to language-like rules and, at the same time, it is a socio-symbolic psychical structure which is internalized in the form of the unconscious. My use of the term Other invokes Lacan's conceptualization of the socio-symbolic network within which subjects interact with one another and, with the tools of language, define and understand themselves as individual subjects.

Kelly Oliver (2000) defines the “Other” as a locus of intersubjectivity that carries implicit and explicit ethical responsibilities. The question, What does the Other desire? implies a “me”— what does the Other want of me? The question of what the Other wants of oneself, and the relationship of desires that this question implies, is the foundation upon which human subjectivities are formed. This is a relationship of witnessing and
being witnessed, it is a relationship that carries ethical implications and responsibilities. Oliver (2000) explains,

Subjectivity requires the possibility of a witness and the witnessing at the heart of subjectivity brings with it responsibility, response-ability and ethical responsibility. Subjectivity as the ability to respond is linked in its conception to ethical responsibility... It is the ability to respond and to be responded to. Responsibility, then, has the double sense of opening up the ability to response — response-ability — and ethically obligating subjects to respond by virtue of their very subjectivity itself. (pp. 196-197)

The question, *What does the Other desire of me?* and my struggle to understand what an ethical response to this question might look like within the context of teaching the *Criticizing Television* course, became a pivotal focus that not only influenced my conceptualization and assessment of writing assignments, but also sensitized me to the responsibilities inherent in the intersubjective, relational spaces of criticism writing pedagogies.

**Difficult Knowledge and Deferred Action**

Difficult knowledge, the term that Pitt & Britzman (2003) give to one’s experience of the trauma of pedagogy, is used in the case study to refer to the evocative experiences where feelings of difficulty or awkwardness emerge through the disruption of the affective, resonant *real* of the subject’s unconscious. The experience of difficult knowledge is a slippery phenomenon to define in words, much less locate in a mute,
textual artifact long separated from the context of its creation and reception.

Deferred action is a psychoanalytic concept that “heightens the problem of how emotional significance and new ideas are made from past and present experiences” (Pitt & Britzman, 2003, p. 758). Deferred action means that the assignment of significance to an experience is delayed: First, the force or emotional resonance of an experience is felt before it can be understood or expressed in language, and second, deferred action describes how an event or object in the present may take its affect, force, or revisions from an earlier experience (Pitt & Britzman, 2003).

Thick Interpretation

In writing the research, I sought ways of conceptualizing the dense stickiness of perceptions that flooded and stalled my attempts to signify the data. Building upon Clifford Geertz’s (1973) concept of thick description, the idea of thick interpretation is an admission of subjectivity’s depth and vastness, its concentrated intensities which gather strength and depth in relationship to others. Thick interpretation is difficult, even uncomfortable; it is a reminder that interpretive closure is impossible. For me, this meant relinquishing certainty, loosening my grasp on interpretive mastery, and allowing knots

21 From Researcher’s Journal (January 29, 2008):

On difficult knowledge: Television is an excessive text, yet perhaps also empty… How, then, to face this slippery text in a meaningful way? Certainly, one of the primary student outcomes in the Criticizing Television course curriculum was to learn to develop a critical argument based on description, interpretation, and judgment (standard art criticism elements)…. However where I begin to have difficulty is in the unproblematized form and assumptions of the criticism essay assignment. And the unproblematized motivations for and results of the act of criticism itself. What does it mean to write? What does it mean to criticize?

In asking these questions, I am enfolding and throwing into relief, the process of reflexivity. I am seeking a curriculum that challenges me to look at the ways in which my subjectivity is formed at the border of others and the world, in flux… caught and captured in a specific circumstance, through the symbolic representation of my ideas in writing.
and wrinkles of perception to emerge in the process of (de)forming the shape of the research. Pushing the study’s data up against the unruly possibilities of a psychoanalytic unconscious punctured any illusions I may have harbored about the identification, description, and interpretation of “data.” Writing, as act and as object, is a dance of thick interpretations. As such, it never quite gathers up all of the meaning it is meant to express. Like the process of writing criticism in the *Criticizing Television* course, writing the trajectory of the case study is a process of stretching toward and grasping for coherence in the thickness of so many competing texts.

**Critical Consciousness**

Critical consciousness is a reflexive awareness of the social, historical, political contexts that constitute subjectivity and influence perceptions of, responses to, and expectations for, visual culture phenomena. Embraced by educators who pursue social justice goals through pedagogical action, critical consciousness is usually conceptualized as a conscious form of agency and perception. In contrast to a passive education that positions students to adapt to unjust, oppressive realities, Paolo Freire (1970) advocates an active, engaged education—one which stimulates the creative faculties of both students and teachers and stirs the desire to question and transform realities through the development of critical consciousness. However, while the pursuit of critical consciousness is usually perceived as a liberatory endeavor, it may become yet another form of oppression. In a world flooded with images, where critical positions on popular culture are often difficult to separate from designer capitalism’s celebrations of cultural phenomena, the potential entwinement of the critical consciousness project with the reproduction of oppressive social practices cannot be overlooked. As Elizabeth Ellsworth
asked twenty years ago, “What diversity do we silence in the name of critical pedagogy?” (1989, p. 299). Paul Duncum (2009) offers an updated perspective on Ellsworth’s query with his questions about the silence of art education discourse in regard to the transgressive pleasures that students sometimes experience with popular culture. As Ellsworth and Duncum remind us, critical consciousness is not a monolithic concept. It is fraught with more contradictions, repressions, and resistances than most curricula are equipped to handle. There is a need for curricula that do not merely transgress current art education practices and sensibilities (Duncum, 2009), but are capable of translating the seductiveness of transgression into recursive reflexivity and of motivating sensitive, sustained engagement with others and civic life.

**Resistance**

Resistance is a familiar concept in liberatory pedagogies that seek to facilitate critical reflexivity and the development of agency in relation to dominating ideologies. Stuart Hall conceptualizes resistance as potential and beginning (rather than inevitable and the end); Ien Ang views resistance as a moment in an ongoing struggle (Butsch, 2000). On the other hand, resistance is conceptualized differently through psychoanalytic theory: As unconscious, repressed affects which are at odds with a subject’s perception of their identity in the symbolic order, resistance occurs in situations where the unconscious, core aspects of self are at odds with the structure and expectations of the symbolic order. The experience of resistance in an education context can be difficult to detect, in oneself and in the actions of others, because it must remain hidden to preserve the coherence of one’s symbolic identity. An example is when students act or respond in ways that they believe the Other (the authoritative representative of the symbolic order—for example, a
Psychoanalytic Theory in Education

Psychoanalytic theory offers insights into the social nature of subjectivity, providing methods of analysis for understanding the connections between cultural trends and new patterns of self organization” (Elliot, 2002, p. 11). Through the lens of psychoanalytic theory, the motivations and desires that factor into subjectivity originate and operate within unconscious drives. Anthony Elliot (2002, p. 10) refers to this incomprehensible inner world as a “hidden self” that is not accessible even in self-reflection. Moreover, Elliot asserts, this hidden self is a significant concept in psychoanalysis because, in addition to its implication for one’s personal experience of the world, it is also inextricably woven into one’s interpersonal relationships. Thus, psychoanalytic theory is not only concerned with the individual, but with the social systems we are embedded within. Psychoanalytic theory offers insight into “theoretical debates on modern and postmodern identity, providing methods of analysis for understanding the connections between cultural trends and new patterns of self organization” (Elliot, 2002, p. 11). In particular, post-Freudian psychoanalysis, as in the work of Jacques Lacan (1973, 2006) and Donnell Stern (1997, 2002, 2009) address the intersubjective nature of human relationships, casting a new light upon the origins of subjectivity.

As Sharon Todd (1997, 2001) and others (Cho, 2005, 2009; Felman, 1987, 1997; Mayes, 2009) have observed, psychoanalytic theory is a viable method for exploring the paradoxes and contradictions of education, particularly those aspects of learning and teaching which disrupt and aim to transform subjectivities. Shoshana Felman (1997)
notes that one of the unique characteristics of a psychoanalytic orientation to education is its concern with information and experiences that are unavailable through any other mode of learning” (p. 23). Indeed, psychoanalysis disrupts the very assumptions of what counts as ignorance or knowledge, bringing a new perspective to “the understanding of what ‘to know’ and ‘not know’ may really mean” (Felman, 1997, p. 23). The issue of knowledge and ignorance intersects with the question posed at the opening of this chapter “What does the Other desire?” because education is an intersubjective relationship wherein each person is engaged in desire for the Other’s attention, knowledge, and desire, while at the same time trying to maintain their own ego-integrity. Thus, learning and teaching contexts are sites of struggle among attachments and losses and, because of the unknown aspects of the subjective unconscious, these struggles are often unexpected and difficult to articulate within the rational ordering of assignments and curricula. A student’s struggle to maintain ego-stability in the learning process is, as Sharon Todd (2001) notes, a continual process that sometimes leaves a student with the feeling that they’ll never be the same again. The ego is not never fully formed, the subject’s lack is never filled, therefore “the ego is continually vulnerable to the potentiality of violence, to the recurrence of learning to become” (Todd, 2001, p. 433), a reality that reinforces the ethical aspects of teaching and learning [italics added].

As Todd (2001) explains, neither students nor their teachers can predict exactly what may be of personal significance in a course, or what kinds of evocations, resonances, or disturbances might result in the context of a course or an assignment. Both students and teachers make use of the curriculum in highly individualized ways, while at the same time affecting one another through the intersubjective resonance of classroom
interactions and in relation to the production and assessment of coursework. Further, both students and teachers gravitate toward or resist bit and pieces of the learning event in the service of their personal “hidden projects of unconscious desire” (Todd, 2001, p. 346). In short, people bring a host of idiosyncrasies and unconscious associations that enable them to resist, transform and create symbolic attachments which pedagogy cannot predict or control” (Todd, 2001, p. 346).

**Evocation and Resonance: The Affective Nature of Critical Consciousness**

Along with subjectivity, and critical consciousness, the concepts of resonance and evocation are key issues in this research of students’ television criticism writing processes. Although each of these concepts can be quite slippery and nebulous in signification and definition as well as perception, they are real phenomena of lived experience. In their interrelationship, they are capable of creating the sort of affective charge that makes some teaching and learning experiences so memorable and transformative, either positively or negatively. It is the aim of this research to explore the slippery, unruly evocation and resonance of writing endeavors which position students’ and instructor subjectivities within desires for critical consciousness. In short, this study of students’ criticism writing in the *Criticizing Television* course ventures into uncharted territories—those places of uncertainty and instability that are so difficult to translate into course objectives and assignment rubrics. In the process of exploring the territories, this case study looks to the distinctive arrangements and interactions of student and instructor subjectivities as they emerge within an art education disciplinary context and as they become visible through the psychoanalytic methodological framework used in this research.
Referring to postmodern ethnographic research as an *evocative discourse*, anthropologist Steven A. Tyler (1986) makes a distinction between acts of representation and the phenomenon of evocation which, instead of fusing meaning tightly to a signifier, points or gestures toward an understanding. In describing evocation, Tyler explains:

Because its meaning is not in it but in an understanding, of which it is only a consumed fragment, it is no longer cursed with the task of representation. The key word in understanding this difference is “evoke,” for if a discourse can be said to “evoke,” than it need not represent what it evokes, though it may be a means to a representation. Since evocation is non representational, it is not to be understood as a sign function, for it is not a “symbol of,” nor does it “symbolize” what it evokes…It is not a presence that calls into being something that was absent; it is a coming to be of what was neither present nor absent…(Tyler, 1986, p. 129-130)

Evocation, then, does not contain a particular meaning, nor does it bind meaning to signifiers. Instead, evocation is a gesturing toward the ineffable, “a coming to be of what was neither present nor absent” and a way of “making present what can be conceived but not presented” (Tyler, 1986, p. 123).

Tyler’s conceptualization of evocation describes not only my experience with the study and its data, but also my experience of conceptualizing and articulating the research. While evocation and resonance are not overtly visible in my interactions with the research data, these affects are nonetheless very real, emerging as feelings of empathy and rapport, intuitions and enthusiasm, withdrawals and resistances, as I interact with the study participants and their writings. An intersubjective phenomenon, evocation and
resonance are implicated in what and how participants reveal of themselves in their writing, and also impact the way in which I consciously and unconsciously perceive and respond to these revelations. The collisions and collusions of students’ writings and my responses to them are conceptualized in the study as dynamic relational spaces that originate in conscious and unconscious efforts to render the world visible for self and others. Inscribed in a criticism text’s repetitions, disruptions, and affective resonances, the invisible practices of the unconscious and the hidden structures of relational spaces leave traces throughout the writing created in the course and in the texts generated through the case study.

Scope and Limitations of the Study: Reflection and the I/Eye

Explaining the scope and limitations of a research project is a crucial step in the process of developing and defining a study’s focus, direction, and implications for a particular context or audience. In the case of this study of students’ writing in the Criticizing Television course, a psychoanalytically informed theoretical perspective serves as the primary methodology, a choice which has complicated some of the traditional organizational concepts and representation strategies found in the majority of qualitative research texts. The concepts of scope and limitations, as strategies for shaping and defining the study have both conceptual and tangible threads which contribute to, and embody, the complexity of generating, naming, and interacting with the data of this study.

Many studies, qualitative or quantitative, place a great deal of emphasis on results; often, there is an implicit expectation that research should show and tell us something. Method, procedures, and analyses are a means of creating a textual, visual, or
performative expression of a phenomenon. The goal of a study may be to question, extend, refute, create, or even disrupt knowledge and experience. Research, then, is assumed to be an activity that produces something, even if that phenomenon negates existing knowledge or results in phenomena that elude quantification. This case study of student writing in the *Criticizing Television* course does produce a result, however, the result is a phenomenon which is not quantifiable in a positivistic sense. Specifically, I believe the result of this study is a circuit of reflexivity that resonates with the gaps, absences, and lack both within the phenomenon being researched and within the subjects who encounter this research. In other words, this case study produces a relationship between reader and text, an effect or residue of subjectivities within a particularized context. Thus, in a conceptual and theoretical sense, the scope and limitations of this study are produced through the enmeshment of writer and reader subjectivities.

This discussion of the conceptual scope and limitations of this case study is intended to provide a milieu for an expanded consideration of the purpose and effects of this study. Here, I am advancing the idea that research scope and limitations may not only refer to the tangible, expressible parameters of a study (size of its participant population, focus of topic, intended effects, etc.), but may also refer to the non-representational and unconscious qualities of a study. Finally, consideration of the conceptual and unconscious nature of a study’s scope and limitations provides a foundation for a key issue in this research’s purpose and data analysis: the issue of interpretation and its relation to a Lacanian psychoanalytic method. Following from Shoshana Felman's (1987) discussion of Jacques Lacan’s revolutionary potential for psychoanalysis, I offer that this case study of student writing in the *Criticizing Television* course is less concerned with
production of quantifiable data results than it is with the exemplification of a particular way of reading. As Felman explains, Lacan’s significant contribution in psychoanalysis is his reminder that psychoanalysis, a mode of reading and interacting with the world, reenacts a “constant revolution in the most basic human questions:

*What does it mean to be human?*

*What does it mean to think? and consequently,*

*What does it mean to be contemporary?* (1987, p. 9)

Felman argues that reading the work of Lacan is to enact, or embody, a revolutionary interpretive stance, one which constantly puts into effect, or creates, an excess on one level which provokes constant analysis on another level. Put another way, Felman’s studies of Lacan are an example of an interminable reading, an interpretive reading which emphasizes re-reading. In a psychoanalytic reading, the experience of insight does not mean that an illuminative frame is locked firmly in place to explain a phenomenon, rather, the feeling that one has captured meaning is to experience where meaning is not. Knowledge, insight, meaning are, in Felman’s arguments, and in the context of this study, re-readings which are interminable in scope and limitations (Felman, 1987, 1997). This is a case study wherein a final word cannot be said (Felman, 1987).

*(Literal) Parameters of the Study: Complicating the Conceptual Scope and Limitations of the Case*

In addition to the conceptual implications that influence the scope and limitations of the study, this case does employ tangible concepts, boundaries, and parameters to parse out the shape and texture of a particular problem. The research is prompted by my
experience of teaching a writing-intensive art education course on the topic of television criticism to undergraduate students at a large Midwestern university. The case study encompasses data generated through participant interviews and textual data from students’ completed course writing assignments, the instructor’s assignment feedback texts, the instructor/researcher’s reflexive teaching journal, and review of published research literature from the disciplines of art education, English and composition studies, writing across the curriculum (WAC), and from the topic area of psychoanalytic theory in education and social science research.

The study’s participant population is drawn from the comprehensive pool of undergraduate students who completed my section of the Criticizing Television course, during the time period of 2005 through 2009. Additionally, the case study includes analysis of a range of published journals and texts in the art education literature from 1950 to the present; a range of published journals and texts from English, writing across the curriculum [WAC], and composition studies from 1960 to the present. Other textual data include the researcher’s/instructor’s journals and student essays created for a postmodernist critical essay project and a final critical essay assignment. Rounding out the textual data are the content of E-mail interviews with two former students and an online questionnaire distributed to all former students of the course. The students’ texts and student research participants were selected using a purposive, theoretical sampling strategy; the E-mail interview and online survey participation was self-selected, that is, former students were made aware of the study through an E-Mail announcement and had the option to participate in the anonymous online survey an/or volunteer to participate in an E-mail interview. Although this research is focused on adult learners in a college-level
course, this study may hold relevance for other age groups and learning situations due to its interdisciplinary connections linking issues of epistemology, subjectivity, writing, and critical responses to visual culture experiences.

The scope of the research participant population and data involve a relatively small group of examples. Given the focus on the affective, evocative qualities of writing critical responses to television, I worked inductively to limit the data pool to a select group of participants and texts. These data were generated though writing, reading, and drawing inquiries, captured in my research journal. Focusing on nuances of evocation and affect in participants’ perceptions and representations of their experiences of writing in the Criticizing Television course, I began to feel out the contours and edges of this project. Two in-depth interviews, online survey responses, twenty-three writing assignments, seventy-eight pages of my research and teaching journal, and research literature from three separate disciplines were analyzed collectively and recursively over a period of two years. Winnowing and refining the data meant omitting a variety of potential themes and possible directions for this research. These paths not taken hold promise for future research. For the present project, however, an abundance of data crystallizations and thickly interpretive layers of analysis led to the emergence of evocative vignettes. Sharply resonant, sometimes to the point of confusion and discomfort, these vignettes, are the result of repeated readings and re-readings, writings and revisions, a process of interminable recursivity (Felman, 1987, 1997) that attended to the intuitive (Crociani-Windland, 2009), impressionistic (Van Manen, 1988), and evocative (Tyler, 1986) qualities of the textual data, as well as the presence of these qualities in the research activities and artifacts.
Conclusion: Why is Criticizing Television a Compelling Research Case?

The curriculum of *Criticizing Television*, conceptualized as a criticism writing course dealing with a popular culture phenomenon, draws upon familiar discourses within the discipline of art education: art criticism pedagogies and visual culture studies. While creating *Criticizing Television* I discovered many tacit as well as overt assumptions and traditions within the discourses of art criticism and visual culture studies that didn’t mesh together comfortably when it came to the task of designing a socially conscious curriculum for critical writing processes. For example, visual culture discourse had sensitized me to issues of power and agency and their effects upon subjectivities in relationship to visual imagery and experiences (Barrett, 2003b; Duncum, 2004; Eisenhauer, 2006; Tavin, 2003). However, art criticism models from the past and present (Barrett, 2003; Cromer, 1990; Duncum, 1994; Hamblen, 1984a; 1986; Feinstein, 1983, 1984, 1989; Feldman, 1967, 1973/1988; Geahigan, 1980, 1996, 1999) offered little in the way of decisive statements on subjectivity and its implications for the social and political effects of written critique. I found the unresolved stances on subjectivity in art criticism to be problematic, and a provocative issue for research. I believe that the social and political implications of critique are of vital concern for subjectivity when criticism is directed not toward an art object which may be distanced from one’s lifeworld, but instead toward conditions or objects that intimately constitute one’s lifeworld.

As I learned through my experiences with the *Criticizing Television* course, a discipline’s tacit epistemological and ontological assumptions about pedagogies can exert powerful influences on the ways in which curriculum is created, resulting in intended as well as unintended effects for both teachers and students (Carter, 2007). These
unintended consequences often exist unnoticed in the present, yet may be discerned through analysis when pedagogies are placed in deconstructive dialogues with life experiences and disciplinary texts. Over twenty-five years ago, composition theorist James Berlin expressed concern about the unexamined pedagogical strategies that position the teaching of writing as a largely “mechanical skill,” or “instrumental task” (1982, p. 766). Further, Berlin points out that, “in teaching writing, we are tacitly teaching a version of reality and the student’s place and mode of operation within it” (1982, p. 766). Following from Berlin’s observations and my own experience of teaching the course, I’ve concluded that the Criticizing Television students’ writing processes are inevitably intertwined with my, as well as the art education discipline’s, “realities,” thus necessitating pedagogies that prioritize reflexivity. In agreement, composition and rhetoric scholar, Anne Ruggles Gere (2001, p. 219) believes there is the potential for a “colonization” of students’ writings when writing pedagogies are not reflexively considered. She draws from the work of composition theorist Lad Tobin in her advocacy for a “theory of reading student texts which takes into account our reading of the students themselves, of our own unconscious motivations and associations, and of the dialectical nature of the teacher-student relationship” (Gere, 2001, p. 219).

Another composition scholar, Melissa Goldthwaite (2003), voices concerns about the power dynamics that surround personal writing assignments in academic settings. Specifically, Goldthwaite questions the confessional impulse in some forms of academic writing. Drawing upon Foucauldian theory, she speculates about the source of teachers’ desire for students to enfold personal disclosure into their academic texts:

The practice of writing about the self in college composition might be viewed as
part of a much larger technology of confession for the production of truth in Western societies—witness Foucault's description of the frequency of confession in legal, medical, and educational practice as well as in family and love relations and even in popular media. Foucault argues that this production of truth is deeply embedded within relations of power where teachers are receivers of confessions as part of the institutional exercise of power. (Goldthwaite, 2003, p. 67)

Goldthwaite believes that students are capable of examining the social forces that construct the rhetoric of their texts. She points out that qualities such as “focus, shape, language, and purpose” of a text can and must be taught (2003, p. 67). I concur with Goldthwaite, believing that reflexive considerations within visual culture must be extended to the rhetorical constructions of language—especially as the ubiquity of software tools and of Internet access drive the creation and publishing of texts (in all their multimodal forms) more deeply into the experiences and belief systems of societies.

Also at issue in the composition of criticism writing is the complicated encounter of students’ experiential and spectatorial pleasures within their visual culture experiences and the distancing and mediating languages of critical perspectives. Composition and rhetoric scholar Winifred Wood (1996), explains her ambivalence about this language encounter:

In taking on the task of teaching these mediating languages, we often forget the extent to which they are also distancing languages, languages that separate students from their own experiences. It is a difficult line to negotiate, the line between the comfortable language of experience and the cool objective language of academic inquiry. (p. 284)
Like Wood, I’ve observed students struggle with the negotiations of academic and personal discourses as they form their critical analyses. Students exclaim in wonder, or groan and sigh in frustration, at their emergent critical consciousness about television, often claiming, “I’ll never watch TV the same way again!” Although I taught the Criticizing Television course for several years and heard statements such as this many time, I’ve never completely come to terms with my feelings about students’ admissions of their newly acquired critical consciousness. The development and expression of critical awareness both fascinates and troubles me in ways that thus far have been difficult for me to articulate. Also, in concurrence with Wood’s discoveries, I’ve realized I’m less interested in a student’s movement from being a visual culture spectator or participant to cultural critic than in the multiple ways the positionalities of spectator and critic “work to inform and interanimate each other” (Wood, 1996, p. 282). Wood’s questions about the transition from spectator to critic served as a thought provoking heuristic as I developed progressively focused questions for the case study data:

What are the particular maneuvers students make as they encounter and attempt to absorb the languages of the academy? What elements of their prior writerly identities exist? In what ways do they express and make use of their inevitable resistance? How do their languages and (the academy’s) meet, intersect, and overlap…? (Wood, 1996, p. 282)

While a useful beginning, Wood’s questions do not address the complexities inherent in framing discourses as oppositional. For example, by assuming that spectator language operates in opposition to critic language—and looking to students to tell us (the academy) where these discourses collide and resist, teachers may unknowingly be
reinforcing the oppositions that education aims to soften. Additionally, Wood’s questions do not delve deeply enough into the complexities of how the discourses identified as student/spectator and academy are embodied in the material practices and assumptions operating both within and outside of universities. On the other hand, the discursive formations of academic writing discourses have drawn the attention of composition and rhetoric scholars who clearly identify the ways in which academic discourse is “aligned with middle class in structure/style, and values” (LeCourt, 2006, p. 30). Further, these scholars have solidified their identification of the middle class values of composition through analyses of the structure and content of expository essays, claiming, for example, that the ways in which traditional expository writing is taught reinforce or reflect middle class values of time, thrift, and delayed gratification (Bloom, 1996).

Organization of the Dissertation

This study addresses a need in art education for an approach to criticism of visual culture which recognizes the subtle, fluid shifts of experience and perception that may develop into a motivated, personalized, and deeply engaged critical consciousness which has potential to carry on beyond the time and space boundaries of the classroom. With a focus on criticism writing assignments, the study identifies ways of working productively with the complicated and often contradictory subject positions taken up in relation to experiencing, and writing critically about, television phenomena.

Following Chapter Two, Literature Review, a series of Methodology chapters build upon the issues discussed in this introduction:

Chapter Three, To Construct a Methodology, is the first in the Methodology series, providing a discussion of the psychoanalytically informed methodology used in the
research. Next, Chapter Four, *Wording the Impasse*, details the case study’s methods; and, Chapter Five, *Peripheral Vision*, offers a methodological interaction among psychoanalytic theory and the data of the study. Chapters Six, Seven, and Eight address contextualizing theory topics for this case: *The Social Construction of Writing Subjects in Art Education; Television as Visual Culture Phenomenon*, and, *Theorizing Writing, Subjectivity, and Television Within the Context of the Course’s Development*. Finally, Chapter Nine, *(Against) Conclusion: Pedagogy of the Impossible*, summarizes the experiences of the study and the implications for art education practices while suggesting directions for future research. A comprehensive list of references in Chapter Ten is followed by Appendices containing IRB consent forms and related documentation.
CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Introduction

The case study of television criticism writing in an undergraduate art education course originates in my efforts understand the goals and value of written expressions within art education. The effort to understand took on greater urgency given that the television criticism course is created and responds to the visual culture studies context of contemporary art education. Traditional art criticism methods, which dominate art education literature, theory, and classroom practices offered no clear grasp of the role of subjectivity and its profound effect upon critical response to an art experience. The structure of description, interpretation, judgment draws from the subject’s intersubjective encounter with the artwork, but missing is reflexive acknowledgement of those feelings within the critical response that escape words—the affective resonance—which is a crucial, formative aspect of any symbolic representation of lifeworld experience. Because the Criticizing Television course is conceptualized to facilitate critical reflection of television and perceptions of social diversity in the US, the issues of became even more of a focal issue for me.
Rationale For the Study

This study was prompted by my perception of a disconnect between the conceptualizations of artwriting and criticism writing in art education pedagogies and the possibilities for writing that could be conceptualized through visual culture studies. To explore this issue, the research seeks to develop a fine-grained view of the relationships among subjectivity, critical consciousness, and writing processes in the *Criticizing Television* course. In addition, the study looks to students’ critical writing processes and artifacts in the *Criticizing Television* course to determine how this writing might relate to, diverge from, or bring new awarenesses to established criticism writing practices in art education. Lastly, this research contextualizes the above issues within visual culture discourse in art education, and, in the process, brings relevant research in composition studies and psychoanalysis to inform and extend art education discourse on writing and critical consciousness in visual culture pedagogy.

Literature Review Method: Content Analysis

In this study, content analysis of research literature is undertaken with the following questions:

- What are the implicit and explicit models and expectations for the form and content (genre) of particular types of texts in art education?
- What are dominant keywords, patterns, and themes in art education literature regarding written criticism?
- How is subjectivity theorized and prioritized in art education literature on art criticism pedagogies?
- Are there patterns and themes in the discipline of composition studies that
intersect with art education’s concerns about visual culture pedagogies?

Content analysis, first widely used by communications scholars in the 1950’s, refers to the process of “identifying, quantifying, and analyzing of specific words, phrases, concepts, or other observable semantic data in a text or body of texts with the aim of uncovering some underlying thematic or rhetorical pattern running through these texts” (Huckin, 2004, p. 14). Researchers in the discipline of information sciences, Marilyn White & Emily Marsh (2006) describe content analysis as a method for making replicable and valid inferences from texts” (p. 23), noting that inference is particularly important to this research technique. They explain that a researcher can perform content analysis by using “analytical constructs, or rules of inference,” to draw “conclusions from one independent domain (the texts) to the other (the context)” (2006, p. 24). Importantly, analytic constructs are not explicit; a researcher must arrive at the analytic constructs that will best serve her research interests by consulting “(1) existing theories or practices; (2) the experience or knowledge of experts; and (3) previous research” (p. 24). The inductive process of qualitative content analysis flows from foreshadowing, or open, questions that guide the research and influence the data that are gathered. White & Marsh outline basic procedures of qualitative content analysis, noting that once researchers have selected the text they believe to be most relevant to their study, they usually:

- unitize text, in the sense of distinguishing words or propositions and using quotes or examples;
- contextualize what they are reading in light of what they know about the circumstances surrounding the text; and have specific research questions in mind.
However, although researchers keep their research problem and their specific foreshadowing questions in mind, these questions are inductively pursued within the text using an iterative process that consists of the researcher first scanning the entire corpus to get a sense of the big picture, then noting key phrases and ideas. White & Marsh (2006) observe that, in comparing the content analysis with the other study methods and by re-reading the corpus of text, the researcher may discover emergent “ideas, alternative perspectives, oppositional writings, and/or different uses of the texts, perhaps by different groups” (p. 37).

The content analysis of the art education literature revealed that student writing is an under-researched area. Perhaps because art educators are not usually expected to be writing instructors, there are few studies in art education that specifically address writing theory and practice, especially within the context of visual culture studies. Although writing does receive attention in the art education literature, the focus on writing itself is often secondary, usually serving to illuminate a primary issue such as art criticism in classrooms (Anderson, 1988, 1993; Barrett, 1991, 1994, 2000a, 2000b; Duncum, 1994; Geahigan, 1980, 1996, 2002; Hamblen, 1986; Johnson & Cooper, 1994), computer hypertexts visual culture (Kiefer-Boyd, 1997; Taylor, 2000, 2004; Taylor & Carpenter, 2002), or art history (Efland, 1990; Freedman, 1991). A notable exception is the focus in recent years on writing in relationship to arts-based research methodologies in art education (Chalmers, Eisner, 1997; Springgay, 2005a, 2005b; Stout, 2007a, 2007b). Silence on the topic of student writing in art education is surprising, given the evidence that art education scholars have, over the years, initiated insightful
conversations about the complexities of language (Eisenhauer, 2006a, 2006b; Springgay, 2005a, 2005b) in relation to contemporary art practices and pedagogical practices. Sydney Walker’s case study of graduate and undergraduate students’ art criticism interpretation processes (1996) and work with poststructuralist approaches to art criticism (1997) offer compelling data that support the need for a language focused and critical discourse aware approach to art criticism. Relatedly, Jane Gooding-Brown’s (1997, 2000) research on a “disruptive model of interpretation” for art criticism proposes that art criticism would benefit from poststructuralist critical processes that foreground reflective and reflexive practices. Uniting the work of Springgay, Eisenhauer, Gooding Brown, and Walker is an acknowledgement of the complexity of writing and speaking about art and visual culture. Words are not innocent or neutral containers of meaning. Thus, in the art education classroom, the language used to represent experiences with visual phenomena is just as complex and contested, in terms of its communicative and ideological properties, as the images being analyzed.

My discoveries within the art education literature took on new significance in light of my encounters with recent literature on art criticism in disciplines surrounding and intersecting with the field of art education. This literature on art criticism raises questions about the methodologies and postmodernist theoretical perspectives of “new art criticism” (Smagula, 1991), as well as questions about the practice, meaning, and function of criticism in the contemporary world (Butt, 2005; Princenthal, 2006; Rogoff, 2005; Round table, 2002). Jeff Jarvis (2006), professor of interactive journalism and new media analyst/author, surveys the landscape of the Internet, finding a criticism context wherein texts, authors, audiences, and textual production are marked by slippage,
fragmentation, and interactivity. He observes: “Just as the public and critics have a new
timeless relationship thanks to the Internet, so may artists and their audiences alter roles” (Jarvis,
2006, para. 8). Jarvis acknowledges the creative potential of audiences, potential that has transformed viewers into creators, receivers into producers, passive audiences into
participants, asking (2006, para. 8), “(W)hat happens when the public, so quickly
promoted from audience to critic, can now become participants in creation?”

**Criticism Writing Within and Around Art Education**

The focal issue of criticism writing in this case study was identified through my experiences of developing and teaching *Criticizing Television*, and an examination of art
education literature in the areas of art criticism and critical consciousness in visual
culture studies pointed to a need for research which looks specifically at student writing occurring in contemporary art education contexts. While art criticism writing practices within art education have intersected with visual culture informed pedagogies during recent years (Barrett, 2003a, 2003b), the topic of student critical writing pedagogy as it relates to visual culture objects and experiences within students’ lifeworlds has not received sustained or focal consideration in art education. Moreover, as I studied literature dealing with writing processes in artifacts in art education, I noticed that the issue of subjectivity is often slippery and unresolved in both art criticism literature and visual culture literature. Art criticism’s close ties with aesthetic theories (Hamblen,
1984a, 1986), lack of unified stance on procedures and objectives in its classroom applications (Duncum, 1994), and uneven attention to the socio-economic backgrounds of students (Hamblen, 1986) have contributed to hazy, and sometimes contradictory, positions on subjectivity in art criticism responses. On the other hand, visual culture’s
roots in cultural studies (Duncum, 2003) and its appropriations from anthropology and the humanities (Bauerlein, 2004) do bring attention to the subject’s role in a visual culture experience.

Although writing pedagogies are not represented specifically in art education research of visual culture, writing in general, especially as it relates to developments and refinements in art criticism has been of interest to art educators over the years. For example, Barrett (2000) has advocated for relationships between personal and communal art interpretations and for multiple interpretations that can exist alongside one another; Garber (1990) introduced a feminist criticism paradigm for writing art criticism; and Stout (1999) offered a criticism writing model that builds appreciation through the use of artists’ original writings. Problematically however, the discipline of art education has yet to establish a dialogue on the ways in which we might understand the ideological underpinnings and pedagogical consequences of written critical responses to visual culture.

Like image creation processes and images themselves, writing processes and textual artifacts are sites of authority and agency within visual culture. Going further, researchers of student writing posit that “(w)riters ‘perform’ social identities through writing” (CSTW Second Level Writing Handbook, n.d., p. 4). These performances may be as overt and visible as the visual rhetorical features of a text’s typeface and page layout (Bernhardt, 1986/2004; George, 2002; Hill, 2003/2004; Stroupe, 2000/2004; Wysocki, 2004b), or as covert and silent as a writing assignment structure designed to elicit particular forms and themes of student writing (LeCourt, 2006). I maintain that considerations of power and authority of textual practices and artifacts texts are
especially valid in educational contexts wherein students are expected to identify, interpret, and express their subjective, lifeworld investments in visual culture phenomena. Specifically, I believe it is vital to study how the writing that students create in response to television fits within critical pedagogy goals of visual culture studies in art education (Duncum, 2002, 2003, 2004; Freedman, 2003b; Freedman & Stuhr, 2004; Tavin, 2003, 2005a, 2005b). A study of students’ criticism writing in *Criticizing Television* will begin to foreground writing processes and artifacts and their connections to ideologies and expression of subjectivities.

The rhetorical or persuasive power of font designs and typeface arrangements, textual genre structures and conventions, and tacit beliefs about reading and writing within discourses (Kress, 2005; Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996; Wysocki, 2004a, 2004b; Westbrook, 2006) are seldom engaged in art education’s considerations of students’ responses to visual culture. Also pertinent is the need for a stronger grasp of the meaning of language’s materiality and its implications for visual culture studies in art education. According to composition and rhetoric scholar David Bleich (2003), “language is material in the sense that it has tangible effects” (p. 469). Moreover, Bleich notes, failure to consider the material effects of language in real world encounters and contexts can be silently deleterious for individuals and groups. Bleich (2003) observes:

The materiality of language suggests that, socially, *language* has been separated from "actualities" and treated as simply as an instrument of reference or conveyance. This approach to language has enabled the continued stable existence of the "intelligentsia," that is, the overwhelmingly unbalanced population of the well-educated. (p. 470)
In addition to the intellectual divide they associate with a container or conveyance view of language, Bleich and other composition and rhetoric scholars (Devitt, Bawarshi, & Reiff, 2003) find that a limited understanding of language’s material effects in a culture constrains understanding of the ways in which patterns of language use correspond to patterns of situated social behaviors. An example of the way in which language becomes enmeshed with material practices and social behavior patterns can be observed in the popular social networking (MySpace, Facebook) and social publishing (blogs, wikis, YouTube) Internet sites which are shaping the ways in which people read and write themselves and others (Ibrahim, 2006).

**Historical Trends in Art Criticism in Art Education**

While past and recent art education literature offers rich, detailed accounts of histories and traditions that have shaped art criticism in art education (Anderson, 1995; Efland, 1990, 1995; Freedman, 1995; Geahigan, 2002; Hamblen, 1995; Lankford, 1984), models and procedures of art criticism (Anderson, 1988, 1991, 1993, 1995; Barrett, 1986, 2000a; Duncum, 1994; Feldman, 1967; Feinstein, 1983, 1984, 1989; Geahigan, 1996, 1999; Hamblen, 1984a, 1986; Wolf & Geahigan, 1997), research of thematic structures of student and professional criticism (Barrett, 1991, 1994; Lee & Barrett, 1991, Walker, 1996), implications of feminist models of art criticism (Garber, 1990; Hagaman, 1990; Stout, 2000), and study of the ways in which practices of art criticism benefit higher order learning (Stout, 1990, 1995) and develop art appreciation (Darby, 1988; Stout, 1999, 1997), more often, it is the content of art criticism, rather than the conditions or contexts of its production, that are addressed in the literature. Specifically, the content of art criticism is addressed in the literature through discussion of various art criticism...
pedagogical models, the structure and aims of which serve the goals and ideals of the particular social, historical context.

In contrast to the literature that addresses the content and schemas of art criticism, I discovered literature relating to contexts and conditions of art criticism in and around considerations of traditional classroom-based art criticism. The issues raised in this literature are of interest to my research because they demonstrate a focused engagement with the conditions of criticism’s production, pointing out distinctions between spoken and written criticism (Murdick & Grinstead, 1992; Wilson, 1986/1988), the linguistic structures of criticism (Geahigan, 1996, 2002), the need for reflexivity regarding art criticism’s sociological underpinnings (Hamblen, 1986), the metacritical potential of “deconstructive art criticism” (Anderson, 1991), the possibilities of structuring art criticism as an interactive hyperdocument (Kiefer-Boyd, 1997), the challenges of teaching art criticism within the context of postmodern theory (Walker, 1997), or criticism’s potential for engaging disruptive interpretations through a poststructuralist theory approach (Gooding-Brown, 2000).

In addition to the various foci of art criticism literature, I detected a continuity in art criticism’s development in art education, and found that social historical context creates a richly informative subtext of art criticism’s development in art education. An example of this unifying thread is identified by art educator Jim Cromer (1990) who attributes criticism’s growth to a philosophy of aesthetics. Cromer traces the origins of art criticism to ancient Greece, describing art criticism as “the storytelling aspect of art and aesthetics” which “transforms visual experience into verbal expressions that can be shared with others” (1990, p. 9). However, even in antiquity, there existed struggle to
reconcile subjective and objective aspects of the art and aesthetics “story,” conflicts that planted seeds for the art criticism models and schemas that have flourished throughout the years and shaped art education’s curriculum.

The 1960’s heralded the child centered movement, and a subject centered approach to curriculum contributed to art education’s disciplinary approach to art criticism (Cromer, 1990). Beginning in the 1960’s and over the next few decades, Edmund Feldman, Eugene Kaelin, David Ecker, Harry Broudy, Ralph Smith, Gene Mittler, Louis Lankford were to develop various models for the systematic production of art criticism. Lankford’s model (1984), however offers the most developed acknowledgement of the role that subjectivity plays in art criticism processes. Positing that situational context, and even a subject’s physical comfort level, contribute to the perception of an artwork, Lankford draws from the phenomenological philosophy of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Lankford’s phenomenological focus acknowledges the importance of viewer reflections which, in being “continuously verified and enriched by immediate perceptions, may extend a viewers experience of that work beyond what is visibly given…but still within a context of relevance” (p. 157). I point to Lankford’s model not only because its attention to subjectivity and context in the production of art criticism distinguishes it from the other schema, but because of its references to “reflection.” Specifically, Lankford’s model of art criticism uses “reflection” as a dialectic between the viewer and the artwork as well as the viewer and her world and in doing so, offers a historically distinctive perspective that prefigures the socio-cultural foundations of visual culture studies. However, Lankford’s model, as well as the other criticism models, does not venture into questions about the critical act itself and does not
problematize assumptions about the objects of criticism or the forms and modes within which criticism is expressed.

**Art Criticism and Visual Culture Studies**

A review of art criticism and visual culture literature reveals that these topics are linked through their relationships with the issue of subjectivity. In art criticism discourses, the implications of the criticism writer’s subjectivity is approached with reservation. With the exception of Barrett (2000b, 2003a, 2006), most who write about art criticism tend not to explicitly broach the validity of personal responses in art criticism activities. Conversely, visual culture discourses demonstrate overt attention to subjectivity and related identity issues. Many enfold questions about individual subjectivity into larger projects of cultural awareness and emancipative pedagogies (Freedman, 2003b; Freedman & Stuhr, 2004), resistance and creativity in relationship to technology (Akins, Check, & Riley, 2004; Darts, 2004; Garoian & Gaudelius, 2001; Lai & Ball, 2004; Springgay, 2005c), and several art educators have explored visual culture and subjectivity through psychoanalytic theory (jagodzinski, 1997a, 1997b, 2004, 2005; Walker, Daiello, Hathaway, and Rhoades, 2006).

Recent art education literature, while not focused specifically on student writing in art education courses does refer to language and writing themes, sometimes directly, other times metaphorically. Directly related to my research interest in the writing processes and textual artifacts in the *Criticizing Television* course is Michael Emme’s (2001) proposal that critical analysis of art should be opened to visual communication. Emme posits that an exclusive reliance on words and numbers in the creation of art criticism constrains expression and agency. Also, Sally Mitchell’s (2001) speculation on
a normative reliance on language to represent experience of the arts raises questions about criticism’s mode of production, particularly whether or not writing practices are necessarily the best, or most valid response to an artwork or art experience. While Emme argues that choosing alternatives to word and number systems of expression is a form of activism that art educators can undertake to contribute new critical practices to the discipline, Mitchell circles and focuses on language, specifically the essay itself, as “figural” or “real” (p. 93). Both Emme and Mitchell understand the metacritical role an essay or written criticism text can assume when the mode and means of production of the writing are drawn into the critical reflection process. Emme’s discussion of criticism as activism and the images of student visual criticism accompanying the article text are a provocative invitation to rethink what we expect of texts and images.

A metaphorical reference to language and writing is found in Kevin Tavin’s (2006) exploration of the antecedents of visual culture. Notably, Tavin characterizes art education as a palimpsest, written and overwritten with ideas, actions, and images that witness the anthropological, cross-cultural, and sociological awarenesses with which past art educators prefigured current ideas about visual and popular culture. Tavin’s palimpsest metaphor brings attention to art education’s dynamic and complex past and present through a focus on writing—its traces, materialities, overdeterminations, and visual qualities; its conterminous resonances and rhizomatic connections between art education theories and practices, both past and present. The premise of the article raises questions about the dense layers of experience, knowledge, and activity that constitute individual and communal life. The palimpsest metaphor creates a vivid, dynamic picture of art education’s richly textured, connective disciplinary identities. As I connect the
ideas in the article with my own knowledge of palimpsests, and think about the appearance, textures, and material practices of forming a palimpsest. I find myself thinking about the ways in which this critically engaged text might be presented differently, perhaps with greater reflexivity about its written form, including its textual design and its organization of ideas. The point of my observation is that academic articles are shaped by their genre, time and place of presentation, and expected audience. My awareness of the performative nature of textual form is sometimes difficult to separate from my reading of texts, and I suspect I am not alone in my awareness. For, just as my own readings of texts are disrupted by awareness of writing’s possibilities for performing otherwise and differently toward varying effects, I hear from students in the *Criticizing Television* course who describe their disruptive experiences with television texts, notably because of their awareness of *You Tube* and its intertextual, creative mash ups of broadcast TV programs. Students have remarked that their experience with the video sharing website You Tube has added a creative dimension to their television viewing and expanded their awareness of the ways in which television texts might be performed differently. Clearly, form matters in the production and reception of texts within visual culture contexts.

An article by Kevin Tavin makes clear the visual, performative nature of text. His (2007) proposal for “striking through” the word aesthetics demonstrates how a word with such heavy ideological baggage might be reconceptualized by altering its visual appearance. As Derrida (1974, 1978, 1981) demonstrated, the visual impact of a strike-through is immediate, and perhaps jolting, in that the word can no longer lie smoothly against all the other words in a text. Tavin’s arguments and the visual impact of their
presentation are a vivid example of the way in which writing and language tend to fade into the background until it is foregrounded through a disruption. Also foregrounding the powerful visual signification of a text’s design is Jan Jagodzinski, whose essay, *The Nostalgia of Art Education: Back to the Future, part 4* (1997b) employs “pastiche type fonts to add a visual dimension to the decentered voices” (p. 157). Jagodzinski’s text, self-described as “puke writing,” violent,” “outrageous,” and “entirely excessive” is meant to “position the reader so as to provoke a strong response” (p. 157).

Related to the text and language issues raised by Tavin and Jagodzinski is Jennifer Eisenhauer’s (2006) discussion of the ways in which languages of bombardment work to construct subjects. In a direct analysis of the role that language plays in visual culture discourse, Eisenhauer argues that describing people as bombarded by visual culture imagery implies that subjects are passive receivers or are acted upon by images. Eisenhauer reviews writing on visual culture in education and observes that repeated references to subjects’ bombardment by media messages creates a “discourse in which the underlying tendency is to maintain passive/active dichotomies between subjects and objects” (2006, p. 156). Eisenhauer’s close attention to the language in which art educators couch their visual culture pedagogies exposes, in poststructuralist fashion, the way in which language inscribes, implicitly and explicitly, normative constructions of subjectivity. Moreover, and in a deconstructionist move, Eisenhauer notes that the discursive position of bombarded subject is funded by visual culture pedagogy’s unspoken assumptions of a coherent, unified, and autonomous humanist subject, a notion that conflicts with the fragmented, decentered subjectivity that many attribute to visual culture imagery.
Eisenhauer’s close reading of art education’s language and identification of repetitions and patterns of word use results in new conceptualizations of, and relationships between subjects and texts of visual culture. As a result of this focus on language, different questions might be asked of visual culture pedagogies. For example, instead of asking how subjects might resist the bombardment of visual culture, in light of the concerns being addressed by my proposed research, we might ask, *in what way does art education’s discourse regarding subjective response to artworks and visual culture set the parameters for, perpetuate, and complicate relationships of subjects and objects in visual culture?* Tavin’s, Eisenhauer’s, and Jagodzinski’s perspectives on the language of visual culture within the discipline of art education bring a necessary critical engagement with the visuality of language. Their work operates at, and unsettles, the margins of the image-centered discourse of visual culture studies.

Also operating at the shifting margins of visual culture studies is theorist Irit Rogoff (2004) who characterizes the field of visual culture as fluid and flexible, constructed of dialogues that increasingly blur boundaries of production and reception of visual culture experiences. Rogoff notes that one of the most interesting aspects of visual culture is that the “boundary lines between making, theorizing and historicizing have been greatly eroded and no longer exist in exclusive distinction from one another. Like Eisenhauer, Rogoff is unperturbed by self-reflexive discourse analysis, viewing questions within and about discursive movements an “opportunity for a bit of self-consciousness and a serious reexamination of the politics inherent in each project of cultural assessment” (2004, p. 388). Rogoff’s self-reflexive dialogue within the processes and languages that constitute visual culture is important to my research in that she avoids
binary oppositions of image and text, choosing instead to conceptualize changes in visual culture’s object of analysis as merely a shifting of ground. In Rogoff’s view, the shifting ground determines a change in the very subject of discussion or analysis, a shift in which the necessity for having the discussion in the first place and for having it in a particular methodological mode and at a particular time become part of this very discussion (2004, p. 388).

Like Rogoff, art educator Brent Wilson (2003) engages reflexively with the terrain and disciplinary boundaries of visual culture in his speculations on the impossibility of mapping the content of art education. By calling attention to the failure of static disciplinary boundaries in a world where information technologies make visual images immediate, accessible, and overwhelming in number, and by proposing a rhizomatic curriculum model that traverses the betwixt and between spaces connecting schools and home, Wilson allows space for the lines of flight and emergent paradigmatic shifting that allow for different questions to be asked of art education—for example, what are art education’s disciplinary expectations of writing as it is employed in the writing activities that we ask our students to use in the construction and demonstration of knowledge? And, how might art educators trouble their assumptions about what writing is expected to do and show in art education’s visual culture pedagogies?

Sydney Walker’s (1996) study of the thinking processes of professional critics and those of students is a rare example of art education research that gives intensive scrutiny to writing. Walker’s study, in drawing comparisons between thinking processes of professional critics and students, brings focus to the ways in which experts and novices organize knowledge. Walker’s analysis of the criticism writings of her student sample
revealed that, not unlike professional critics, the student writers sought thematic unity and used this unity to organize myriad other interpretation strategies. While Walker’s study is limited to student writing developed in response to contemporary artwork, her study’s conclusions hold particular relevance for my case study of visual culture writing. Specifically, Walker concluded that, although students could employ interpretation strategies effectively, “instruction about knowledge organization is crucial for making these strategies most useful for the production of well developed student interpretations” (p. 90). Walker’s conclusion points to the need for reflective practice about the form and construction of knowledge in one’s thinking about art. However, reflective practice about one’s knowledge construction takes on complex dimensions in the visual culture critical process. For example, by turning one’s critical lens away from an artwork, and towards the immersive phenomena of visual culture, critical distance becomes an issue. If realities and subjectivities are understood to be socially constructed, and if the object being analyzed is a television program in one’s home and not a painting in a museum, where and how might one position the self to critically engage with visual culture? Might thematic unity be conceptualized differently, perhaps in a critical pedagogy perspective, as a subjective-relational thematic unity that builds individual and social reflexivity into the critical writing process?

**Summary: Art Criticism, Visual Culture, and Composition Studies**

A review of literature in the topic areas of visual culture and art criticism in art education reveals a lack of research that specifically addresses writing processes occurring in art education courses. Another issue that stands out in this preliminary review of literature is that there is little consensus about, or even focused dialogue on the role,
meaning, and value of art criticism in visual culture studies. Considering the progressive
development of art criticism in responses to the social and historical conditions in art
education, I am left to wonder what art criticism is today, and what it may become. What
is clear from the preliminary literature review, however, is that visual culture is not a
recent development in art education, but is a persistent awareness that, over time, has
been expressed more clearly and more frequently in art education. Art educator Paul
Duncum (2002b) draws upon Laura Chapman’s assertion that connections must be made
between students’ study of imagery and their everyday lives. To this end, Duncum argues
that students must have “space in which to become articulate about their involvement in
visual culture” (2002b, p. 17). This proposed case study operates from positions on visual
culture established by Duncum (2002a, 2002b, 2003, 2004) and others (Duncum &
Moreover, this case study is premised on the belief that writing is a significant space of
expression for students’ articulations about their involvement in visual culture.

The act of identifying writing as a significant space of expression in art education
is not undertaken without careful consideration of the potential implications. As Kerry
Freedman (2003b) has noted, “teaching visual culture involves various types of
postmodern border crossing, from the crossing of conceptual borders to borders of
medium and form” (p. 39) however, Paul Duncum (2002b) raises the question, “(j)ust
how broad is the cannon [sic] to be?” (p. 17). Duncum points to W. J. T. Mitchell’s
prescient observations of the tensions inherent in border crossing, quoting Mitchell’s
comment that “we have both to reckon ‘with those parts of culture that lie outside the
visual, and those parts of the visual that lie outside of culture’” (2002b, p. 17). While I
concur with Freedman about the inevitability of border crossings when teaching visual culture, I believe it is crucial to consider carefully the potential effects of border crossings as the canon of art education stretches and opens up to new objects, media, and experiences. I also believe it vital to examine the border construct itself, evaluating how and why it exists within a particular social and historical context.

This research may be considered a border crossing of sorts, or on the other hand, perhaps it is instead a recognition of a space that has existed all along, hidden in plain site/cite/sight (Jagodzinski, 2002, 2004), within the discipline of art education. While I believe that placing writing within the lens of visual culture studies is both timely and valid, I accept that there will be those who object to adding yet another issue to an already burgeoning and unwieldy canon. However, the ubiquitous presence of writing within the discipline cannot be denied. Turning to composition studies is a logical move for art education to develop an informed understanding of the ways in which writing may be used to amplify understandings of visual culture. Moreover, an informed understanding of the ways in which writing processes shape and constitute subjectivities; mobilize power, authority, and desire; and enable or constrain agency offers art educators the ability to better develop visual culture pedagogies that involve writing practices.

Composition studies and art education have some significant commonalities. In a broad sense, both are involved in the investigation of culture. Moreover, both not only investigate culture, they each place special emphasis on the shaping of one’s expression of the investigation. While art educators have generally focused on artmaking as an expressive form of investigation, composition studies has attended to writing as expressive form of communication. However, the border crossings that Freedman and
others attribute to postmodernism have blurred the distinctions between various forms of expression of meaning. The discipline of composition studies now works with the visual, aural, and interactive qualities of writing in forms such as *multimodal composition* (Duffelmeyer & Ellertson, 2005; New London Group, 1996; Wysocki, 2004b) and the visual, persuasive qualities of text in the sub discipline of *visual rhetoric* (Bernhardt, 1986/2004; Blakesly & Brooke, 2001; George, 2002; Hill, 2003/2004; Porter & Sullivan, 1994/2004; Stroupe, 2000/2004; Westbrook, 2006). Likewise, art education has expanded its own boundaries by recognizing the legitimacy of visual culture studies. At the heart of both disciplines is a concern for sensitive, ethical teaching that empowers and motivates students to become socially aware citizens. Thus, art education and composition studies work in complicated epistemological territories.

Acknowledging this challenging terrain, composition and rhetoric scholar Robert Yagelski (1999) offers,

> because writing as a social, cultural, and individual activity is wrapped up in complicated ways with epistemology and notions of the self, teachers of writing must negotiate some treacherous territory that other teachers may not need to traverse. From a postmodern perspective, we might see the writing teacher as occupying an especially complex and overdetermined ‘subject position’—or set of conflicting subject positions—within specific institutional and cultural context. That subject position gives the teacher a special though often conflicted status. (p. 45)

Yagelski’s observations serve as a touchstone of this study. For, although he is describing the work of a writing teacher, his observations are applicable to any critically engaged art
educator. In fact, Yagelski also points out, in his discussion of writing instruction as critical pedagogy, that critical reflection on pedagogy is vital even when one’s course and teaching seem to be going well and students are responding positively. Similarly, composition scholar Lad Tobin (1991) identifies the need for critical reflection, yet is more specific about how this critique might be engaged. Tobin’s observation about critically engaged teaching points specifically to the teacher-student relationship, thus creating another touchstone statement to guide my proposed case study’s psychoanalytically informed perspectives: “We need to develop a theory of reading student texts which takes into account our reading of the students themselves, of our own unconscious motivations and associations, and, finally, of the interactive and dialectical nature of the teacher-student relationship” (Tobin, 1991, p. 335).

To summarize, art education’s art criticism and visual culture pedagogies demonstrate interests in the role of subjectivity in a critical encounter with an artwork, however each realizes this interest in different ways. While art criticism pedagogies tend not to place focus on the role of subjectivity in the production of art criticism, pedagogies dealing with visual culture often develop from a critical pedagogy framework which positions viewer or audience as an interested, engaged subject working toward critical consciousness. However, neither art criticism discourse nor visual culture discourse offer a theoretically grounded pedagogy for the production of writing within their respective discourse.

By contrast, the discipline of composition studies offers substantial research on the production of writing, including considerations of the ideological underpinnings of choices made in the production and consumption of texts. The creation of a critically
engaged dialogue between visual culture art education discourse and composition studies research offers an intriguing opportunity for developing new insights into students’ written expressions about visual culture.

**Psychoanalytic Theory**

The psychoanalytically informed method that guided the development of the case study methodology has roots in several disciplinary areas, however, the use of psychoanalytic theory in art education was pioneered by Jan Jagodzinski (1997a, 1997b, 1997c). Jagodzinski’s work in curriculum and pedagogy studies (1997d, 2002, 2004a) also overlapped with visual culture issues such as identity (1997d), youth culture and fantasy (2004c), and media studies (2004b, 2008). Sydney Walker’s (2009) psychoanalytically informed research on subjectivity and artists’ practice finds relationships among artmaking, meaning, and the unconscious, while Kevin Tavin’s exploration of aesthetics and desire translates Lacanian theoretical perspectives on the objet a into a political stance on the discourse of aesthetics in art education (2008). These scholars’ studies have not only expanded the possibilities for considerations of subjectivity in art education, they have also provided a foundation for this case study’s psychoanalytically informed perspectives on writing in art education.


Psychoanalytic theory has also informed research methods which focus on the interpretation of texts, language, and voice. For instance, Ian Parker (2005) offers a Lacanian method of discourse analysis for the study of texts, and Carol Gilligan’s *Listening Guide* method (Gilligan, Spencer, Weinberg, & Bertsch, 2003; Sorsoli & Tolman, 2008) is used to read the multiplicities of voice in interviews with adolescent girls about their perceptions of their sexuality. Psychoanalyst Annie Rogers (2006,

Composition scholar Marshall Alcorn (2002) seeks to connect expressive writing and political aspirations of composition through a psychoanalytically informed pedagogy that allows for writers to take on the difficult task of “finding their own conflicting thoughts and take responsibility for these thoughts on paper” (p. 3). Viewing writing as a “mechanism for the circulation of desire through culture” (2002, p. 4), Alcorn’s psychoanalytically informed composition studies would create a form of public discourse that could communicate the influence of desire on personal and communal understandings of self and society. Alcorn insists that teaching politically correct knowledge for the enlightenment of subjects and the abolishment of hegemonic practices is futile in the long term because such “knowledge will always be used in accordance with existing ideologies and their respective desires and identifies” (2002, p. 5). Instead, he believes that, in order to undo repression and false understandings, subjects must learn to identify and relinquish identifications with master discourses that perpetuate hegemonies. Changes in discourse can be effected through “educational processes of identification, symptom formation, and mourning”—“emotional work” that requires of teachers and students “time and patience” (Alcorn, 2002, p. 6).
Conclusion

Like the visual culture phenomena that constitute and position subjectivities, writing, as a visual mode and structure of symbolization, shapes, and is shaped by, subjectivities (Bloom, 1996; Center for the Study and Teaching of Writing, n.d.). Further, texts and writing systems are not only the means by which ideas about visual culture may be represented and communicated, but are visual entities themselves, existing within, as well as extending, complex visual and verbal discursive relationships (Kress, 2003, 2005; Kress, & van Leeuwen, 1996, 2001; Mitchell, 1992). Given the multiple modes within which people express and receive ideas in a digital age, the contexts and modes of a text’s production is a significant aspect of the text’s meaning for both the producer and the receiver (Wysocki, 2004a, 2004b). A psychoanalytically informed perspective on student writing, writing processes, and choices made in modes of text production offers a complex view of the motivations and desires that shape the creation and reception of writing. Moreover, a psychoanalytically informed perspective may produce new insights into subjectivity, agency, positionality, and ideologies, particularly in a world where access to texts and the tools of their production remains unequal (LeCourt, 2006; Rader, 2005).

Finally, while the literature does not evidence substantive efforts to theorize student criticism writing pedagogies in visual culture art education, there are indications that a psychoanalytically informed study of writing pedagogies would fit comfortably within, as well as complicate, existing literature in art education. This case study of student criticism writing in Criticizing Television finds affinities with currently researched writing issues such as language and meaning in the arts and visual culture,
aesthetics and criticism, and research methodologies in art education. Because students’ written responses to visual culture continue to play a powerful role in art education, research on students’ involvement in, and production of, criticism writing in contemporary contexts has the potential to help art educators learn how better to create visual culture art education experiences that have a relevant and vital presence in our postmodern context.
CHAPTER THREE

Writing the Impasse | Inhabiting an Impasse(able) Text:

Theoretical Issues in the Research Methodology

Preface: Almost, Until, and Refusal

Writing is born of gaps and fissures—periods of almost, interminable stretches of until, and sharp pangs of refusal. Writing a coherent pathway into the slippery shapes and bristling textures of data is a process of stretching toward and grasping for coherence in the thickness of so many competing texts. Thus, the writing of this case study can only be an evocative snapshot of shifting relationships and densely layered evocations.

Taking inspiration from Lauren Berlant’s observation about the need for patience in the pursuit of the “distillate that appears as the satisfying object” (2007, p. 437), this case study’s research methodology is founded on the belief that “methodology” and even “data” are but a distillate produced through a particular confluence of phenomena—
context, participant and researcher subjectivity, and the unconscious—and the recognition of this distillate is a matter of time, patience, and reflexivity.

Emerging from an evolving, reflexive process of seeking, naming, exploring and problematizing the data of this study, this chapter is a writerly text of induction and intuition, grounded in the data, grounded in my subjectivity, and articulated through my own subjective retrospection and deferred awarenesses. Like all efforts toward naming and interpreting lived experience, this methodology is partial, interested, and unfinished.

**Introduction**

> I am a chair and two apples. And I don’t add up.

~Clarice Lispector, 1989

The psychoanalytically informed methodology of this qualitative, interpretive case study originates within an impasse. That is, the development and articulation of the study’s methodological rationale, even my conceptualization of “data” are the result of my experience of resistance, denial, tension, and ambivalence in working with and around the student writings that inspired this study. The confounding entwinement of writing, subjectivity, and data that I experienced in developing this study is expressed by Norman Denzin (2008):

> (A)s a writer you are deeply implicated in what you are writing and it is an unstable position, and your methodology is not neutral, but rather, it is constitutive of the very thing you are writing about. So this raises the issue of how do we rearticulate ourselves to the empirical world? And where do we go? (pp. 268)

Indeed, where do we go from here? This chapter begins to address this question through
explication and discussion of the methodological perspectives used in the development of this case study.

My intent in this study is not to use a psychoanalytically informed methodology for the purpose of discovering the true meanings behind students’ choices in writing television criticism. In fact, one of Lacan's contributions to psychoanalysis was to place a question mark over the notion of truth or the interpretation of human motivation. Instead of truth-seeking, Lacan's methodology is directed toward learning, that is, a definition of learning as exploration of the existential problem of self-knowledge and the unconscious, repressive forces that thwart it.

**Resisting Psychoanalysis: A Rationale for a Psycho-Social Research Methodology and Psychoanalytically Informed Research Methods**

Researcher of psychology Wendy Hollway makes an important distinction between the use of psychoanalysis to analyze people and employing psychoanalysis to inform the methodology of a qualitative study. In recent years, Hollway (2009) and others use the term “psycho-social” (Clarke, 2006; Clarke & Hoggett, 2009; Hoggett, Beedell, Jimenez, Mayo, & Miller, 2010) or “psychosocial” (Froggett & Hollway, 2010; Hook, 2008; Parker, 2010) to denote an application of psychoanalytic theory that emphasizes the pursuit of an “understanding of the workings of the psyche and the social without reducing one to the other” (Hollway, 2009, p. 461). This nuanced approach to translating psychoanalytic theory into research methodology is further refined through yet another distinction: the use of the phrase “psychoanalytically informed methods” rather than “psychoanalytic methods.” Hollway refers to this approach as a “psychoanalytic sensibility” (2009, p. 463), thus placing a frame of scrutiny around the researcher’s
perspective. Hollway’s conceptualization of psychoanalytic sensibility offers a vital point of reference for my research, a necessary caveat for a researcher’s interactions with participants and data. As Hollway (2009) explains, having a psychoanalytic sensibility means that a researcher must always be prepared to rework the knowledge bases and assumptions that they bring to their interactions with research participants.

Theorizing further the psycho-social, psychoanalytically informed perspectives that frame a research endeavor bring attention to the researcher’s goals. A researcher who works in a psychoanalytically informed manner will attend to the relationships and associations among ideas in a study, rather than pinpoint meanings in an individual’s words and word clusters. This holistic sense of a study’s participants and data acknowledges the importance of not placing all of one’s interpretive schema in one basket, so to speak. That is, if psychoanalysis works from the assumption that a participant’s unconscious subjectivity will prevent them from being transparent to themselves, then a researcher must employ an approach that spreads the focus out from the individual herself to incorporate other sources of experience.

In summary, if psychoanalysis is selected to theorize educational practice, or conduct research of education, it can do so only by adjusting expectations of both psychoanalysis and education, where knowledge is concerned. Psychoanalytically informed methodologies are not productive, in the typical sense of educational productivity which tends to prioritize measurable learning outcomes. Instead, psychoanalytically informed methodologies create impasses of understanding by dismantling taken for granted assumptions about “what it means to know” (Felman,
In summary, a psychoanalytically informed methodology in research and in education is concerned less with results than with process.

The (Impossible) Sum of a Subject

Clarice Lispector’s words at the chapter’s opening are a subtext for the complexities of this discussion, which revolve around the problematics of methodology, in general. The problem, in brief, is: how can methodology be used in the service of both guiding and disrupting an inquiry? Lispector observes: “I am a chair and two apples. And I don’t add up.” As I view it, the idea of “adding up” is a matter of seeking holistic unity and coherence through the assemblage of disparate parts. Coherence, specifically that which constitutes subjectivity, is defined here as the perception of one’s self as a unified, bounded ego that is recognizable to the self and to others. As a form of self-expression, writing is a method of constructing and conveying coherence. In the context of writing a critical essay, what can be learned from the desire to express coherent meanings in a text? In the context of research, what might be learned from the felt difficulties of locating coherent meanings in the texts of a study? In seeking to answer these questions through my study’s data, I found myself at a methodological impasse. The data of this case study were, to me, an impossible text—one whose coherence unraveled in the very process of its coming together. The impossible sum of two apples and a chair.

Methodological impasses can be traced to the indeterminacies of subjectivity. However, the particular impasse experienced in this case study originates in my desire for the comfort and stability of a familiar language, while at the same time, my longing for a failure of language. Thus, this methodology chapter responds to the question of how to proceed in the context of uncertainty and fallibility; how to proceed when data,
subjectivity, and desire don’t add up. As one of three chapters devoted to the methodological issues of this case study, this chapter attends specifically to the theoretical issues underpinning the case study and its methodology. The next chapter, Wording the Impasse: Exploration and Explication of Research Methods, discusses the methods with which the case study’s data and data interactions are conceptualized and explored. Lastly, the final methodology chapter, Peripheral Vision and the Impasse(able) Text: Imagining and Interacting With Data presents data interactions and discussion of their implications.

In the sections below, I describe the conceptual framework of the methodological impasse, and establish its relationship to writing, subjectivity, and Lacanian theoretical perspectives. Like a figure-ground relationship structuring the visual composition of a painting, the impasse methodology conceptualized here is an impressionistic view of this study’s theoretical and experiential intersections within the larger, overlapping contexts of qualitative research and psychoanalytic studies. This chapter cannot be a definitive or static picture of methodology, but is conceptualized as a confluence of interpretive evocations, inclusive openings, and generative positionings that create a substrate for methodologies to come. Methodologies that, in their efforts to feel out and name the contours of their limitations, embody the complexities of human experience.

Lacanian psychoanalytic theory is chosen for the development of this study because it has the potential to facilitate a richer, more complex understanding of subjectivity and lived experiences of writing than sociocultural theories alone. Lacanian theory looks to the irrational, unconscious, inexpressible nature of language (Alcorn, 2002; Bracher, 1994b, 1999, 2002; Parker, 2005; Tobin, 1991). Like poststructuralism,
psychoanalytic theory can be used to explore silences, omissions, and invisibilities in lived experience and discourse. However, while poststructuralism offers a social, contextual view of subjectivity (Grbich, 2004; Lather, 1991, 1992, 1994, 2003; Mazzei, 2007), Lacanian theory deepens an inquiry by considering the ways in which unconscious desires and affective attachments are mobilized throughout culture in the constitution of subjectivities and identities (Brooke, 1987; Crociani-Windland, 2009; Clarke & Hoggett, 2009). In addition, a Lacanian psychoanalytic approach to a study complicates the positionality of those involved with the study. By this, I mean that the participants of my study of student writing in *Criticizing Television* are not necessarily the only subjects of the inquiry. As explained in the previous chapters, subjectivity and identity are interdependent. A subject who speaks and writes does so in relation to an Other with whom there is an unconscious relationship predicated on each person’s desire for recognition. Who, then, in this case study, are the subjects of the research inquiry? I posit that the participants of the study are produced through a conceptual framework and metaphorical space, *I of the text*. As explained in previous chapters, the *I of the text* is not a static entity that holds still for the scrutiny of an analysis. The *I of the text* refers to sites of intersubjectivity evoked through interactions among persons and texts. These sites are marked by multiplicities and potentialities. They are shimmering sites of desire in process.

The shimmering that characterizes the *I of the text* is an effect of desire and drive, specifically the way in which both are implicated in the loss that inaugurates subjectivity. Desire is intimately entwined with the *objet a*, the objects, people, or experiences in the world that a subject is compelled to seek to assuage their unconscious lack.
Paradoxically, the \textit{objet a} is both the lost object and the nature of loss itself (Zizek, 2006), however, even more strange and paradoxical is the subject’s unconscious drive to maintain the loss of the desired object. This dual quality of lack—seeking both fulfillment and frustration is the crux of desire’s transformation into drive. Zizek (2006) explains that, in the case of \textit{objet a} as the object-cause of desire,

we have an object which is originally lost, which coincides with its own loss, which emerges as lost; while in the case of \textit{objet petit a} as object of drive, the ‘object’ is directly loss itself—in the shift from desire to drive, we pass from the lost object to \textit{loss itself as an object}. That is to say: the weird movement called ‘drive’ is not driven by the ‘impossible’ quest for the lost object; it is a \textit{push to enact ‘loss’—the gap, cut, distance—itself directly}. (p. 62, italics in original)

The impasse methodology of this study is an effect, or result of, desire and drive that arise from my own personal investments in this project and the larger disciplinary and socio-historic contexts within which this study occurs. Therefore, I cannot refer to my own desire without acknowledging my complicity with the desires around me which shape my researcher subjectivity.

Complicating my efforts to develop the psychoanalytically informed methodology for this case was my fervent desire to develop an approach to the case’s writing that neither diminished the complexity of the relationships and contexts from which the writing emerged, nor strangled the tenuous evocations of what I perceived as critical consciousness. Two assumptions about writing inhered in my approach. First, I assumed that a psychoanalytic theoretical perspective \textit{could} be pragmatic. That is, the dense and circuitous concepts of Lacanian theory could bring useful insights into writing
and subjectivity in this case. Another assumption was that there was an elusive
\textit{something} that I perceived within students’ critical writing, something that must be
explored in order to help me understand better why writing matters in the development of
critical consciousness. But, what was this significant \textit{something} in the writing?

The identification of what was significant about the writing in this case did not
occur quickly or easily. Naming the ways in which the writing stirred my curiosity,
pricked at my assumptions, and disrupted my sense of certainty about the validity of my
perceptions was a process that unfolded over many months. There were periods of time
when working with the data was a passionate, vibrant, and fertile experience. And, then
came long stretches when the work and my purpose in doing it felt colorless, blurry,
untenable. Over time, my belief that psychoanalytic theory could illuminate
characteristics of critical writing on visual culture was bolstered through locating and
studying the work of scholars who had synthesized, explained, and applied
psychoanalytic theories within the contexts of their own disciplines (Atkinson, 2003;
Briton, 1997; Callard, 2003; Clarke, 2006; Grumet, 1999; Harris, 2001; McGee, 1987;
Rickert, 2007; Thomas, 2007; Wright, 1988, 1999). I also saw psychoanalytically
informed methodologies as a natural fit with interdisciplinary trends in education and the
increasing attention given to personal experiences in visual culture theories. For example,
writing and composition theorist Gregory Ulmer (1987) summarizes Freud’s invention of
psychoanalysis as an interdisciplinary endeavor arising from personal and academic
goals:

Let us think about Freud's invention for a moment. It consists of the
generalization of his peculiar personal, familial circumstances, mediated through
a major work of world literature (Oedipus Rex), into the discourse of medical science. There may be a formula available in this example, joining strong personal, emotional experience, a work of art, and an unsolved problem in a field of knowledge. (pp. 768)

Ulmer’s succinct description of the origin of psychoanalysis illuminated for me the key ingredients comprising my own inquiry. Among the diffuse, peripheral awarenesses, theoretical readings, writing processes, and affective resonances that formed the dense tangle of my experience with this study, a short list of key issues could be identified. These issues informed the development of this case’s methodological structure:

- **Personal, emotional experience**—which refers to the affects that were experienced in relation to the writings of this case (writings created by students and the writings produced through the case study methods);
- **The presence of writing**—a phrase that signifies the processes of writing in a holistic, general sense and the actual writing artifact produced in the endeavor;
- **And, an unsolved problem in a field of knowledge**—which refers to the linchpin issue that motivated this research, of what significance for students and instructor was the criticism writing created in the *Criticizing Television* course?

**The Thickness of So Many Texts: Navigating the Discomfort of Methodology**

The identification of anxiety as an issue of significance for a researcher was emphasized by George Devereux nearly fifty years ago\(^1\). More recently, Wendy

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\(^1\) George Devereux’s landmark text, *From Anxiety to Method in the Behavioral Sciences* (1967) represents one of the earliest efforts of a researcher to theorize the effects of countertransference upon scientific research method. A practicing psychoanalyst who was also experienced in anthropological fieldwork,
Hollway’s (2009) and Claudia Lapping’s (2007, 2008) explications of psychoanalytically informed methodologies not only acknowledge the discomfort of working within the presence of uncertainty in research, they use this discomfort as a methodological guide or even as a source of data. In her studies of the complexities of “affect, dynamic conflict, unconscious intersubjective processes and embodied practices on the formation of identity,” Hollway (2009, p. 464) finds support in relational psychoanalyst Nancy Chodorow’s (1999) perspectives on psycho-social research, work that involves (t)he radically uncommonsensical and anxiety-provoking understandings underpinning psychoanalysis—that...fantasies are ever-changing, that motives are unconscious, that humans interpret and construct the world and our lives in terms of unconscious, emotionally-laden wishes, fears and fantasies, that anxiety generates major aspects of human functioning (including the analyst’s). (1999, pp. 103)

Thick with possibilities, data tangle around one another in my study, overflowing and causing anxiety. In my research journal, I mused about my experience of sorting and selecting essays that pricked at my consciousness or resonated with me for one reason or another:

These words are thick with possibilities, an excess of representations and significations spinning and tangling around one another. The thickness is sticky,

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Devereux argued that it is impossible to investigate other human beings without one’s unconscious subjectivity influencing the research. A researcher’s unconscious, repressed wishes, fears, desires, and fantasies create anxiety in the researcher, leading inevitably to distortions and errors. As Devereux explains, the desire to eliminate the influence of researcher subjectivity from a study is an attempt to control and quell the anxieties produced by the unconscious. Thus, research of others is also an investigation of one’s self (Devereux, 1967).
difficult to move through. I can’t seem to progress past the feelings of awe and intimidation in the presence of all off these words. In spite of the excess of words, I feel silenced. I must find a way to remain present, not flee. What will I do with the aporias and (missed)understandings, the dizziness and disorientation of too many data, affects, and possibilities for making sense, sensing patterns? Will I ever find a way out of this mess?

The anxiety I experienced in sorting and selecting the data I found most resonant for this study was a provocation that I identified with the other aspects of impasse that I now think of as a methodological structure. However, the identification of this experience as having a role in the constitution of the impasse did not occur until much later.

**The Time of Impasse: The Nature of Deferred Action**

An erratic, yet productive growth that emerges from roots both conscious and unconscious, a methodological impasse cannot be named at the time it is occurring. It is approached and identified through *deferred action*. A psychoanalytic concept that describes how “emotional significance and new ideas are made from past and present experiences” (Pitt & Britzman, 2003, p. 758) deferred action also relates to the concepts of transference and countertransference. Assigning significance to an experience may be delayed for several reasons. First, the force or emotional resonance of an experience is often felt before it can be understood or expressed in language, and second, an event or object in the present may become meaningful by accumulating affect, force, or revisions from an earlier experience (Pitt & Britzman, 2003). Finally, another way that meaning is derived is through the “anchoring of representation” (Parker, 2005, p. 170). Ian Parker’s method of Lacanian discourse analysis locates meaning at the sentence level, in the
placement of punctuation which confers meaning by virtue of its placement. “Lacan argues that the punctuation of a sentence retroactively determines what that a sentence will be understood to have meant, and so the temporal logic of apparent cause and effect is, a Lacanian reading, reversed. Consider, for example, the saying “Let’s eat Grandma,” then note how the meaning of the sentence changes with the later addition of a comma: “Let’s eat, Grandma.” It wasn’t until I spent copious amounts of time questioning my own perceptions of deferrals of meaning in students’ essays and in my responses to their writing, that I began to notice other instances of deferred action. What I think about now is what might be accomplished, pedagogically with such an awareness. This type of exploration on the part of a teacher is a deeper, differently directed mode of reflective practice than what is typically used in education (Markham, 1999).

While it may seem contradictory, a methodological impasse awaits in the past; an impasse is a holding station that doesn’t hold but opens out into anxiety, that dog-paddling around a space whose contours remain obscure. An impasse is decompositional—in the unbound temporality of the lag one hopes to have been experiencing all along (otherwise it’s the end), it marks a delay. Because you can only know later that this was an impasse. (Berlant, 2007, p. 434)

Impasse as Productive Tension

Contrary to the images or ideas that the word impasse may evoke—a stalled process, an immovable object, a silent, stony disagreement—an impasse is not synonymous with inaction. It is instead a knot of multiple tensions—a site of shimmering, quivering energy pushing against a limitation. A methodological impasse, then, is an unruly excess, an unpredictable growth from roots reaching into both
conscious and unconscious subjectivities. Thick with possibilities, methodological representations and significations tangle around one another, overflowing to the point of discomfort. However, instead of pulling away from the discomfort of the methodological dilemma, I pushed myself more deeply into it. I remained within the anxiety, allowing it to settle in and around me. I recorded the ambivalence and frustration of this time period in my journal. For several months, I wrote, I read, and I waited. I wrote about the content of what I read and sometimes I wrote observations of myself reading, noting how I approached a text, which parts I gravitated toward, which sections I avoided. And I continued to wait.

I would like to say that a resolution of the impasse occurred in a flash of insight. But it did not; resolution was much more subtle, and it was a sense of the study that I gathered up through retrospection. Looking back through weeks of journal entries, I found traces of a pattern, a slight shift of focus in what I was looking for in students’ writing. Here’s what I discovered: somewhere along the way, while struggling through the thick mud of futility, I ceased focusing so intently on the psychoanalytic concepts which continually resisted translation into pragmatic methodology. Instead, I began seeing the research in much the same way I look at a landscape when the glare of sun is in my eyes. Thus, I found myself looking away from the most illuminated areas of the visual field. I shifted my gaze from the heat and centrality of data-glare to open up my perceptions to an awareness of the edges of the data landscape. Squinting and softening my researcher’s honed focus, relaxing my bristling analytic desires so that they might flow into the indeterminacy of perceptions, and trusting that I would eventually
understand the lay of this strange land, discrete details began to merge into clusters, revealing curious shapes, gaps, and previously unnoticed markers of affect.

The experience of seeing, yet not seeing, the data landscape is how I eventually found resolution within the methodological impasse. It is how I became acquainted with the indeterminacy at the center of perception. And, it is how I learned that, because of language and its role in constituting subjectivities, there are gaps that can’t be filled, experiences that cannot be articulated, no matter how many words and images are poured into them. Finally, I learned about the creative possibilities of these gaps by discovering that the vacant spaces are anything but “empty”—we just can’t “see” the content through conventional ways of viewing and perceiving…That is, the indeterminate, seemingly empty center of the gaze is a place of projection; it is the unconscious register of subjectivity. It is where the remainders of what we think we know, who we believe ourselves to be, are projected and experienced by others’ unconscious subjectivities. This indeterminate center is the relational space of intersubjectivity.

Over time, I increasingly connected the idea of critical consciousness with the impasses I experienced around the articulation and application of methodology and method. In my perspective, critical consciousness was not simply a pedagogical goal or curriculum outcome, but was a process involving both conscious and unconscious aspects of subjectivity as well intersubjective relationships. As I saw it, in the context of both teaching and research, one of the most critical aspects of critical consciousness was the role of the unconscious, which, in being the locus of the irrational, sometimes contradictory desires of the subject, meant that critical consciousness was imbued with resistances, desires, and impasses. As a result, critical consciousness, when re-articulated
with an acknowledgement of the unconscious origins of subjectivity, may be more like a sticky and messy failure of the illusions of a coherent, rational self, than an enlightened understanding of self and other.

In summary, within the myriad layers of theory, desire, and impasse, there are conceptual threads and knots that reveal and connect key methodological issues. The sections below continue the explanation of the methodological impasse. In this discussion, select aspects of psychoanalytic theory and its history are presented in support of the research methodology, along with discussion of reflexivity, dissonance, and philosophical approaches to psychoanalysis in the social sciences. The chapter concludes with recommendations for a psychoanalytically informed methodology that resists instrumentation while offering creative, pragmatic possibilities for the development and use of data-interaction methods.

**Methodological Impasse: A Text Falls Together, Meaning Falls Apart**

The methodological impasse in this case study exists because of the problem of identifying and articulating that which must be suppressed and unnamed to maintain one’s unified, coherent sense of self. This is a psychoanalytically informed methodology that unravels method and vice versa, for those aspects of data that appear as ‘evidence’ or ‘intelligibility’ are merely repetitive scribblings around the edges of what cannot be named, in the service of holding subjectivity together. Impasses, relational spaces, tensioning points, and evocations are symbolic placeholders that gesture toward the crucial work of the unconscious in our relationships with one another and in our pedagogy and research endeavors. As I have experienced it, an impasse is not a
concession to defeat, nihilism, or meaninglessness. Nor is it a tourniquet that stops the flow and slippage of signification. Rather it is a reminder of where insights might be perceived, out beyond the centrality and smoothness of literalness and rationality. As Harriet Meek (2003) explains,

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2 Robert, a former student in the *Criticizing Television* course, and one of the E-mail interview participants, used the word “tourniquet” to describe how the act of writing criticism functions for him: *I guess criticism has always been a tourniquet for me. A momentary relief of whatever mental pain. I don't get as upset as I used to about things because I finally started making things more consistently around 21 or 22.* These three sentences, tucked into the middle of a dense narrative about Robert’s writing and art activities, are strikingly poignant for me. I read repeatedly the sections of writing within which these three sentences appear. In these interactions with the writing, it occurred to me how similar the word tourniquet sounded to “turn” and “quit.” I began to associate these signifiers with Robert’s word “tourniquet” and this chain of associated signification began to function as a subtext for me—a nonsensical reading of a narrative which was likely intended to simply describe Robert’s interests and activities. I found the word tourniquet, and the associated words “turn” and “quit” to be a persistent and potent subtext, a remainder and excess of signification that gestured beyond and that didn’t quite fit with the rest of his text.

I perceived the placement of the word “tourniquet” as a point of overflow that functioned (for me) as disruption in Robert’s list of activities, leading me to wonder about the significance of “distraction” in Robert’s writing, or in criticism writing, in general. He wrote: *It occurred to me that I hardly ever just sit and contemplate or have an open moment. I live in a collective housing situation so there is always a distraction, I book shows, write zines, make artwork, go to school, go to work, have a partner (sometimes), curate things. I just always have a distraction. When I do sit and think inevitably a good idea about something will surface and just as inevitably it will include an anti-capitalist critique. The latest thing I have been working on is a piece on the dueling meanings of surfing & skateboarding in the American consciousness. How surfing represents manifest destiny, a man vs. nature narrative and is thus perceived as wholesome as exhibited by the Beach Boys, Elvis movies, its legal status. Skating which is surfing transplanted to concrete is a man vs. man narrative. A creative play and destruction of human civilization - so it's illegal and is represented by delinquents and punk rock.*

My interaction with Robert’s interview narrative was marked by repeated readings, both during the interview correspondence, which stretched over several weeks, and months after the interviews and other data collections were completed. The realization of my association of the words turn and quit with the word tourniquet and the related idea of distraction in writing occurred at the time I was writing the three methodology chapters—I had an “aha” moment when I began to sense the peripheral distractions that pulled me to the edges of my own writing and thinking, leading me to new insights. I wondered if students experienced writing and insights in this way, too. I wondered, further, how writing might be taught to encourage peripheral reflections.
many of the difficulties and blockages we encounter while doing research take place because we are not listening to information available to us. We tend not to recognize this information as messages from ourselves which have arrived in a disguised way and need to be deciphered…We worry about giving up conscious control, even for a little while, but it seems likely that this may be exactly what is needed. (para.17)

Working from Meeks’ viewpoint, an impasse is call to rethink, and perhaps enlarge, the meaning and means of pursuing critical consciousness within pedagogies or research methodologies.

Writing processes and artifacts are the impetus, expression of, and, ultimately, the problem of this case study. The methodology is described through writing, yet writing as process and as object, is a slippery, fallible phenomenon. Writing never quite gathers up, or holds onto, the meaning it is meant to express. Complicating matters is a writer’s unconscious subjectivity formed from inchoate and unsignifiable excesses which not only punctuate and disrupt the writing process, but also create gaps and dissonances within the expression itself—gaps that a writer herself may be unable to see. As I learned through this study, the gaps and silences of writing may be understood as metaphorical spaces that indicate the tenor and texture of the unsymbolizable unconscious. Seeking, locating, and speculating upon these gaps and spaces was a primary goal in my work with the data. However, the gaps, invisibilities, and absences I sensed in my interactions with the data, led me to the experience of an impasse. However, as I came to learn, an impasse is a viable position, it is a metaphorical site where I could begin to imagine critical consciousness in terms of a critical unconsciousness.
A Psychoanalytically Informed Methodology

*What is said is always in relation to what will never be expressed.*

*At these extreme limits we recognize ourselves.*

—Edmond Jabès, 1993

Lacanian analyst Eugenie Georgaca (2003) posits that Lacan has “gone the furthest in terms of psychoanalytic approaches in theorizing the social and linguistic construction of subjectivity” (p. 542). According to Lacan, both consciousness and the unconscious are constituted by language and are articulated in language in the subject’s life. Elaborating on the dynamic of unconscious and conscious subjectivity within language, Georgaca explains that a subject’s ego or sense of identity and “self” is but one of the parts of the subject, and, moreover, a part “whose function is to mask the heterogeneity of the speaking subject through sustaining a sense of self-unity and mastery” (Georgaca, 2003, p. 542) through language. Crucial however, is that subjectivity resists containment in language; the subjectivity of a writer or researcher will necessarily be articulated in the gaps between signifiers.

Some basic, foundational ideas about subjectivity’s unconscious origins can be drawn from Jacques Lacan’s theories of the subject. Lacan’s perspectives on subjectivity evolved over many years, however one of the enduring tenets the tripartite constitution of subjectivity. That is, an individual’s subjectivity is shaped through the interaction of unconscious registers known as the *Real*, the *Imaginary*, and the *Symbolic*. Generally speaking, the Imaginary register is the ego; the *Symbolic* register refers to the subject’s constitution through language; and, the register of the *Real* is constituted through the dynamic, unconscious relationship of the subject’s lack and the *objet a.*
The Imaginary and Symbolic registers inaugurate the social subject around the age of 18 months at a conceptual, developmental juncture known as the mirror stage (Lacan, 1973). At this time, an infant who previously had no sense of differentiation from its caregiver, develops through mirror reflections and interactions with others, a sense of self-presence, autonomy, and separateness. However, while gaining a sense of differentiation, the child is still overwhelmingly vulnerable and in need of a caretaker’s attention. As a result, the child must learn to communicate, at first imitating and later eventually learning on its own the social symbols of the culture: language. The concept of the mirror stage supports Lacan’s theory that the notion of a unified self is a misrecognition or “méconnaissance” (Lacan, 1973, p. 74). A subject’s belief in the mirror reflection as proof of their integrated, unified “I” or true self, is a méconnaissance since what is taken to be the “I” is actually only an image.

The mirror stage and entrance into the Imaginary register is significant, for what will come to be believed as the subject’s autonomous self or “I” is actually an image of an other that the subject confuses with the idea of self. Also significant is the result of the méconnaissance: the subject’s self, or ego, is external—a representation circulating among all other representations in the world. Further, the external locus of ego stability and subjectivity establishes selfhood as radically decentered and located in the Other (Lacan, 1973). Being a subject, knowing oneself as an “I” among all the other “I”s in the world is to be in constant need for recognition from the Other, and to be in constant pursuit of signifiers which will cover not only the subject’s lack, but also screen the subject from recognizing the lack of the Other.
A demand for recognition from the m/Other and a longing for unity with the Real (the original state of fullness and unity) is an impossible quest, destined to fail because the demand for the Real and the unbearable sense of loss when it cannot be obtained originate at the unconscious level, ensuring that no object or action will ever satisfy such desires. For Lacan, this separation and subsequent longing for a return to unity and fullness is key to the structure of the unconscious. As Lacan’s theory of subjectivity illustrates, the unconscious is the foundation of all human drives and motivations. Moreover, this power remains a constant throughout life, never waning or disappearing, but constituting one’s personal and social worlds, even shaping one’s manner of learning and writing.

The act of writing is a method of managing lack and an attempt at suturing the fragmented self. In fact, subjectivity’s constitution through unconscious dynamics that involve the recognition and suturing of one’s self through signification in language provides a frame through which the critical writing in the course, and the writing of this research, may be examined. Mark Bracher (1999a, 1999b, 2002) and others (Alcorn, 2000, 2002; Brooke, 1987; Harris, 2004; Parker, 2005; Pollock, 2007; Salibrici & Salter, 2004; Tobin, 1991) have, in various ways and toward varying goals, argued for writing’s use as a pedagogical site of self awareness and social change. Research methodology, like writing pedagogy, is a site that not only facilitates self awareness and change, it also functions as a productive, creative mode of pedagogical, theoretical risk-taking.

The risks of a psychoanalytically informed methodology stem from the choices made in proceeding with a method that does not fit comfortably within, and even resists, traditional qualitative methods. For example, the anti-instrumentalist nature of
psychoanalysis necessitates that a researcher must find her own way through the confusions and miss-steps that are inevitable in creating methods that are ethical and appropriate to the needs of the research participants and the disciplinary context. There are no existing coding manuals or content analysis procedures that can be transferred to a psychoanalytically informed methodology. Research literature in psychoanalysis does provide narratives of analyses, however these accounts tend to neglect detailed explanations of analytic methods and the steps taken to reach conclusions, even in clinical cases (Hollway, 2009; Kvale, 1999). Thus, finding one’s way through the difficult terrain of a psychoanalytically informed methodology entails a continuous commitment to critical reflexivity toward self and context.

In addition to critical reflexivity, the work of psychoanalytically informed research entails creative risk-taking. As I discovered through the development of this case study, a psychoanalytically informed approach to research is more art than science, a creative-interpretive, and thoroughly subjective approach to theorizing about human experience. Therefore, even though Freud’s discovery of psychoanalysis was often associated with positivist science, as a rule, psychoanalytic methods, especially those developed by Lacan, are not compatible with empiricist, positivist research procedures. Education researcher Tony Brown traces the incompatibility of positivist scientific method and language, locating the problem in the excess or remainders of human experience that cannot be contained in language:

In fitting a research or scientific model to reality, there remains an element of je ne sais quoi that resists any sense that reality can be successfully processed and fully accounted for through a structural filter. Successive
attempts to revise the filter merely alert me to alternative failings. As a practitioner researcher, I tell stories of the world yet learn both through the way in which successive stories shape the world but also through the ways in which they seem to fail me. (p. 409)

Brown’s explanation of the failures of telling one’s account of the world, offers a glimpse of what creative risk-taking means in the context of research that relies on participants’ self-narratives. A researcher must proceed with openness and flexibility toward the inevitable misalignment of world and word. In this way, a subject’s or context’s truth and reality become the creative materials from which researcher and participants together construct and articulate their emergent subjectivities.

The interpretive work of a psychoanalytically informed approach to research concedes the impossibility of ever re-presenting the truth of a situation. Lacan’s famous declaration (1990) *I always speak the truth* casts light on the curious approach to truth-telling in Lacanian psychoanalysis, a practice which has little to do with truth or honesty, as most people define it. Lacan’s statement refers to the idea that all statements contain within them truths of which the speaker herself is not aware. In other words, any declaration that Lacan or any other person utters (or, for that matter, any text including this dissertation), will speak the truth of the unconscious which may bear little resemblance to any ‘truth’ perceived and articulated by the conscious subject.

Lacan’s method of truth-seeking aimed toward tracking the flow of affect within spoken or written discourse. Importantly, however, this method of tracking affects did not follow a template or design created in advance. Rather, the flow of discourse between Lacan and the subject created a unique landscape within which Lacan and the subject
produced a distinctive dialogue that held clues for glimpsing connections between unconscious affects and the subjects actions in the world. In summary, psychoanalytic research requires a particular attitude toward truth and objectivity, one that recognizes the unique relationship between researcher and the researched, the aliveness of affect, the unpredictability of subjectivity in context, and the importance of the unsayable in the constitution of self and relationships.

In addition to necessitating an openness toward alternate meanings of truth and knowledge, the use of a psychoanalytic theoretical perspective in research subverts replicability and generalizability of a data analysis. In my perspective, it is this certainty of uncertainty and conflict that offers perhaps the most realistic and pragmatic perspective on the paradox of wording the world for one another. Uncertainty and its concomitant slippage of signifiers and signifieds keep the questions moving and keep possibility in play while engaging desire to keep the movement going. The impossibility of writing, of wording the world for one another are the knots which keep critical consciousness in perpetual impasse, necessitating that educators constantly negotiate the challenges of a changing terrain of irresolvable difference. If critical consciousness is a tensioning space “between ignorance and knowledge, between not knowing what to do but still having to act, and between not seeing and seeing too much” (Britzman, 2003, p. 75), then we must learn to live in the middle of things:

We must learn to live in the tension of conflict and confusion and possibility…we must become adept at making do with the messiness of that condition and at finding agency within rather than assuming it in advance…We can never get off the hook by appealing to a transcendental Ethics. We are always on the hook,
responsible, everywhere, all the time. (St. Pierre, 1997, pp. 176-177)

**Critical Reflexivity**

The notion of being “responsible, everywhere, all the time” is a fundamental tenet of a critical reflexivity. The ‘critical’ aspect of reflexivity brings a perspective that is rigorous enough, yet flexible enough, to respond to the ethical challenges that accompany the work of teaching and learning toward critical consciousness. A critical reflexivity is a crucial aspect of working within a methodological impasse. This form of reflexive endeavor is active, engaged, and self-consciously attuned to working within the conditions of contradiction, misunderstanding, and fallibility.

As a mode of continuous and contextual self study, reflection, evaluation, and action, the concept of reflexivity has been a significant aspect of this case study’s development. Specifically, the reflexive approach taken in this research acknowledges that data are not the result of viewing a situation through detached scrutiny but are generated through the recognition of the conscious and unconscious connections by which subject and object influence and constitute one another (Finley, 2002).

Ongoing and recursive reflexivity about my desires in relation to the goals and purpose of this study figured prominently in my interpretive interactions with students’ essays and their responses to the survey and interview questions. I was acutely aware of my responsibility for maintaining what I perceived to be an unruliness within the writings that comprise the data of the study. Resisting urges to tidy up the data by glossing over its inherent messiness and disjunctiveness, I also rejected the pull to analyze students’ subjectivities. In summary, instead of creating narrative cohesion where none seemed to exist, my goal was to offer glimpses, shaped through researcher reflexivity, of the
possibilities for sensing critical consciousness and other evocative affects within and around the writings of the case. To that end, I worked to explore, through writing as method of inquiry (Richardson, 2003), my emotional investments in the texts. This was done in the hope of facilitating deep reflexivity, a critical consciousness which makes space for the possibility of understanding how unconscious aspects of subjectivity come to bear upon critical responses to visual culture. While the content of students’ writings were initially the focus of this research, I learned through the reflexive, recursive experience of the impasse methodology the importance of exploring how one reads a text, rather than focusing exclusively on extracting hidden meanings from a text’s content.

**A Question of Time**

It has taken considerable time and puzzlement to story my research experience into words and to name some of these words “data,” since the methodological impasse arises from ambivalence toward naming and coherence. Unlike Denzin’s and Lincoln’s (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003) chronological organization of research developments, the moments of my research’s development refuse neat enumeration. My experiences with this project are marked by perceptions that sprawl beyond and seep through the boundaries of the case study’s time and place. My perceptions of the research and my relationship to the data are more like thickening awarenesses of experience than categorical, linear observations and events. Working with the data of this study is best described as a layering of insights, progressing through stages in an iterative process of writing as a form of inquiry (Richardson, 2003), which ultimately reflects signifiers back into itself, becoming an impasse. Thus, in the development of this study, I sought a methodology of patience and holding; a methodology that honors the difficulties and impossibilities of finding the
unobstructed views of experience that I long to see.

In retrospect, I realize that the most frustrating aspects of the methodological impasse were perhaps the most productive for development of critical reflexivity, a phenomenon which resembles Donnel B. Stern’s (2009) description of the relational, reflective quality of psychoanalysis:

We do not waste our time looking only in the light. We try to locate the places of mystery, the parts of our relatedness…that we just can’t seem to find words for, that (to begin with) we may not even be able to shape into a coherent set of events; and we do that even when, or even especially when, those parts of relatedness are uncomfortable. We immerse ourselves in the discomfort, feeling it so thoroughly that we know it from the inside. We try to deny ourselves no part of it; we try to allow ourselves to become saturated with its effects. And then, eventually, at least when we are fortunate, we find ourselves surprised by a new perception of the other, of ourselves. (p. 180)

In my perspective, Stern’s description of the psychoanalytic process is one of the most exciting aspects of a psychoanalytically informed research method. The excitement lies in the realistic, pragmatic implications of the unconscious and unformulated aspects of subjectivities. At issue here is the abundant, contingent flux of meanings that qualitative researchers experience, the multiple possibilities for creating and giving name to the locus of research. From a psychoanalytic perspective, excess and remainders are the condition of speech. Words cannot possibly hold nor accurately represent the rich complexities of experience because experience is an amalgam of conscious awareness and unconscious drives. Thus, “behind any utterance is a positioning and logic, a sort of
‘backstage’ production set that allows the parade of reality but reveals itself in any missteps, stuttering, interruption in flow” (Malone & Barabino, 2009, p. 256). As we word the world for ourselves and for one another, we are always saying and hearing more and less than we know. We speak and hear the excesses of signification that are produced to cover over the Real of experience which necessarily eludes words. Language is more and less than we need.

Stern’s acknowledgement of the spectrum of discomfort and elation experienced in psychoanalytic work confirms my own experience of multiplicities of affect in this study. It is important to emphasize, however, that my experience of these affects, are, like a clinical psychoanalytic experience, a process that unfolds over a period of time. This process involves steps and phases, all of which are interlocked, progressive like a chain, yet are multiply layered as well, like a deep, thick sedimentary formation.

**Psychoanalytic Theory and Research Methodology**

In its consideration of the role of the unconscious in the construction of subjectivity, psychoanalysis offers a unique perspective for exploring the irrational, hidden, and powerful roots of desire that structure all intersubjective relationships. With an intrinsic structure that subverts traditional definitions of knowledge and ignorance, psychoanalytic theory is ultimately a “critique of pedagogy” (Felman, 1997, p. 19). Relatedly, by validating misrecognitions and miscommunications and by resisting replication and generalization, psychoanalytically informed research methodologies are inherently a subversion of method. This section explores Lacanian theory as it relates to the case study’s methodology, with focus given to its applicability for research of experiences with, and around, writing.
Sigmund Freud’s (1856-1939) theories of the psyche are regarded today as classical, or traditional, psychoanalysis. It is important to remember that classical psychoanalysis emerged within a distinctive socio-historical context. Freud’s psychanalytic method developed in an “intellectual and cultural milieu which looked to science and its twin beacons of rationality and objectivity to provide the truest and most meaningful perspective on human experience and the world around us” (Mitchell, 1993, p. 13). In the nineteenth century, science offered a solid framework and a system of control through which the chaos of life might be theorized and explained. As relational psychoanalyst Stephen Mitchell explains:

In the dazzling explosion of technological proficiency in the nineteenth century, the belief was nearly escapable that the sure knowledge provided by science, and the control it granted over the worlds around and in us, would lead to deeper understanding, wisdom, and a better life. (1993, p. 14)

Mitchell’s statement regarding the belief in science as a means of “control over worlds around us and in us” must be held in serious consideration when thinking about the application of psychoanalysis in non-clinical contexts. The statement is a crucial signpost of caution for this study, pointing to a need to examine motives for the use of psychoanalysis in non-clinical contexts. Over a century has passed since Freud’s originary work with psychoanalysis. During this time, and continuing today, the founding principles of psychoanalysis have evolved into an expansive corpus of theory and practice, spanning several continents and informing a variety of philosophical, disciplinary, and clinical perspectives. Indeed, Freud himself considered some aspects of
his theories to be speculative and in need of further questioning, development, and possibly even correction (Tyson, 2006).

A major evolution in twentieth century psychoanalysis is attributed to Jacques Lacan. Before developing his own theories of psychoanalysis, Lacan was a member for 20 years of the Society Psychanalytique de Paris (SPP), and the International Psychoanalytic Association (IPA). Lacan’s famous re-reading of Freud (Felman, 1987) brought emphasis to the role of language, rather than biological drives, in the constitution of subjectivities. In his study of Freud’s work, Lacan “claimed to have rediscovered the authenticity” of Freudian theory and intent, “misconstrued hitherto owing to hasty readings and faulty translations” (Diatkine, 2007, p. 647). Close readings of Freud’s case studies provided Lacan with actual examples of Freud’s analytic techniques in action. Lacan’s re-reading of Freud’s work seized upon instances where the indeterminate nature of language indicated key aspects of a patient’s subjectivity. Lacan noted that “from the beginning to the end of (Freud’s) work, words, and, more precisely, words with a double meaning, played an essential role in most of his interpretations” (Diatkine, 2007, p. 647). While the role of language in the analytic treatment was intriguing to Freud, he saw language as secondary to his interests in dreamwork and neurotic symptoms.

Lacan’s early studies of Freud’s work led to his later development of theories that emphasized role of language in the constitution of subjectivity. According to Lacan (1973), the acquisition of language is the precondition of being a subject. Specifically, acquisition of language is a necessary aspect of being an “I,” an autonomous subject. Entrance into the symbolic order, or world of language, is predicated on a bargain of sorts.
and the beginning of a subject’s external identifications and expressions of self: The infant-subject must relinquish the undifferentiated self to acquire the symbolic tools (signifiers) with which to communicate with the mother, and later, others. Language, then, not only establishes the structure of self, it also establishes all other structures known to a subject. However, even as language creates subjects who sense themselves to be whole and unified beings in the world and experience others as unified and whole, language is the hallmark of the split subject. Composition and rhetoric scholar Judith Harris summarizes succinctly: “A desire for self-integration is openly articulated, but only through, paradoxically, its own dissociative strategy” (p. 192).

A psychoanalytic perspective on writing and visual culture is not to be confused with therapy. Rather, it is a “mode of critical understanding, which attempts to interpret covert patterns of human behavior influencing larger systems of culture and society” (Harris, 2001, p 181). Of significance for a study of writing within a visual culture curriculum, images and affect are particularly relevant in Lacan’s theories of subjectivity. Positing that a subject is fragmented and incoherent due to separation from the primitive, unified state of the “real” experienced as an infant, Lacan (1973) traced the scopic origin of subjectivity to the mirror stage wherein a child-subject misrecognizes its mirror image as being a whole, unified self. This reflected self permits the subject to conceptualize themselves as an “I,” thus formally entering the world of language, or symbolic order. As a result of the
mirror stage, the image is not only the basis of identity as misrecognition or meconnaissance (Lacan, 1973), but will continue to be a locus where identity is sought, confirmed, and reconfirmed. Like poststructuralist theories of subjectivity, a psychoanalytic perspective locates the formation of individual and cultural subjectivities and identities within language. However, psychoanalytic theory’s conceptualization of subjectivity and language is complicated by the role played by the unconscious. By introducing the unconscious into considerations of subjectivity, and by situating this process within language, psychoanalytic theory opens up an avenue for the exploration of writing, particularly those aspects of writing that cannot be empirically described or theorized, such as felt experiences of resonance or inexpressible resistances and desires.

**Situating the Lacanian Subject: Language and Discourse**

Lacan’s theory of the subject utilizes terms and concepts familiar in critical and social constructivist theories. For example, like the subject conceptualized in many contemporary critical frameworks, the Lacanian subject is influenced by language and discourse. Yet, Lacan’s perspective on the relationship of subjectivity, language, and discourse is unique because it contains the variable of unconscious desire. In conceptualizing the relationship between desire and language, Lacan “takes from Saussure the notion of language as a system of signs determined by their difference from each other, but for him the signifier produces a signified through a direct appeal to the field of experience, a positive condition” (Wright, 1999, pp. 62-63). However, unlike Saussure, who theorized signifier and signified as a sign unified through sound and concept, Lacan’s conceptualization of signifier and signified was as a site of contestation and struggle. In Lacan’s view, the “only way of being in language is to be at odds with it,
although language lures us in through a subject’s narcissistic hope that the rules will be hers or his” (Wright, 1999, p. 63).

The Lacanian theory of subjectivity differs from structuralism theories which posit the subject as a product of discourses. The structuralist subject is “an ‘effect’ of discourse. It is an illusion produced by linguistic effects. The subject thus fades back, without a residue, into its constitutive element, language” (Alcorn, 1994, p. 26). In contradistinction to structuralist, and even poststructuralist, conceptualizations of the subject, Lacan’s subject has the potential for resistance. Although the notion of a subjectivity structured by unconscious drives might seem to imply powerlessness against desire for Real fulfillment or complete expression in the symbolic order of language, proponents of a psychoanalytically informed pedagogy insist that identifying these desires (as well as resistances) can be the key to agency. Identification of one’s unconscious desires by bringing them into the Symbolic Order through language or identifying and acknowledging them in images is, according to Bracher (1993), an essential step in understanding how one’s desires are at odds with, or aligned with dominant discourses. Marshall Alcorn (1994) asserts,

poststructuralist theory posits the subject as a passive entity constituted by participation in a social language. The idea of resistance questions this passivity and calls attention to a subject’s unique ability to deny, dismiss, or deform social directives. Resistance implies agency, an ability to counteract forces that in other contexts would successfully constitute subjects. (p. 29)

Significantly, it is the register of the Real that offers a fruitful, albeit complicated, site of exploration for considering the personal and social effects of a subject’s writing
processes and artifacts, and for locating desires and resistances in the research of writing. Philosopher Brigit Nordtug (2004) notes that of the three registers, the Real is hardest to understand because it is what is left out, missed, or left behind in the process of signification. While a remainder of that which cannot be expressed in a culture’s symbol systems, the Real has a profound effect on subjectivity and meaning because it constitutes the absences, gaps, inconsistencies, and contradictions that interrupt the signification process. Quoting from Lacan’s lecture about psychosomatic reactions, Nordtug explains that the Real is a relational dynamic, pushing at discourse from beyond the margins of conscious subjectivity. Therefore, the Real is a “relation to something that always lies on the edge of our conceptual elaborations which we are always thinking about, which we sometimes speak of, and which, strictly speaking, we can’t grasp, and which is nonetheless there” (Nordtug quoting Lacan, 2004, p. 90).

Problematizing a Psychoanalytically Informed Methodology

Jacques Lacan’s challenging, opaque, and cleverly punning texts perform as well as inform his theories of the unconscious (Felman, 1987). However, as fascinating and absorbing as Lacan’s texts might be, they do tend to resist easy transfer to non-psychoanalytic disciplines. Psychoanalytic theory’s origins in clinical practices of psychoanalysis, is a heritage that composition scholar Mark Bracher (1999) views as advantageous for educators, particularly those who teach writing:

Because the process of psychoanalytic treatment is devoted to resolving the same fundamental conflicts that we have seen to be at the root of many writing problems, it is therefore likely that psychoanalysis can show us how these problems might be reduced by dealing with the psychological conflicts
underwriting them. By the same token, the writing classroom would appear to offer psychoanalysis an alternative site for the investigation of psychological conflict as well as the psychological intervention in such conflict. (pp. 125)

Bracher connects the goals of clinical practice and pedagogical practice explicitly with the assertion that the “talking cure” of psychoanalysis can be “a basis for constructing a ‘writing cure’, a pedagogy that, by helping students work through the intrapsychic conflicts underlying writing problems, can help cure their writing of its ills” (1999, p. 125). On the other hand, Bracher’s assertion does not address the concern that, by curing psychological ills through writing, or by offering a “writing cure” meant to transform unconscious aspects of subjectivity, psychoanalytic theory could actually function to colonize students’ subjectivities.

The difficulty of applying Lacan’s theories in non-clinical settings is, in my perspective, both beneficial and problematic. A resistance to quick and simple translation has necessitated that scholars invest considerable time and effort in understanding the psychoanalytic discourse and how it might function within their particular discipline. On the other hand, the difficulty of Lacanian theory, as well as the care and attention needed in its application, have contributed its reputation as a rarified, elitist discourse that excludes and obscures rather than promote inclusion and clarity. While I saw potential problems in working within Lacan’s performative, opaque discourse, I also saw potential, valuable conversations about the affective aspects of education experiences, and characteristics of human relationships that resist articulation through other theoretical discourses.

The exploitative and colonizing potential of psychoanalytic theory is not only
applicable in education contexts, but also in research endeavors. The potential problems in using psychoanalytic theories outside of a therapeutic context is addressed by sociologist Claudia Lapping (2007), who points out that psychoanalysis, as a clinical practice, operates under some specific assumptions about the analyst/analysand relationship which are not applicable in the relationship of researcher and participants in a qualitative inquiry:

Psychoanalytic practice constitutes a very particular contract between analyst and analysand, one that permits the analyst to ask probing personal questions and to offer interpretations of the very intimate material that may emerge. It is a series of conversations between analyst and analysand, in a clinical setting, that constitutes a therapy from which the analysand is thought to benefit in some way. (In addition), the psychoanalytic contract permits the practitioner to pursue very intimate lines of questioning, and, more specifically, to present interpretations to their subject in a way that would be highly unusual even in sociological inquiry into the most intimate aspects of people’s lives. Indeed, the complexities involved in using such approaches outside of a therapeutic context raise serious ethical dilemmas. (p. 628)

Lapping’s cautions were foremost in my mind as I corresponded with the E-mail study participants. As I read their responses to my questions and worked to compose my replies, I was uncomfortably aware of how much I do project into and interpret from students’ writing. I found myself becoming anxious about replying to their messages. I struggled to find a balance between cultivating openness, flexibility, and curiosity and within the correspondence writing. I was concerned that not only my writing be perceived
as interesting, and thought-provoking to the participants, but that it also was perceived as being conducive and welcoming to an unrestricted process of developing ideas. I began to realize that the process of composing facilitative responses to students’ writing, of composing replies that convey deep listening and perception of their contributions was challenging in ways that echoed the challenges I felt when responding to students’ writing when I taught the Criticizing Television course. While psychoanalytic perspectives potentially hold value for study of the affective qualities of teaching and learning, there is a danger in co-opting concepts selectively from the vast corpus of psychoanalytic studies. For example, psychoanalysis, when applied outside of a clinical context by non practitioners, runs the risk of becoming a colonizing discourse.

Although psychoanalytic theory has been used in studies of art and literature over the years (Adams, 2007; Alcorn, Jr., 1994b; Felman, 1987; Felman & Laub, 1992; Gallop, 1985; Ragland-Sullivan, 1984; Sayer, 2004; Ulmer, 1987, 2007; Wright, 1998, 1999), examples of its use in art education research are limited. Denis Atkinson’s (2003) research on teacher identity is joined by Jan Jagodzinski’s corpus of psychoanalytic studies in art, curriculum, and popular culture (1997c, 2002, 2004a, 2004b, 2004c, 2006), while Walker, Daiello, Rhoades, and Hathaway (2005), Tavin (2008), and Walker (2009)...

Mary Thomas (2007), considering the potential benefits and limitations of using psychoanalytic methods in qualitative research of identity, cautions against analyzing research subjects themselves, noting that lack of training as a psychoanalyst makes this practice impractical at best, and inappropriate at worst. Because psychoanalytic theory “suggests an extradiscursive component of the subject represented by interiority” (Thomas, 2007, p. 537) there is a risk of discounting the socially constructed nature of subjectivity. As Thomas explains, “(i)nteriority is merely a trope, not an indication of any sort of isolation or locale of the unconscious, which is, after all, a dynamic, interactive force that has no materiality and is only evidenced by its effects (including material, linguistic, and behavioral ones)” (Thomas, 2007, p. 537).
have explored the concepts of subjectivity, desire, and the \textit{objet a} in relation to art education pedagogies. Apart from K. Daniel Cho’s (2009) conceptualization of \textit{psychopedagogy}, Mark Bracher’s \textit{Writing Cure} (1999), and Bracher’s \textit{Radical Pedagogy} (2006) which offer examples of an application of psychoanalytic theory culled from teaching experiences, the use of psychoanalytic concepts in art education, and, education in general, is often limited to application of specific aspects of psychoanalytic theory. For example, recent literature offers alternate ways of thinking about familiar art education concepts through psychoanalytic frameworks. Topics include exploration of meaning in artmaking (Walker, 2009) identity and subjectivity (Walker, Daiello, Rhoades, Hathaway, 2006), and aesthetics (Tavin, 2008), however, there are few instances where the use of psychoanalytic theory in art education is problematized.

\textbf{Reflexive Dissonance and Critical Reflexivity}

The concept of reflexivity is of significance in this study, not merely as an approach to exploring my assumptions about my motivations in the research, but as a signpost that acknowledges the existence of theoretical, political, and intellectual agendas in the writing of this research. Reflexivity, according to Thomas Schwandt, (2001), refers to the “fact that all accounts (in speech and writing) are essentially not just about something, but are also doing something” (p. 223, italics in original). In this way, reflexivity is ontological, for a spoken or written account is not only representative of a world, but is also affected by a subject’s being in that world (Schwandt, 2001).

Additionally, reflexivity can refer to the process of critical reflection, wherein one acknowledges and critically reflects upon “biases, theoretical predispositions, preferences, and so on” (Schwandt, 2001).
Pushing the concept of reflexivity further, this case includes the unconscious registers of subjectivity (*Real, Imaginary, Symbolic*) as a necessary complication, or problematic, of research reflexivity. The problematic presence of reflexivity, as conceptualized through this study’s psychoanalytic perspective, is exemplified in the *messy texts* (Schwandt, 2001) that comprise the data and analysis. These messy, unruly, *writerly* (Barthes, 1970) forms of composition resist allusion to objectivity. Further, they do not offer the “‘finished’ appearance of a realist tale written by a detached observer. They reflect an open-endedness, incompleteness, the full presence of the writer in the text, and the continual movement back and forth between description, interpretation, and multiple voices” (Schwandt, 2001, p. 224).

Harriet Meeks (2003) notes that meaning is in the data, however it is up to a researcher to locate and give structure to the meanings—a process that necessitates reflexivity about methodology. “The researcher's analytic methods serve as a set of lenses allowing some meanings to emerge while diminishing others” (Meek, 2003, p, 3). Thus, a critical aspect of reflexivity is to acknowledge that not all reflexive lenses are conscious. As a result, reflexivity in research cannot tell us the whole story. As Mauthner and Doucet (2003) explain, even critical reflexivity cannot complete the picture of motivation, desire, and intent that the unconscious must repress and conceal in the service of maintaining a stable and coherent sense of self:

No matter how aware and reflexive we try to be...intentions, emotions, psyche, and interiority are not only inaccessible to readers, they are likely to be inaccessible to the author herself. There may be limits to reflexivity, and to the
extent to which we can be aware of the influences on our research both at the time of conducting it and the years that follow.” (pp. 425)

Mauthner and Doucet also make reference to the delayed nature of reflexivity. My own reflexive experiences do confirm the existence of the phenomenon of “deferred action” (Pitt & Britzman, 2003), that is, there have been many realizations and insights that did not occur until much later. Therefore, instead of viewing reflexivity in finite terms, I agree with Mauthner and Doucet (2003) who suggest that it is more realistic and more useful to think in terms of “‘degrees of reflexivity’ with some influences being easier to identify and articulate at the time of our work while others...take time, distance and detachment from the research” (2003, p. 425).

A consideration of reflexivity may also be combined productively with the idea of cognitive dissonance, pointing toward the idea of reflexive dissonance. Leon Festinger’s (1957) theory of cognitive dissonance held that humans have a deep need within the psyche to maintain consistency in thoughts, actions, and behaviors. Festinger believed that when people feel a disharmony or dissonance between two factors within the self they will strive to decrease the tension by either changing their original thought, acceding authority to the opposing thought, or by letting go of the thought or behavior. The desire to maintain consonant cognitions can even be as strong as the basic desires for food and shelter, indicating that primal, even unconscious, drives may be intertwined with motivation to avoid dissonant cognition.

Part rhetorical strategy, part ontological reflexivity, a process of reflexive dissonance proceeds from the point of silence or difficulty by first allowing for an acknowledgement of conflicting and contradictory aspects of subjectivity. Moreover, the
process entails an acceptance of these difficulties as valid, educational aspects of one’s experience. Reflexive dissonance would view difficulties or impasses experienced in relation to writing as part of the text itself. It would, in Schwandt’s (2001) words “reflect an open-endedness, incompleteness, the full presence of the writer in the text” (p. 224)—a full presence that includes not only the visible aspects of a writer’s (and reader’s) subjectivity, but also those that are invisible, or silent.

The self-reflection implied in the concept of reflexive dissonance has a deep affiliation with the Lacanian concept of the Imaginary self, that is, the reflected image of coherence, unity and autonomy which establishes one’s identity as an external construct. The concept of reflexive dissonance is intended to bring attention to the self-estrangement that can occur when one’s systems of belief or knowledge are threatened by dissonant ideas. Lacanian psychoanalytic theory places much emphasis on the unconscious drives, however, these drives also have profound effects upon a subject’s sense of their bodily presence, particularly in the experience of emotion. Emotion or affect, especially that which is non-symbolizable is associated with the Real, and that remainder of the Real which continues to motivate the subject through desire, the objet a.

The Imaginary register is of significance to a study of writing for it is within this register that a subject’s presence for an Other in the Symbolic Order is reified through the production of narratives. As a site where reflexive dissonance might be facilitated or sought, criticism writing practices harbor the potential of pushing psychoanalysis beyond its therapeutic heritage toward a philosophical approach to the study of contemporary visual culture.
Conclusion

This chapter began with an exploration of research methodology as an impasse. Following from Clarice Lispector’s prose, I theorized that methodology could be used in the service of both guiding and disrupting an inquiry. My study of psychoanalytic theories complicated my ideas about education and the relationships of students and teachers, and this body of theory has also complicated my ideas about research methodology and methods. I reflected on this uneasiness in my research journal:

*I am deeply uneasy about the process of seeking and analyzing data. Data collection in the form of interviewing and surveys means that I have to create questions that others will answer. Am I afraid of this responsibility? Or is it that I’m afraid of puncturing and exposing the mysteries of the evocation and resonance I experience when teaching or in my encounters with writing? Am I afraid that writing about and analyzing the experiences would render them tame and lifeless in the Symbolic Order?*

The impasse I experienced in the development of the research methodology led to anxious discomfort. As I developed this case study and narrowed my research focus to questions about the nature of subjectivity and critical consciousness in relation to writing processes, my awareness of ambivalence and discomfort about writing was ever present. Sometimes this awareness took center stage as I reviewed postmodernist perspectives on the crisis of representation. Other times, I was able to push the discomfort aside as I read about grounded theory and content analysis methods, finding comfort with the descriptions of data sorting procedures and coding methods. However, although the content analysis and grounded theory methods offered a seductive pathway where I might
have been able to build the impression of certainty about the “results” of this study, I refused to acquiesce. I could not pretend certainty when I felt deeply conflicted about working within, and attempting to understand, the uncertainty I experienced in my interactions with the data. Therefore, when faced with the choice of devising an analysis that neatly connected the dots of conscious subjectivities, or sharing the ambivalence, unruliness, and puzzlements in my interactions with unconscious data, I chose to acknowledge the unruly realities of the unconscious. Other researchers have chosen similarly (Brown & England, 2004, 2005; Clarke, 2006; Clarke & Hoggett, 2009; Froggett & Hollway, 2010; Meek, 2003; Parker, 2003, 2005a, 2010). I am heartened by Mary Thomas’ (2007) explanation that an affirmation of the validity of the unconscious is not a rejection of consciousness, nor does a psychoanalytic method erase or negate conscious accounts of the world. Instead, it redirects the ‘truth’ of the subject beyond the words or representations in a subject’s narrative, and indicates that the unsaid and unsayable are as important, if not more important, than the said. (pp. 541)

A recognition of the influence of the unconscious register of subjectivity, and an acknowledgment that research may not produce verifiable answers, necessitates asking different questions of research and formulating different expectations. For example, instead of seeking quantifiable, transferable results, an inquiry’s focus could be on what assumptions are operating in methods used in perceiving and expressing the unconscious. This focus on the assumptions and operations of a method would be attuned to silences, gaps, and the unsayable, emphasizing the subjective and challenging nature of identifying these qualities.
An emphasis on a subjective “reading” of data points toward the need for an increased focus on researcher reflexivity. Going further, combining the emphasis on reflexivity with research of the unconscious points toward the need for ethical awareness and responsibility in expressing one’s perceptions of a person or context. On the other hand, however, simply striving to be an ethical and responsible researcher or teacher cannot solve the problem of an unconscious that refuses to acquiesce to reflexivity. This problem is one of particular interest in this case study. Education researcher Audrey Kleinsasser (2000) identifies the crux of the issue, and a focal concern of this study: “Ethics cannot be separated from epistemology and, to this end, reflexivity on ethics has everything to do with good data” (p. 157). What Kleinsasser has pointed out is the problematic connection among ethics, data, and reflexivity in the psychoanalytically informed methodology used in this case study of student writing. By what criteria can data be considered “good,” and through what means can an ethical reflexivity be demonstrated in a study which takes seriously the presence of the unconscious? The subsequent methodology chapters address this issue and extend other dialogues begun in this chapter. Chapter Four, *Wording the Impasse: Exploration and Explication of Research Methods* discusses the methods that comprise this case study, and Chapter Five, *Peripheral Vision and the Impasse(able) Text: Imagining and Interacting With Data* contains my interactions with the data. Together, these chapters endeavor to represent the complexities of using a psychoanalytically informed methodology in qualitative arts education research.
CHAPTER FOUR

Wording the Impasse:

Exploration and Explication of Research Methods

*The resistance of the wood varies depending on the place where we drive in the nail: wood is not isotropic. Nor am I; I have my “exquisite points.” The map of these points is known to me alone, and it is according to them that I make my way, avoiding this or seeking that...*

~Roland Barthes, 1978, p. 60

*These stories were not addressed to me, not meant for me.*

~Gabrielle Schwab, 2006, p. 96

**Introduction**

A researcher’s choice of inquiry methods is a decision steeped in epistemological and ontological implications, thus methods are inextricably intertwined with researcher subjectivity. Education philosopher Eliot Eisner (1997) offers a perspective on the sensitive correspondence between method of inquiry and a researcher’s epistemological assumptions:
There is an intimate relationship between our conception of what the products of research are to look like and the way we go about doing research. What we think it means to do research has to do with our conception of meaning, our view of cognition, and our beliefs about the forms of consciousness that we are willing to say advance human understanding. (p. 5)

Eisner’s observations about the relationship of the products and procedures of research informed my decision to choose a psychoanalytically informed methodology for this research as well as methods of data analysis that could facilitate a productive and informative dialogue among the forms of data involved in this study. My approach to working with the data of this study is one of “interaction” rather than “analysis.” This perspective is adopted because of the political and ideological implications of using psychoanalytically informed methods in research of subjectivities. I have deep concern about bringing the concept of analysis into a study which uses psychoanalytically informed methods. I feel a responsibility for making clear that psychoanalytically informed methods are not appropriate for the analysis of students (including their ideas, desires, and actions) in a non-clinical context. My interactions with the data of this case are an inductive, recursive, and generative endeavor, with an emphasis on researcher reflexivity.

The overarching aim for this study, as explained in Chapter One, is to explore how the concept of critical consciousness, implicit in the goals of most visual culture pedagogies in art education, was experienced by students and teachers within the context of television criticism essay assignments in the *Criticizing Television* course. As discussed earlier, the hidden power dynamics that shape an instructor’s construction of a
writing assignment and students’ attitudes toward writing contribute to the constitution of a site of indeterminacy. That is, students construct and express their ideas about television in relation to their desires for recognition and approval from the course instructor who is positioned as the authoritative subject who will stand as judge of their efforts. As the research suggests, the concept of critical consciousness may be implicit in the goals of visual culture pedagogies in art education, however, the process of writing toward critical consciousness in the context of a television criticism essay assignment contains implicit, and even complicit relationships among desire, knowledge, and power. Woven into the overarching aim of the study are several specific areas of focus: Subjectivity, reflexivity, writing and critical consciousness, and the problems and potentialities of using a psychoanalytically informed research methodology in a qualitative case study.

Research Questions

This qualitative case study focuses on students’ perceptions of the writing they created in the Criticizing Television course, situating these perceptions within overlapping theory contexts and in relation to my instructor’s and researcher’s perceptions of the course and this case. Two questions initially motivated research: How is student subjectivity positioned and constructed in relationship to their criticism writing in this course? And, in what ways does my own subjectivity, as an instructor, shape my assumptions and expectations regarding students’ subjectivities, their writing, and the definition of critical consciousness in the context of the course? These questions are addressed in relation to a data interaction issue: What unique challenges do I encounter in my researcher’s interactions with the writings of this course and the writings generated
through this case study?

In addressing the initial questions, the research aims to explore and describe the ways in which unconscious subjectivities become visible to me within the texts of this case. Further, I seek to describe what I believe to be evocations of the unconscious, referred to in the research as the *I of the text*, and seek to understand how these evocations may represent the complexities and contradictions of a critical (un)consciousness-in-transition. Three philosophical questions overlay my interpretive interactions with the data, bringing attention to the ontological and epistemological nature of subjects and intersubjectivities (Doucet & Mauthner, 2008):

1. *Within the writings of this case, what can be known about subjectivity and critical consciousness?*

2. *How do I know what I know about subjectivities within and around these writings?*

3. *Of what pedagogical value is the exploration of subjectivity, the unconscious, and critical consciousness within the context of students’ television criticism writing?*

The first and second philosophical questions, *Within the writings of this case, what can be known about subjectivity and critical consciousness?* and *How do I know what I know about subjectivities within and around these writings?* frame my interactions with data in the sections below, and in Chapter Four. The third question, *Of what pedagogical value is the exploration of subjectivity, the unconscious, and critical consciousness within the context of students’ television criticism writing?* is addressed in Chapter Nine within my reflections about the outcomes of the study.
A Bricolage of Methods

The psychoanalytically informed approach to this case study brings together several qualitative research methods and psychoanalytic methods in the generation of and interactions with data: qualitative case study method; writing as method of inquiry; *Lacanian Poetics* approach to text; and, a Lacanian theory of discourse. In addition, E-mail interviews and an online survey round out the bricolage of methods used to generate and interact with data.

**Qualitative Case Study Method**

A particularized and bounded inquiry (Stake, 1995), this interpretive, qualitative case study involves six sections of the *Criticizing Television* course, taught in 2005 through 2009. The case study is undertaken not only to develop a rich, interpretive account of the critical writing in the course, but to generate understanding of a particular issue through “progressive focusing” (Stake, 1995, p. 22). In this study, the issue being examined through progressive focusing is criticism writing and subjectivity; the “data” of the study are emergent and interpretive; and, moreover, reality is believed to be intersubjective, multistoried, and situated within socio-historical contexts.

**Psychoanalytically Informed Case Study Method as “Unavailable Design”**

The psychoanalytically informed research perspectives used in this study establish the conditions for articulating *unavailable designs*, in both the structure and writing of the research and in the phenomenon being studied. Researcher of writing and new media, Anne Wysocki (2005) questions the relationship between material practices of writing and epistemological constructs, particularly the effects of unquestioned assumptions and constraints of practice which form the “available designs” (p. 59) that people employ in...
their writing processes. Wysocki points out that practices such as reading and writing are shaped and limited by a culture’s unspoken and unquestioned conventions for that activity, conventions (or, available designs) that are made newly visible when the transparency of an activity is shifted into opacity through changes in material practices. Wysocki sees such shifts and changes in material practices as seeds for new awarenesses—or, encounters with unavailable designs.

Wysocki’s conceptualization of unavailable designs and their effects on epistemology brought some illuminating insights as I developed the research methodology and conceptualized the research focus. Art criticism pedagogies and examples of art criticism discourse are well-documented within research literature, thus constituting available designs for art criticism in art education. By contrast, research of criticism writing and subjectivity in *Criticizing Television* aims to open space for imagining and exploring psychoanalytically informed visual culture writing practices, that is, unavailable designs not yet theorized within art education discourse. In other words, this case study’s focus on student writing in the *Criticizing Television* course pushes art criticism pedagogies from transparency toward opacity through a psychoanalytically informed consideration of the subjective, affective resonance of criticism writing. Moreover, a psychoanalytic approach to data is in itself an unavailable design because it is not a predetermined instrument of analysis but is instead a responsive, adaptive approach to the contingent and contextual nature of phenomena, particularly the unconscious subjectivities of researcher and participants.

Distinguishing the concept of unavailable design from the concept of inventions is a subtle, yet crucial, idea that undergirds the conceptualization of the study and its
methodology: the notion of immanence. Following from a poststructuralist logic of deconstruction, the idea of an unavailable entity is necessarily predicated on the existence of an entity that is, was, or will be available. Each term, or signifier, is necessary to ensure the integrity and functioning of both terms’ meanings, that is, the signified concept that something is either available or unavailable. The prefix un- transforms the word available, denoting something present, yet inaccessible or unavailable. The human unconscious, then, might be understood as an unavailable design, since its presence as a word and concept necessarily implies an “other” that balances out and completes the signifying chain. In the psychoanalytic perspective, the unconscious is not a separate entity, or something that may be discovered someday, but is instead immanent, that is, it is present, however not available for access. The complexities of individual and cultural subjectivities originate in immanent, unavailable designs—unique constellations of conscious and unconscious intersubjective processes that constitute individual and social worlds.

**Writing as Method of Inquiry**

In agreement with researcher and theorist Laurel Richardson, I view language as a site where “different discourses divide up the world and give it meaning in ways that are not reducible to one another” (Richardson, 2003 p. 508). As an object of study as well as a method of inquiry in this research, writing is a site of colliding, interpenetrating, and even contested discourses. In this study, art education discourses are placed in dialogue with English and composition studies discourses to reveal some of the assumptions, and unavailable designs, that drive critical discourse about television.
Positioning writing as a method of inquiry in a study is done with the goal of demonstrating that data do not exist *a priori* of the inquiry but are situated and generated within the multivalent realities of the research issue. In this study, writing, as both method and centerpiece of inquiry, is perceived through a psychoanalytically informed reality. This perspective inevitably influences the type of questions that are asked, the ways in which answers are pursued, and the expectations for research results. For example, while writing as form of inquiry can be employed with the goal of generating texts that lead to discovery of new knowledge or revised insights, this case study also uses writing to explore and contemplate what cannot be discovered. In pursuing what cannot be written or read, using writing as a form of inquiry can generate new questions about the function of writing in a discipline or how writing functions for individuals. For example, *What (or, whose) purpose is served by the way this account is written?* *Or, How (and, why) do students learn to write about self and others in this way?* A psychoanalytically informed perspective on writing as a form of inquiry helps to push research beyond the production, analysis, and theorization of visible texts and into uncertain, invisible territories of unconscious (inter)subjectivities.

Significant to this research of writing in the *Criticizing Television* course is the relationship between what is visible in the writing and what is unknowable. Lacanian psychoanalytic theory offers a way of thinking about this relationship through a framework that explains human behavior in terms of conscious and unconscious experience. While many instructors of writing attend primarily to the visible, textual expressions themselves, there are other, less apparent aspects of expression that may be traced within the writing process and the written artifact. Writing can inform and reveal,
but it can also conceal and mislead. From the conscious awareness to the unconscious, unthought unknown, I pursue the invisibilities in and around the process of writing in the course and within the research. Therefore, I ask, of what importance are the invisibilities of writing? Of what use is the resonance of what is felt but is not visible in essayistic arrangements of sentences and paragraphs? Of what pedagogical and personal significance are gaps between what is thought and what is written about visual culture experiences? And, to what purposes might the aporias and impasses occurring around written expressions be put within the pedagogical aims of cultivating critical consciousness? To this end, I wonder, what might be learned from the mis-written and mis-read in student assignments? And, how might teachers and students make use of the anxieties and exhilarations experienced around writing about visual phenomena? Might an exploration and articulation of affects and felt difficulties around writing be a learning experience in itself? Going further, what if the silences, gaps, and elisions encountered in translating visual experiences into words were considered to be a pedagogy of thick perception and interpretation aimed at opening reflection and reflexivity toward critical consciousness?

Writing as Method of Inquiry: Who/What/Where is the “I” of the Text?

The phrase “I” of the text signifies the placeholder function of the pronoun “I” in students’ criticism texts. That is, rather than representing the consciously constructed identity of the writer, the “I” of a student’s criticism text is a gap that multiple subjectivities might occupy. Further, this gap or space known as “I” is shaped by the very circumstances or context of the text’s writing and its reading by others, a phenomenon of intersubjectivity. The “I” of students’ texts (the affective content) pushed me off balance,
precisely because I was (unconsciously) aware that I, the instructor, was also present in their texts. That is, my outward demeanor in the classroom, the assignments I created, my feedback on students’ writing, and my unconscious subjectivity were all intertwined with how students “appeared” to me within that classroom context.

**Writing as Method of Inquiry: Writing Through (and because of) the Unsayable**

*Whether we recognize it or not, each of us is poised between two existential terrors, that of remaining unknown and unseen, our anguish and our joys without witness, and that of being known so completely that we are left undefended.* ~Kathryn Harrison, 2006, para. 6

*The Unsayable* is the title of psychoanalyst Annie Rogers’ (2007) book about her experience of working with young girls who have suffered the trauma of abuse. Through discussion of her young patients’ experiences and revelation of her own history being abused as a child, Rogers affirms a significant tenet of Lacan’s theory of language and subjectivity: language reveals and hides more than we ever intend to say. In the case of traumatic experience, as Rogers points out, speaking of abuse is accomplished through the use of an elusive language, one that arises from a person’s particularized manner of producing coded signs and symptoms, and this language escapes the understanding of conventional therapy.

While trauma and abuse are not an issue in my case study of students’ writing, I must acknowledge my own uneasy relationship with language and writing. The relationship of *saying and not saying* is a common theme in my life and my work—a relationship that I’ve come to understand has influenced my feelings about the representation of experience and imagery through language. Looking back over the years
I taught about criticism writing in the *Criticizing Television* course, I can see the roots of my ambivalence about writing to and for other people. It seemed that each time I collected a stack of student essays to grade, I vacillated between excited anticipation for what I would read and anxiety and dread about writing feedback for the essays. It was only within the context of working on this case study that I began to map out and name some of the conflicts I encountered around writing, sensing connections between my feelings about writing experiences as they occurred when I taught *Criticizing Television* and the affects that surfaced within the research writing. Looking back at my experiences of teaching the course through the psychoanalytically informed perspectives of the present has helped me to identify and articulate possible motives for the choices I made in teaching writing. What I suspect now is that I wanted more than anything to make the critical essay’s function and form so clear and vivid and understandable (for students and myself) in order to divert focus from the messiness that lay around and within the processes and artifacts of criticism writing. All my well-intentioned talk about thesis statements, sentence structure, paragraph transitions...and then came John’s essay. So startling to me at the time, that essay later became a retrospective stone in my shoe. A past experience that kept disrupting me in the present.

John’s essay, submitted the first quarter I taught the course, was a response to the final paper assignment which clearly (or so I thought) presented the criteria for a research-based, expository critical essay. The overarching aim of this assignment was a capstone experience; students were asked to write a traditional academic criticism essay about a television program or genre of their choice, preferably one that held some kind of significant personal meaning for them, utilizing the theoretical tools of the quarter. I
worked with John throughout the quarter to address significant structural and grammatical issues in his writing, and was pleased to note improvements in clarity and form as the quarter progressed. As a result of these improvements, his final essay came as a shock to me.

I first encountered the paper in its draft stage. Eleven pages long (the assignment criteria was a 5-6 page paper), the paper did not follow expository form. There was no distinguishable thesis, but instead a stream of fragmented text. I perceived the “voice” of the essay as angry, aggressive, frustrated. Sliding between first and second person voices, the text was punctuated with large gaps, single sentences positioned between paragraphs and in some places, clusters of repeated words. As I read the essay, I felt deep concern. How would I grade this assignment? This was my first quarter teaching the course and I wanted to teach well. To me, teaching writing effectively and successfully meant working within the familiar, established procedures and structures found in the University’s Writing Center guide for instructors (CSTW, n. d.). Also influential to my expectations for student writing in the course were models of art criticism and critical discourse in art education that I’d read and internalized over the years.

Looking back at John’s essay from my present context, I think that, in addition to wanting a solution to the problem of grading and responding to his writing, I wanted to understand why that essay was so disruptive and confusing for me. At the time of John’s essay, I believe I somehow intuited that critical discourse on popular culture wasn’t as clean, clear, and neatly structured as I desired it to be. While I may have intuited this messiness, and while I could feel an affective resonance, I was not equipped at that time
to view my feelings as legitimate, or use my reactions to guide me toward questions I could ask of myself, or of the student. I remain curious about that essay today. While I am curious about the content of the essay, I am most interested in why John chose to abandon the structure completely. Why he chose to defy the criteria and create his own “unavailable design” which to him, expressed most accurately overflow and excess, the frustration and anger, that he experienced in relation to television.

In my perspective, critical discourse is excessive. Its excessiveness is necessary because it has an awfully large task with which it must contend: covering and taming an unruly repression of unconscious desires, while establishing a certain logic of critical discourse. As a result of this study, I’ve discovered that what interests me most is the excessiveness within and around writing, the remainders and excesses in and around signification which strive, but fail to contain, the messiness of subjectivity. I am interested in devising a mode of critical writing which will not only point toward a logic of critical discourse, but will accomplish this gesture toward logic by incorporating the writer’s reflexive awareness of the indeterminacies of self and other. In this approach, written criticism could be expected to accomplish more than criticizing television. It could take as a goal the process of locating one’s individual lexicon—that kernel of the Real around which desire is mobilized, causing a subject’s responsiveness to television’s

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1 I use the phrase “logic of critical discourse” to refer to the discipline-specific assumptions and expectations that determine what is considered valid and useful critical practice. For example, art criticism writing in art education has its own distinctive logic of practice. Over the years, art criticism practices in art education tended to focus on appreciation and explication of art phenomena. To this end, art criticism generally encompassed a combination of activities including description, interpretation, judgment or evaluation, and theorizing. This approach tended to place greater emphasis on the object of criticism, rather than the subjectivity of the critic herself.
modes of subject positioning. With this psychoanalytically informed approach, the work of criticism is based in a logic of excess and affect.

A method of criticism writing which is based in a logic of excess and affect necessitates an approach that pushes a student to become their own instructor. For example, identifying the individual lexicon that mobilizes responsiveness to popular culture would be a student’s responsibility. In the case of John’s essay, I could’ve asked him to examine and attempt to articulate the shapes and textures of his essay, taking into consideration my (instructor’s) feedback on his work. I would not have asked that John analyze the ideas he expressed in that essay, as I would in an assignment that prioritizes textual or literary analysis. Instead, I could have asked John to write about the process of composing that original essay, paying attention to the places where he struggled to articulate his ideas. I would have suggested that John draw a visual representation of the essay. In this schematic illustration, John could indicate where his ideas seemed most dense and thick and substantiated with examples, and areas where ideas seemed sparse and unsupported. In so doing, John might have perceived sites of narrative breakage among the written passages, places where his ideas didn’t connect, where his perceptions fell against one another, all jagged and tangled. He might also have noticed repetitions, densities, and thickenings of words, where descriptions tumbled one after the other, flowing rapidly, choking logic. The perception of inexplicable points of resonance in one’s writing indicate places where language breaks down, where the logic of critical discourse becomes something other, something excessive. This experience is, perhaps, less of a logic of practice than a poetics of critical (un)consciousness.
A Lacanian Poetics

Ellie Ragland-Sullivan’s essay, *The Magnetism Between Reader and Text: Prolegomena to a Lacanian Poetics* (1984), emphasizes the relational, affective nature of reader’s experience of a text by attending to magnetic attractions effected through eruption of unconscious, repressed material. According to Lacan, the unconscious, repressed material which is the precondition of conscious subjectivity is “dynamically suspended,” or held in place through a filter of unconscious representations, until it is “released into conscious life through the evocative resonances of language, the intentionality of affect, the lure of objects of Desire, and the Imaginary impact of identificatory traps” (Ragland-Sullivan, 1984, p. 384). Ragland-Sullivan’s idea of magnetism articulates metaphorically those feelings of inexpressible resonance, evocativeness, or disturbance that a reader might experience in an encounter with a text. A Lacanian poetics, then, does not psychoanalyze texts or people, but instead seeks the “paralinguistic points of join between visible language and invisible effect” (Ragland-Sullivan, 1984, p. 382). Ragland-Sullivan’s points of join are analogous to the concept of impasse in the case study. Moreover, the points of join are compatible with a method of drawing that attends to perceptions of shape and texture in written expressions.

The strange disturbances, magnetic attractions, and evocative resonances experienced in my interactions with the texts in the study are precisely where my conscious and unconscious subjectivity push against one another, creating the perception of being stuck in an impasse, or the sensation of being flooded by affects or anxieties. As Ragland-Sullivan puts it, the magnetic pull of these resonant impasses is the essence of a Lacanian poetics which functions as an “allegory of the psyche’s fundamental structure”
Psychoanalyst Annie Reiner (2008) attests to the difficulty (and necessity) of seeking, identifying, and expressing these resonant points of join, whether this process occurs through poetic or psychoanalytic endeavors:

Both poetry and psychoanalysis aim at capturing a moment of mental life from the jaws of death. Coaxing even a moment of consciousness from the unmentaledized ‘void and formless infinite’ is no modest goal, for it is in those moments that one learns, incrementally, to preserve one’s mind as a hospitable environment for truth. (p. 622)

A Method of Positions and Perspectives: Lacan’s Four-Part Discourse Schema as Lens on Method

Lacan’s four-part discourse schema is discussed here, not as a method of analysis, but as an orientation toward methods, or as a lens through which the other methods in this chapter may be viewed. The discourse schema’s perspectives are structural positions through which subjectivities can be described. The May 1968 student revolts in France served as inspiration for Lacan’s politicized seminar, “L’envers de la psychanalyse” (1969-70), in which he introduced a schema for the dissection of discourse in general” (McMahon, 1997, para. 2). While the concepts of the four discourses are generalizable to any social situation, Lacan’s original seminar was focused on power relations, situations of desire, and subjective orientations at work within the academy (McMahon, 1997).

2 “The Other Side of Psychoanalysis,” is the title of Lacan’s Seminar 17, the transcription of which was recently published by W.W. Norton (2006). While Sigmund Freud’s work was written by the psychoanalyst himself, Jacques Lacan’s body of work (particularly that which was produced before 1973) consists of written transcriptions of his oral lectures delivered in his ongoing seminar in Paris, from 1953 until 1980.
Lacan’s four part structure of discourse offers a way of theorizing the workings of discourses, subjectivities, and social agendas that serve specific interests. This theoretical conceptualization of discourse is a useful heuristic to refer to in research such as this, where language is repeatedly held up to scrutiny. In this case study of student writing in the Criticizing Television course, not only do I scrutinize writing, I also attempt to unravel and explain some of the conflicts I experienced in relation to teaching and researching writing. In this research, I frequently refer to the idea of impasse, a concept which refers to my perception of being entangled within, and paralyzed by, the problematic of my conflicting desires around articulating what I intuited in the writings. The conflict of wanting to both succeed and fail in expressing oneself is both a political problem (the matter of agency and ideology around the concept of expression) and a creative problem. Psychoanalysis, however, adds a unique perspective on this conflict, one which sees the problem as a fundamental component of being human. As psychoanalyst Moran Shoham (2006) explains,

> tension exists between the need to represent/communicate and the much deeper need to avoid any representation and thus remain faithful to possibilities (the infinite). Such a tension is not...the sign of a conflict to be resolved...but rather the hallmark of the experience under discussion and thus, perhaps, also an inherent feature of our being. (p. 720)

The four discourses in Lacan’s schema are Master, University, Hysteric, and Analyst, and each is distinguished by the particular position of the split subject in relation to the objet a, or, object in desire (Bracher, 1994b). In this discussion, I focus on the Master and Analyst discourses. What makes this discourse schema useful for
psychoanalytically informed research is its manner of theorizing the relationships among various subject positions, styles of speech, and corresponding degrees of agency. Specifically, I use Lacan’s discourse schema to lend support to my belief that the role of a researcher and teacher of writing is that of an ethical questioner—an approach to a situation which honors the tensions set in motion by questions that may not be possible to answer at this time, or at all.

The significance of Lacan’s discourse schema revolves around Lacan’s concept of the split subject and the lack that constitutes their subjectivity. This split subject, who exists as a subject only because s/he has moved from the undifferentiated Real into the realm of language (Symbolic register), depends upon language to hide or deflect attention from their lacking self. Relatedly, language also prevents the subject from seeing the other’s lack. As explained earlier, a subject is split because s/he has only an illusory wholeness, and this wholeness is always sought in others, using the tools of signification (symbols and images). However, because language can never, finally, symbolize the Real, there is always a remainder, a bit of the Real that eludes the subject. This remainder of the Real, or Lacan’s term, “Das Ding” (Wright, 1999. p. 63) is known as the objet a, and it is a essential component of Lacan’s discourse theory: the objet a is the ingredient that acts as a catalyst in discourse. If language or discourse were capable of covering the Real and the subject’s lack, there would be no movement in discourse, no need to create symbols, no reason to communicate with one another (Wright, 1999). The discourse schema that Lacan developed offers a structural framework for determining the interests and values that are operating within a particular context, values that limit or enable agency.
Master and Analyst Discourses

The discourse of the Master is in effect when rigid canons of sense are imposed upon the signifiers of self and the other, and singular, dominant meanings govern a discourse. The discourse of the Master is driven by master signifiers, that is, the signifiers or ideals within which a subject’s identity and integrity are heavily invested. (Wright, 1999). Master signifiers are commonly held understandings that structure a culture’s and individual’s ethics, morals, and beliefs. A discipline’s preferred theoretical frameworks, dominant philosophies, and value systems are constituted of master signifiers. Bracher (1994) explains that

we can recognize master signifiers by the way both senders and receivers of a message respond to them. Senders use them as the last word, the bottom line, the term that anchors, explains, or justifies the claims or demands contained in the message. Receivers respond to master signifiers with a similar attitude: whereas terms and the values and assumptions they bear may be challenged, master signifiers are simply accepted as having a value or validity that goes without saying. (p. 112)

In the case of Criticizing Television, the discourse of art criticism in art education functioned as a master signifier, determining the decisions I made in developing the course. For example, the assumption that I would have students write critical essays was unquestioned. Moreover, it was also unquestioned that I would assess and grade the writing.

The discourse of the Analyst is that of the ethical questioner. Indeed, it is the goal of the analyst to help the subject (or, in psychoanalysis, the analysand) to recognize their
split subjecthood and take ownership of the relationship between their desires and the unconscious knowledge they conceal. In this discourse, the analyst seeks to locate herself in the place of the subject’s (analysand’s) desire by reflecting, not forcing, the subject’s free-association or play of signifiers that emerge in situations of reflexive dissonance. Importantly, the discourse of the Analyst is the only discourse in Lacan’s schema in which unconscious desires, and all of the confusions, contradictions, and impasses that arise from them, are taken as knowledge. Wright (1999) posits that the discourse of the Analyst is the only discourse

in which the objet a as fragment of the Real is in a place where it can effect the movement of signifiers, precipitating...a new master signifier of identification that is produced by the subject itself rather than imposed by the established order designated by the master. (p. 72, italics added)

An analyst’s role might be assumed by a teacher, who, in guiding students to explore their own personal, desirous attachments to popular culture, can reinforce the idea that knowledge which originates in the unconscious is not only valid, but is also a form of agency. In other words, a subject’s unconscious is the only form of knowledge which cannot be colonized because it is a realm of subjectivity that cannot be controlled by a master discourse, whether this master be a teacher or the student herself.

The Master and Analyst positions in Lacan’s discourse schema became, for me, methodological checkpoints against which I could attempt to explain (to myself and to others) my motivations for certain actions taken in the research. Additionally, the language of Lacan’s discourse theory helped me begin to place signifiers around some of my desires and resistances. For example, when I first began developing the Criticizing
Television course, I was working within established models of traditional art criticism—pedagogies which occupied a dominant position within the art education discipline’s value system. I wanted to use the tools of art criticism discourse, yet I did not find them a comfortable fit. I wanted to know more about the complexities of subjectivity; I was especially interested in finding a way to facilitate exploration of the irrational, unruly aspects of human desire that exceed and disrupt critical discourse about television. Seeing the art education literature in terms of master signifiers and movements of discourses that served particular subject positions, helped me to conceptualize my own presence and absence within the system of discourse.

As a graduate student, I was susceptible to the lure and seduction of master signifiers that promised clarity of pedagogical purposes and procedures. At first, these master signifiers (the dominant traditional theories of art criticism) provided a milieu of security for me. However, as I began teaching the course, I discovered that these same master signifiers that seemed so clear and stable in theory, were becoming a source of anxiety and frustration for me. Specifically, I felt ill-equipped to elicit critiques of television from students without also, in some way, making space for acknowledging the failure of critique. What I understand in the present is that I was seeking to acknowledge the influence of unconscious knowledge—the bits of the Real that disrupt and undermine the logic of critical discourse. It wasn’t until I began to validate these anxieties, by naming them through writings and questions recorded in my teaching journal, that I could actually begin to name them “disruptions.” From my researcher’s subject position in the present, I speculate that the act of naming the inchoate, anxious feelings was a powerful step for me. The result of using terms such as “disruption” or “impasse” in these
situations of irresolvable uncertainty was a step toward conferring agency on the unconscious. I believe that, instinctively, I was seeking a different position in art education discourse. I wanted to flee the master signifiers of art criticism discourse, yet at the same time I could see my complicity in their existence. While I couldn’t have articulated this at the time I was teaching the course, I believe I was seeking to create an Analyst subject position in critical discourse.

In the present, the Analyst discourse is how I seek to position myself in this research, as well as in my approach to the teaching of writing. Seeking to occupy this position does not mean that I would like be a psychoanalyst, or that I wish to create a cure for writing problems. Rather, the Analyst subject position is one in which a person actively seeks to avoid controlling an Other’s desires. Thus, the ethical obligation of the Analyst is to refuse to occupy the role of the subject who knows all the answers. In the context of this research, and in the context of having to translate my lived experience with the course through the structure of qualitative research methods, it is the Analyst discourse that serves as impetus for, and genesis of, the impasse methodology.

**Complicating the Concept of Response**

The word *response* is used frequently in this study, and its meanings are complex, cutting across the disciplines of English, composition studies, and literary analysis activities. Indeed, the approach to “reading” the data of this study bears some theoretical affinities with reader-response theories of literature (Holland, 1992; Marshall, 2000; Tyson, 2006). Thus, a brief discussion of reader-response theory in general is offered to illuminate some of the interdisciplinary relationships within which this study is situated. To begin with the most straightforward conceptualization of response as it is used in this
case study, I consider the essays written for assignments in the course, along with my own written comments and essay feedback on these assignments to be forms of “response.” Additionally, answers to the online survey and participant E-mail interview texts are also “responses” created within the context of this study. However, I believe that there are other, less visible responses at work in relation to the visible forms of written response. That is, the unconscious dynamics which are not accessible to expression and conscious awareneses which are perceived but not expressed outwardly in words are also responses.

In the context of this research, the idea of response is not limited to my instructor’s subjectivity, but is interwoven with and responsive to the students’ responses. The complexity of response is due, in part, to its origins in conscious and unconscious activities, explained in Chapter One as the transference and countertransference. As explained below, the tradition of reader-response theory in literary criticism adds other layers of complexity to the concept of response through considerations of its socio-historic and theoretical usage in the study of reading and writing.

Originating with the work of I.A. Richards in 1929 and Louise Rosenblatt in 1938, reader-response theory attends to the experience of the reader and the relationship, or transactional experience, a reader has with a text. Philippot & Graves (2009) find similarities between reader response and constructivist theories, noting that the transaction of reader and text is an effect of socio-historic context as well as the particular characteristics of a reader, including their “experience, expectations, knowledge, preferences, attitudes, values, beliefs” (p. 10). Literary theorist James Marshall contends (2000) that the word response is problematic because of its broad implications. Noting a
range of possible assumptions raised by using the concept of response in a study,
Marshall muses,

Certainly we mean more than simple comprehension (the ability to say back what happened), but what is that something more? Emotional response? Autobiographical connection? Interpretive insight? Delight in the act of reading itself? Or can we include an understanding of the text's context, of the author's intentions, of the critical tradition that has framed discussion about the text? Almost anything we do or say during or after the act of reading literature can be construed as a response, and thus the task of mapping the possible seems immensely large. (2000, p. 382)

Complementary to reader-response theory is Stanley Fish’s (1980) idea of a community of readers. A community of readers shares a discourse, such as the theories, language, and assumptions which define the identity and guide the activities of an academic discipline. The community shares expectations that influence what is read and what sort of responses to the reading are legitimate and valid. Further, within a community of readers, we

learn ways of approaching texts from the directions for reading that we are given, the assignments that we complete, and the responses of others in that community…When individual readers share their personal meanings with others, these meanings become part of a socially constructed interpretation of a text. We test, alter, and enlarge our meaning as we talk about texts with others, or respond through writing, acting, singing or drawing. As we share our personal meanings with others, their own responses to the text and to our interpretations become part
of our experience and thus of our responses. (Philippot & Graves, 2009, p. 11-12)

Reader response theory is a key form of scholarship in the critical tradition of literary theory (Marshall, 2000). Criticism work that originates in the critical tradition is most often undertaken by researchers who study empirically the processes of reading and writing occurring within the context of school. Researchers working empirically use methods that are generally rooted in the social sciences, originating in disciplines such as education, psychology, and anthropology. An empirical approach, however, presents analytical challenges in that researchers are faced with the task of describing and explaining experiences with texts that are invisible, thus unverifiable in the empirical sense. As Marshall notes, “such responses cannot be studied except as represented in some form of discourse (e.g., speech, writing, drawing) that mediates them and helps determine their content” (p. 389). Unlike a writer’s response, which is represented in words, a reader's response to a text isn’t directly visible. Because the “act of reading leaves no traces, and writing about reading is writing,” a reader's reaction and response to a text “can never be studied apart from the medium in which it appears” (Marshall, 2000, p. 382). As a result, the response itself must be understood as emergent within, and shaped by, the particular characteristics of the context and medium of reading and responding, with consideration given to the reader's “familiarity and skill with the conventions” (Marshall, 2000, p. 382).

All forms of reader-response theory are shaped not only by the nature of reading itself, but also, importantly, the way in which the “reader” is conceptualized. For instance, literary theorists David Bleich and Norman Holland (working with subjective and psychoanalytic methods, respectively) usually employ the word reader in reference
to an actual person. On the other hand, some theorists refer to a hypothetical reader using terms such as Stanley Fish’s *informed reader* and Wolfgang Iser’s *implied reader* to denote the nature of the reading activity which is represented (Tyson, 2006). Rather than direct attention to the actual person who reads, the hypothetical reader, as a concept, indicates the distinctive subject position(s) a text creates for a reader through its particular textual characteristics. Analogous to the hypothetical reader of a literary text is a television program’s ideal viewer or demographic. For example, the anticipated demographic for a weekday afternoon soap opera will differ from that of a Saturday afternoon sports program. In the context of this study of students’ criticism writing, the myriad conceptualizations of a reader as well as the form and motivations of their responses to texts are related to the traditions of reader response theory in that the student writer of a criticism essay and the instructor who responds to the text are both engaged in processes of reading and responding. While the student may be focused on writing, complex processes of reading are occurring, for example, “readings” of the implicit and explicit disciplinary conventions as well as instructor and student expectations. These readings are not only conscious processes, but are also rooted in the unconscious.

**A Psychoanalytic Approach to Reading and Response**

The psychoanalytic methodology used in this case study cuts across the motivations and goals of most reader-response approaches with the consideration of the unconscious nature of subjectivity and intersubjectivity. The psychoanalytic approach conceptualizes the study’s data and participants in a distinctive manner, problematizing traditional literary methods of reader-response theories with consideration of transference and countertransference in the construction of relationships among readers and texts.
A Lacanian analysis of text holds up a mirror to the reader, the act of reading, and the text itself. In accordance with Lacan’s privileging of the signifier over the signified, the purpose of a psychoanalytic analysis of text is not to find the meanings buried in the writing content, but to explore the reflexive implications of the signifiers. That is, any analytic reading of a text, whether a work of literature or a student criticism essay, is an endeavor that reveals the desire and resistance of the reader. In Lacanian theory, the signified slides under, and is subservient to, the signifier. In other words, signifier-signified relationships are arbitrary to begin with and, further, since each and every subject (person) perceives signifiers in a way that is determined by their particularized desires and resistances, there can be, finally, no locking down, no enduring stability of what is signified, or meant, by a signifier. Taking the idea of customized perceptions of signifiers further, a Lacanian perspective on response would approach the format of the text itself as a signifier, looking at myriad factors beyond the text’s intended content (what the writer intended to express), to explore the presence of significations such as the text’s formal visual appearance, including characteristics such as patterns of repetitions in the words, length of the text, or the text’s layout on a page.

**Research Design: Scope, Data, and Sample Selection Strategy**

*Sampling* and *selection* refer to the procedures used to “identify, choose, and gain access to relevant data sources” (Mason, 2002, p. 120), thus careful thought and planning of data sample selection is vital for ensuring the quality and practicability of a research project. Sampling is guided by theoretical and empirical logic (Mason, 2002) and, in my proposed research project, is directed toward generating complex, nuanced, and contextual understandings of the research phenomena. The sample sources for this project
are former students and written texts.

The scope of data considered in this inquiry (Table 1) includes the following:

A sample of students’ essay texts created in *Criticizing Television* during the time period in which I taught the course (Autumn 2005—Spring 2007, Winter 2009), selected E-mail correspondence between students and myself from the time period of 2005—2009, my researcher/instructor’s journal from 2005 through the present, data generated through a twenty-two question Internet survey which was made available to all former students who took the course with me, and in-depth E-mail correspondence interviews with two former students.

The corpus of data also includes affective resonance “data” and evocation “data” which refer to the significant affects experienced in working with the study (affective resonance data), and the theoretical signifiers that were later associated with these resonant affects (evocation data). These “invisible” sources of data are discussed in greater detail below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATA SOURCES</th>
<th>RESEARCH LITERATURE</th>
<th>WRITTEN TEXTS (STUDENT &amp; INSTRUCTOR)</th>
<th>AFFECTIVE RESONANCE DATA</th>
<th>EVOCATION DATA (TEMPORAL &amp; CONTEXTUAL)</th>
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</thead>
</table>

Table 1. Data Sources
When I began this case study, I was open to the idea of devising hybrid research methods where a structured mode of qualitative inquiry, such as grounded theory or content analysis, could be placed in dialogue with Lacanian theoretical perspectives. I located examples of content analysis methods used in research of composition and literature texts (Barton, 2003, 2004; Huckin, 1992, 2004; Krippendorff, 2004). I also located examples of systematic text analysis in the art education literature (Ettinger & Maitland-Gholson, 1990). Additionally, I discovered an art education study that employed content analysis in the research of dance criticism essays (Feck, 2002), and a study that applied content analysis to students’ art criticism writings (Walker, 1996). I felt a measure of comfort and security in the idea of using content analysis for counting, grouping, and charting the words of a text.

While not formally articulated and documented, a content analysis of sorts was continuous and ongoing since I began teaching the course. Over the years of working with the course and consciously attending to the data that emerged from it, my unconscious register of subjectivity was working, too. Those years of thinking and writing iteratively through and around the study, pushed me into deeper questions about student’s criticism writing, compelling me to devise language for articulating them. Therefore, given the ongoing, intimate entanglements with the data, I found it difficult, perhaps ultimately impossible, to discern where the texts ended and my subjectivity began. I found myself questioning the embeddedness of my own subjectivity.
in both the constitution of the text sample (the students’ essays were created while I taught the course, using a curriculum designed by myself) and my responses to the sample. These questions led to considerations of, and concern for, research reliability. Specifically, I wondered: *Am I finding themes within these texts, or within myself?*

Composition researchers Gesa Kirsch & Joy Ritchie (1995) address this slippery relationship between the researcher as “I” and the “I” of the text with a caveat from Trinh Minh-ha:

‘In writing close to the other of the other, I can only choose to maintain a self-reflexively critical relationship toward the material, a relationship that defines both the subject written and the writing subject undoing the I while asking ‘what do I want, wanting to know you-or me?’ (p. 13)

Jennifer C. Hunt, a sociologist who has worked extensively with psychoanalytic approaches in qualitative fieldwork, brings perspective to the slippery position of the “I” in research. She views the researcher as the “primary instrument of inquiry” (1989, p. 14). As such, the researcher’s “mental experience—however that is defined—mediates their understanding of the cultural and psychological world of subjects” (Hunt, 1989, p. 14), as well as objects and phenomena. Following from Hunt’s perspective on the researcher as primary instrument of inquiry, I developed a 2007 pilot study of a small sample of students’ critical essays. This study of three critical essays traced my reflexive perceptions of evocation and resonance in the writing, perceptions that I named “resistance.” As sensitizing concepts in this case, “evocation” and “resonance” refer to the feelings of being moved or provoked emotionally that I experienced when reading the students’ writing as well as affects experienced in formulating my responses to their
writing. My perceptions of evocative resistance in the pilot study essays were shaped through systematic interpretations of the occurrences of repeated words, and also by making note of other striking characteristics of the texts. At that time, my attention was focused on qualities that I perceived to be in the text, and my assumption was that I was perceiving students’ resistance (to the assignment, to my teaching, to critical discourse, or resistance to the course, in general) in these essays.

Later, when I expanded the text sample to twenty essays, I worked less systematically with the words in the texts. I began to notice and pay closer attention to the entirety of the twenty essay corpus and could also contextualize these essays within the emergent data from the interviews and online survey. As I worked with this larger corpus, I eventually began to contemplate how these twenty essays seemed to fit within or stand out among all the other essays created over the years. As I sensed my attachments and affective responses to these essays, I began to feel less and less enthusiastic about working with them. I realized it was difficult for me to confront directly, or even articulate in language, what drew me to these particular essays.

During the time period when I began to focus on the sample of twenty essays, I was also examining closely the emergent data of the online survey and E-mail interviews. I experienced a profusion of affects, and eventually grouped these affects into two initial, general categories. The category of emergent thematic textures encompassed the significant affective phenomena that I attributed to the texts themselves, and the category of thickening areas of sensitivity referred to the nascent theoretical descriptors I began to assign to my interactions with the data of the study. Later in the study, early categories were refined and renamed through the psychoanalytic process of deferred meaning. Thus,
the early, general category of *emergent thematic textures* became known as *Evocation Data* (Table 1). And, the category that I’d initially referred to as *thickening areas of sensitivity* became *Affective Resonance Data* (Table 1).

As I progressed further into the study of the students’ and my own writings, I became more sensitively attuned to the impasses arising from various affective phenomena. Thus, the revision of the names of the categories of *Evocation Data* and *Affective Resonance Data* is, in my perspective, a notable development. Specifically, the process of naming and revising these particular categories of evocative, affective data (phenomena which are ostensibly invisible) exemplifies the growth of a researcher’s awareness of, and commitment to, the agency of the unconscious.

Most striking to me were my shifting perceptions of evocation and resonance in and around the essays, a shift that occurred gradually after the pilot study. Specifically, I began to sense evocative connections among multiple writings created by the same author. Evrinomy Avdi (2008), drawing upon Bakhtin’s work, directs attention to the socio-historical origins of utterance, particularly in relation to the writer’s ‘voice’ and

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3 Psychologist Nita Cherry (2008) explains that an “alertness to deep assumptions about what counts as data can be confronting...we can begin to notice not only what we include, worry about or treasure, but what our gathering leaves out” (p. 27). Categories are metaphorical maps of subjectivity, the “exquisite points” that Barthes describes in the quote that begins this chapter. Within these points of resonance, many phenomena may be brought to light: tacit wisdom we take for granted, personal scripts running so deep we don’t even know they are ours; assumptions about the way things are; the limits of our capability and confidence, past and present; energy; stuckness; aspiration” (Cherry, 2008, p. 27).
transferential relationship with the addressee, or reader:

(A)ll utterances are structured in relation to an addressee and...all utterances have a social history (in this context the various meanings that specific words have relate to the client’s history in important relationships, as well as to the culturally-assigned meanings associated with them). Using these concepts, the analysis traces a gradual shift in the client’s ‘voices’, from a mainly transferential frame in the beginning of therapy, where the client addresses the therapist as if he is the object of his transference, towards the use of a reflexive frame towards the end of therapy, where the client comments on his transferential feelings from a distance and gradually evaluates them and connects them to important relationships in his past. (p. 79)

At the time of the pilot study, I believed that the evocation and resonance I perceived in the writings was linked with students’ resistance to the assignments. However, in the later stages of the research, I wasn’t so sure about my findings. No longer could I believe with certainty that I was perceiving students’ resistance in the essays. Instead, I found myself within an impasse wherein uncertainty of affect reigned supreme, throwing out of focus my carefully considered conclusions about the writing. As a result, I began to think more expansively about my own complicity in the perception of resistance, recalling psychoanalyst Mitchell Wilson’s (2003) explanation of the analyst’s role in the phenomenon of resistance. If, as Wilson notes, “an analyst’s desire thoroughly underwrites the analyst’s technique” (2003, p. 83), then a failure of that technique may result in the analyst’s identification of the failure as a case of resistance.
Research Population and Demographics

The research population (Table 2) is a convenience sample, consisting of undergraduate students who were students in my Criticizing Television course, a Second Level Writing and Social Diversity General Education Curriculum [GEC] credit at a large Midwestern university, which I taught during the academic quarters of Autumn 2005, Spring 2006, Autumn 2006, Winter 2007, Spring 2007, and Winter 2009. The population of men and women range in age from approximately 18 – 35.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case Study Participants</th>
<th>Data</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alix</td>
<td>Essays</td>
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<tr>
<td>Amelie</td>
<td>Essays</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duane</td>
<td>Interview, Essays</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>Essays</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raphael</td>
<td>Essays, E-mails</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riley</td>
<td>Essay, E-mails</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert</td>
<td>Interview, E-mails, Essays</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Participants and Data  

⁴ All participants are identified by pseudonyms. Other participants not included in this table are anonymous respondents to the online survey, and student writing (anonymous authors) selected from the entire corpus of essays created from 2005-2009.

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Purposive Text Sample: Evocative Data

The case study uses a purposive, theoretical sampling strategy, meaning that I’ve evaluated and selected writing data on the basis of relevance to the research questions and analytical framework (Mason, 2002; Creswell, 2007). While not covering a large scope of data, purposive, theoretical sampling is nonetheless effective and desirable because it allows researchers to select contexts, categories, or phenomena that will enable key comparisons for the development and testing of arguments. Moreover, this sampling strategy fits well with a qualitative case study goal of generating data inductively.

Subsumed under the general, purposive sampling strategy is illustrative or evocative sampling, which refers to selection of data that offer an especially vivid and illuminating illustration of a phenomenon or context representing a larger group of experiences or data in the case. The text examples selected from the research literature, my research journal, and students’ writings are chosen on the basis of their ability to illustrate evocatively the phenomena of disruption, affective resonance, and impasse experienced while I taught Criticizing Television and also encountered during my research of writing in the course.

Sample and Credibility

According to Creswell & Miller (2000), establishing credibility can be accomplished by describing in-depth a small slice of the research interactions, “locating individuals in specific situations; bringing a relationship or interaction alive between two or more persons; or by providing a detailed rendering of how people feel” (p. 129). To address credibility, the iterative analyses of the writings in this study incorporated, through impasse methodology and peripheral vision approaches to the data, both macro
and micro focus on the texts. As a result, attention was increasingly given to the
dialogically constructed subject positionings among the students and myself as we
corresponded through E-mail.

In addition, my analyses followed several overlapping trajectories: first, I focused
on the aims of the assignment, in particular, the alternative essay, and the writing
strategies of the students with my (instructor’s) response and assessment as important
signifiers of what was considered to be effective writing in the context of the assignment
and course; second, I focused on students’ interpretations of the possibilities offered them
in an assignment and on the ways in which they chose to comply with or deviate from the
assignment criteria; third, I gave attention to the interactions between student writers and
myself in which our respective discourse positionings became visible in our written
interactions; and fourth, I examined the transference and countertransference effects that I
interpreted in the students’ texts and my own responses to them, with attention given to
tracking my own reactions to evocation and resonance I perceived in the writings.

To explore the dialogical subject positionings of students and teacher in sufficient
detail, I worked with a select group of students’ texts. Like Rosberry, et al. (1989), I
found the close study of a few students (organized into a series of vignettes) to be most
effective in illustrating the evocative instances that characterize a teacher’s interactions
with an individual student’s writing. This method of close analysis of individual cases
bears some similarity to the method of the psychoanalyst, who works with individuals in
pursuit of description and interpretation of personal experiences, while attempting to
come to terms with the ways in which the individual circumstances relate to the larger
network of relationships in an analysand’s life, as well the transferential relationship to
the psychoanalyst in the context of the treatment. However, unlike the analyst/analysand relationship, the intent in the research is not to seek therapeutic ends but to illuminate, through description and interpretation, the experiences of writing about television in an effort to understand the relationships among writing, criticism, and critical consciousness.

Sample Strategy and Rationale

Because this case study employs an overarching sample strategy that is purposive and theoretical, my choice of texts is based on my perception of their relevance for the research questions, my theoretical positions, the analytical framework in the case, and the theory I aim to develop. Identity signifiers such as class, gender, race, ethnicity, ability age, etc. are variables that may be used to inform a sampling strategy in a qualitative study. While a valid approach, the sample used in this study of student writing was not determined through a consideration of specific variables of identity. Instead, the criteria for selection of the writing sample followed a general orientation toward texts which were disruptive, evocative, or had affective resonance for me. To this end, the text sample includes multiple forms of data: My researcher’s/instructor’s journal; E-mail interview data; online questionnaire data; and a sample of twenty television criticism essays created by students while they were in the course.

The student essays examined in this study are an evocative and illustrative sample, chosen strategically to provide compelling and idiosyncratic examples of students’ writing in the course. With the acknowledgment that a Lacanian approach to textual research necessarily implicates the researcher’s subjectivity within the analysis of data, these essay texts may potentially offer an opportunity to explore the “difficult knowledge” that develops in the relational space of the texts and my readings of them.
The essay sample is selected from among all critical writing assignments created during sections of the course taught in Autumn 2005, Winter 2007, Spring 2007, and Winter 2009. Fitting with the evocative, illustrative sample strategy, twenty critical essays created by seven students between 2005 and 2009 were selected for the study because of their unique characteristics, affective resonance for me, and their potential to bring insights to this study’s research questions. A primary impetus for selecting these particular essays is their evocativeness. Out of all the papers I read during the years I taught the course, these essays were, at the time they were submitted, markedly unsettling for me for various reasons.

The essays in this sample are idiosyncratic in topic and in form, yet they do share some similar characteristics. For example, one notable similarity among the essays I selected is the author’s area of study. Four of the authors were undergraduate students with a declared major or minor in the fine arts. Two of the essays’ authors were humanities majors, and another was an engineering major. In addition, each essay chosen for the sample involved a situation wherein the student made a significant, unexpected deviation from the assignment criteria. Further, some of the essays in the sample involved continuations—that is, their authors continued to add to them and inform me of the paper’s development months after the course ended. Finally, a few of the critical essays were perceived by me as “excessive” or overwhelming in some way—that is, I experienced excesses of affect, confusion, resistance, or empathy that puzzled or trouble me.

This case study’s relatively small sample follows from a psychoanalytically informed approach to qualitative research—an approach which carries with it the
influence of psychoanalytic therapy as “an intensive case study of individual patients over several years” (Kvale, 1999, p. 94). In addition to unfolding over several years, psychoanalytic therapy is deeply invested in emotional interactions between an analyst and patient. While my case study did not involve psychoanalytical analyses of the participants, the research did necessitate close readings of texts with an intensive focus on exploring the affective resonance various data invoked in me. One aspect of the psychoanalytical tradition was transferable to this case study: the need for an expanse of time within which a holistic view of the study and its data, including an intensive focus on researcher reflexivity, could be perceived, written, and explored.

Text As Data

The decision to use text as the primary object of inquiry in this case study was arrived at after careful consideration of the goals of the research as well as reflection on the background and development of the research. My interest in student and teacher experiences of writing in an education context began several years ago when I taught Art and Music Since 1945. In that course, which was taught entirely online, students and I communicated with each other solely through text, such as E-mail messages, discussion board postings, and essays. As a result, I developed a sensitivity to writing as a representation and expression of subjectivity.

Beyond my interest in writing in general, I also understood that all research methods, from in-person interviews and focus groups, to content analysis of video, to personal narratives, will eventually be translated through, or into, text. This translation happens in the language exchanged during an interview which may be later transcribed.
selected, and interpreted by the researcher, and it occurs by translating any experience into the signifiers shared by a discourse community.

With the exception of poststructuralist and feminist inquiries which trouble the tidy, one-to-one correspondence of language and experience, many research methods downplay the ways in which written representations of experiences are but interpretive translations of an event, shaped through the perspectives and contingencies of subjectivity and the rules of language. A psychoanalytically informed inquiry that focuses on textual data acknowledges explicitly that language is a site of identity and subjectivity constructions, interpretations, misinterpretations, and misrecognitions.

**Phases of Data Generation and Data Interactions**

The data in this study were generated and explored within several phases from 2007 through 2010 (Table 3). The interactions with the data occurred throughout the study by way of writing as method of inquiry. Phase I involved the process of locating themes inductively for the purpose of guiding the pilot study. In Phase Two, the research writing was developed further, building upon the insights which emerged during the pilot study. This writing was influential to the development of the online survey and E-mail interview questions used in Phase III. This outline of data generation and related research activities offers a summary of the case study’s development from 2007 through 2010:

*Phase I: Initial Examination of Literature and Text Sample; Seeking Inductive Themes*

- Research Proposal
- Review of art education literature from 1950 to the present; English and composition studies literature from 1960 to the present
- Initial exploration of students’ television criticism essays created between September 2005—June 2007
Phase II: Continuing Examination of Text Sample; Exploring and Theorizing Inductive Themes

- Continuing Literature Review
- Pilot study of evocative, illustrative essay sample (three essays)

Phase III: Expanding the Text Sample Through Questionnaire and Interviews

- Continuing Literature Review
- Online questionnaire for former students (multiple choice and fill-in narrative-style questions)
- In-depth interviews (evocative, purposive sample)
- Ongoing interactions with expanded essay sample (twenty essays created by seven authors).

Table 3. Research Activity Timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase One</th>
<th>Phase One</th>
<th>Phase Two</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Literature review</td>
<td>1. Literature review</td>
<td>1. Literature review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Pilot study: Student writing sample (3 essays)</td>
<td>2. I.R.B. application</td>
<td>2. Data interactions: Student writing sample</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Draft E-mail interview prompts &amp; online survey questions</td>
<td>3. Select student writing sample (20 essays)</td>
<td>3. Research journal writing &amp; drawing</td>
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<td>Teaching Criticizing Television</td>
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<th>Phase Three</th>
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Research Method: Online Survey

An invitation to participate in an Internet survey about perceptions of writing experiences in the *Criticizing Television* course was sent by E-mail to the collective population of students who took the course from Autumn 2005 through Winter 2009. The survey was available online to students during July 2009 through August, 2009. Approximately 30 percent of all students who took the course from Autumn 2005 through Winter 2009 responded to the anonymous survey. According to qualitative educational researcher Carolyn Shields (2003), web-based surveys are preferable to traditional mail questionnaires for data collection for several reasons, including the ease with which one can survey large numbers of students, the appeal of this format to computer savvy students, and a sense of increased anonymity and safety for self-expression. The questionnaire used in my study was available at a secure website that did not collect IP addresses or other identity markers, thus preserving the anonymity of participants.

Included within the online survey was an invitation to participate in an E-mail interview. An online survey participant could skip this question, ensuring their complete anonymity. However, if a student did wish to participate in an Email interview they could indicate their interest by selecting a consent button and providing their E-mail address. Eight students expressed interest in being interviewed, however only two students could participate within the time frame allotted for the interviews.

Research Method: Interview

The case study interviews were conducted through E-mail. The semi-structured, free-association, dialogic-style interviews proceeded from themes prepared in advance.
Informed by the central goal of the study, to learn about students’ perceptions of their writing experiences in the course, the interview themes focused on the elicitation of students’ perceptions of and feelings about writing assignments, their perceptions of the instructor’s view of their writing efforts; and the affective nature of writing about visual culture phenomena. Given the free-association style of these interviews, the questions varied from participant to participant. The general, leading themes were developed into initial questions that were later followed by more specific questions to elicit more detailed information.

My E-mail interviews with students occurred over a two month time period. The choice to create an interview dialogue that originates as text, rather than an in-person interview that is later transcribed into text was a carefully considered decision. This choice created a writing and reading situation not unlike that which occurs when I read a student’s paper away from the presence of the student and context within which the writing was created. This decision was significant to me, because I was interested in exploring reflexively how particular subject positions are created through and by written expressions as they occur outside of the original time and space of their creation. The subject-position dynamics of an E-mail dialogue differ from those positions created in the process of receiving and responding to a student critical essay in the context of teaching the course. In both instances, however, there was a distancing and delay from the context of the written expression, my reading of the expression, and the subsequent responses formed in relation to the writing. In the case of the E-mail interviews, my focus was on my own interpretations and responses to the E-mail interview messages (both at the time
of the interview and several months later) as well my thoughts about how my replies may have been experienced by the student interview participant.

Both E-mail interviews began with the following general prompt but, from that point onward, the participants’ replies, and my own responses to their replies, constituted the E-mail interview dialogues:

Dear ------

As you know, I’ve been working with ideas around criticism, writing, visual culture. Developing and teaching the TV class was a powerful experience for me, for many reasons. In particular, I became really curious about how students write about TV----how they translate life experiences into critical perspectives through writing. Some of the students I had over the years took the TV criticism writing very seriously, and some even continued writing after the course was over. I began to wonder why certain students are so motivated to write more, or take risks in their writing, etc. I wonder if instructors could be doing more, or doing things differently, to make writing more engaging and meaningful.

About the interview questions..... I dislike the rigid structure of formal questionnaires, so I’d like to have an informal stream of thinking kind of exchange...we can begin with some questions, but you are welcome to raise questions yourself if you'd like. It's okay to branch out and develop into new themes and ideas. Here are some questions to get us started.... (Note: There are no required amounts to write, nor do you have to answer every question. Likewise, if you have questions you’d like to ask me or ideas to share, please go right ahead.):
• I wonder, what is it about a writing context that enables (or constrains) someone's expression of critical perspectives that are (personally) meaningful and not simply trite and disconnected from their world?

• How does writing function for you, in general? Does it lock down and capture/contain ideas and meanings or does it set ideas in motion for you? Does it settle matters of meaning or does it disrupt? What do you learn about yourself and others through writing?

• And, while you were in the TV course, what enabled or constrained you to write as you did? Did you become more (or differently) critically conscious because of the writing you did? Did the writing feedback you received have any affect on how you felt about your writing? If you had to assess your learning in the course, what was your most significant learning---was it knowledge you gained about TV? About yourself? About culture? About critical theories? About the requirements and expectations of a university writing course (institutional knowledge)? And so on…

**Problems and Challenges in Using Psychoanalytically Informed Methods**

A significant challenge in using psychoanalytic theory as the basis for a research methodology is the potential difficulty in locating and explaining phenomena that are believed to be hidden from conscious awareness. However, researchers working with psychoanalytically informed methods do assert that it is possible to locate a kernel of unconscious subjectivity within the speech of a person or within a written or spoken expression (Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Clarke, 2006; Crociani-Windland, 2009; Hollway, 2009; Hollway & Jefferson, 2009; Froggett & Hollway, 2010; Frosh, 2008; Kvale, 1999, 205
(2009; Lapping, 2007, 2008; Meek, 2003; Parker, 2005a, 2010; Rogers, 2006, 2007a, 2007b; Stern, 1997a, 1997b, 2002; 2010). The process of hearing or seeing the unconscious discourse, however, is less of an instrumentalized method than it is a dismantling of assumptions that communication between people is wholly conscious in the expression and perception of meaning.

Another challenge is posed by this case study’s resistance to generalizability and replication. Psychoanalyst Steinar Kvale (1999) notes several problems that psychoanalytically informed research faces when evaluated within positivist expectations, issues that I considered when developing my own case study:

The intensive studies of selected cases differ from the requirement of large samples of representative subjects; the flexible open mode of interviewing contrasts with the demand for formalized observation and systematic design; the primacy of interpretation of meaning does not lead to exact quantifiable facts; the meaning of observations may change through the temporal dimension of a psychoanalysis, in contrast with a demand for immutable facts. (p. 96, italics in original)

While I am aware of the problems of working with methods that cannot lead to immutable results or systematic replicability, I argue for the necessity of a study that functions as a provocation, an experiment in thinking otherwise and differently about the commonplace activity of writing. The research is a provocation to push writing out of its routine transparency and into a state of unsettledness, where the work of pursuing critical consciousness can become a resonant, evocative endeavor that engages not only the logic of critical discourse, but makes room for the confusions and contradictions of desire.
Failure of Method: To Seek (and Hide) Sense Otherwise and Differently

This chapter has endeavored to identify and explain the confluence of methods that were used in the collection and generation of data in this study. However, beyond the identification and explication of methods, there is the matter of a method’s failure or seeming uselessness. As discussed above, several sources of writing constitute the data in this study, therefore I had many choices in generating and interacting with data. My choices of methods, and my expectations for how the methods would function in this study, create a picture of my subjectivity and a map of my desires. The remainder of this chapter explores a complication encountered with the online survey method discussed earlier in this chapter. This complication was a perceived failure of method that led me to question the role of the *Imaginary* and desire in my creation of survey questions.

Several years ago, when I began work on this case study, I expected that I would analyze student’s writings through a hybridized method that merged Lacanian theory with qualitative discourse analysis. I experienced some difficulties with this approach when I began to work with data generated through the online survey. As students responses to the survey accumulated, I found myself experiencing great disappointment. The voluntary, anonymous survey contained twenty-two questions focused on students’ perceptions of writing in the course. Some of the questions were multiple choice, however there were a large number of open-ended questions. I worked hard to devise questions that might shed light on some of the issues I had identified in my research questions. At the time I constructed this survey, I subscribed to the idea that basic qualitative research methods such as interviews and online surveys could be merged with psychoanalytic methodologies. I still believe this to be possible, however, I experienced
difficulties with the online survey method that caused me to explore more carefully my motivations for choosing certain methods over others.

It wasn’t until I began reading students’ answers to my online survey questions that I realized that the survey was operating on the line of the Imaginary. That is, most of the answers were strikingly predictable. Many were effusive in their appreciation for what some referred to as “the best course” they’d taken in college. It was as if some of the participants (and I) had produced an intersubjective mirror-text that reflected an image of model Student and ideal Instructor.

One question, however, brought a jolt of real discomfort, and in the process of exploring this discomfort, I began to understand what this survey might mean in the context of my study. The query that startled me, question sixteen, was intended to elicit students’ thoughts about subject positions. Specifically, the question asked students to explain their perceptions of how their subjectivity was positioned (by me, by the course material, etc) in relation to the writing they did in the course. The question read:

**In regard to your writing in the course, how was your subjectivity positioned? Who did the instructor think you were?**

Some of the students described “who I thought they were” with enthusiasm and detail, for example:

At some point in my development I was designated as ‘smart.’ There are just a lot of things which come with such a designation, but practically, it became an exercise in pleasing my audience. For each new mentor, I tried as hard as I could to reclaim the intellectual appointment, then to follow through. I wanted to be a
thoughtful writer, a penetrating critic, and an outspoken proponent of television's evils. The singular thing which captivated me, in this class, it felt like the instructor was trying to do the same thing as I. To ease the students into understanding Television as an institution and as an organic mechanism. Then to transcend the visual symbols to a more intrusive system of semiotics. There was a concerted effort on the part of the instructor to analyze the most difficult aspects of television. The students were treated as intelligent individuals who were expected to be able to divest themselves from TV's alpha-waves; to throw themselves into the deep end once they were told the basic rules to (start) swimming. (Anonymous, 2009)

Many responses, however, revealed that students didn’t seem to have a clear sense of how they were positioned:

I feel I internalized more in my writing in this course than ever before. Some of my introspection felt, at times, more honest than a journal entry—embarrassingly... *Who did the instructor think I was? Probably a sullen loner who lives in his own head. Which I am at times. I don't know who I am.* (Anonymous, 2009, italics added)

I believed the instructor thought me much more intuitive than I really am. I'm sure she thought I was thoughtful, bright, and put forth effort, but I think she saw me as someone who could introvert into my psyche and interpret my thoughts and reactions... She was wrong. It was really, really hard for me to know why I do
anything. I'm like *House*⁵; I like what I like, I don't what I don't. I react according to those feelings, and I don't apologize for it. (Anonymous, 2009)

One response in particular caught me by surprise with its succinct candor: “I don't really like to think about it (Anonymous).” In addition to being surprised by this response, I felt very uncomfortable. It is difficult to articulate in words, but I felt somehow that I’d been “caught.” I felt trapped, but also exposed, and vulnerable. I turned the words over and over in my head. *I don’t like to think about it. I don’t like to think about it.....

*I. Don’t like. To think. About it.*

Then it hit me: I had been caught. I was caught up against a mirror that didn’t return a coherent, smoothly articulated sense of myself. In this looking glass, I could “see” myself and the online survey within a larger field of desire—desire for a certain type of relationship with writing, with students. On the survey, I’d asked, “Who did the instructor think you were?” assuming a student would be open to, and capable of, speculating on my perceptions of their positioning within the class discourse. I believe that when I wrote that question my motives were innocent enough: Although I couldn’t have articulated this at the time, I believe I was hoping for answers that let me off the hook where subjectivity and countertransference were concerned. I assumed I’d get a variety of descriptions of students’ imagined personas, but with the overarching message that they did not feel coerced or colonized by the types of writing they did in the course. However, what I did not count on when I formulated that question, was that students

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⁵ “House,” or, “Dr. House,” is the name of the main character, a physician, on the television series *House* (FOX Network). The character House is known for his lack of affect, renegade independence, and opaque motives.
wouldn’t know, or wouldn’t even want to think about how they were positioned. I now wonder if the response, “I don’t want to think about it,” was perhaps a way that students expressed an impasse of their own. I am encouraged by that response, finding it to be an evocative statement that gestures toward potential opportunities where students and instructors could explore the desires and resistances that arise from the inevitable mirroring of ideal egos in the classroom.

What I didn’t understand at that time, but have realized in the present, is the value and purpose of that online survey. Rather than produce data that could be sorted, chunked, interpreted, and analyzed, the online survey, in its entirety, served as a unique thumbprint of enmeshed subjectivities. The enmeshed entities encompassed not only my and the students’ subjectivities, but also incorporated the discourses of art education, qualitative research, and composition studies. Further, and most important, however, is what I perceived to be missing from the survey. Specifically, as I read the online survey responses, I perceived a lack of resonance and a flatness of affect in student’s answers. Initially, I blamed myself and the questions, concluding that if I had written better questions I might have garnered more useful responses. However, at that time, I didn’t realize the importance of my initial response of disappointment. That is, my perceptions of an absence of resonance and lack of affect in the responses were valid and important data. The perception of absence was perhaps an afterimage of my, and my students’, unconscious subjectivities, the shifting, indeterminate residue of the gaps and nonsensical elements of being that escaped the mirror of intersubjectivity.

The online survey has benefited this study by pushing me to articulate some of the disconnects between what I expected from the survey and what I actually received from
it. While I was initially disappointed at what I assumed was lackluster data, I now have a different perception of the online survey. That is, when faced with the reality that I didn’t receive what I expected, I summoned the courage to face the disconnects themselves—those gaps and mis-fits between my researcher’s desires and the students’ expressions. I believe these disconnects and the impasses they precipitated may have been the most illuminating data to have come from this method, as I perceive it in the present. Without the textures of perception brought by my interactions with the online survey, the overall shape and texture of the research would be different.

**Where Do We Go From Here?**

This chapter concludes with a consideration of validity in psychoanalytically informed research. Validity, in a positivist conceptualization of research, is achieved by the study’s ability to capture objective reality, and positivist reliability is attained if other researchers are able to duplicate the study and produce the same or similar results.

Researcher Paula Saukko (2003) refers to validity in the plural sense—validities. Like Patti Lather (2004), Saukko identifies multiple forms of validities, based on the multiple perspectives that research of complex phenomena often entail. Theorist James Scheurich, on the other hand, looks to the essential meaning of validity, summarized by Lincoln and Guba as the “warrant of trustworthiness” because “if a research study had the appropriate validity, the results could be trusted” (Scheurich, 1997, p. 81). However, this case study of student writing does not operate on the assumption that a valid reality is “out there” waiting to be recorded and interpreted, but instead follows from the belief that both validity and reality unfold contextually, intertextually, and under myriad conditions involving conscious and unconscious subjectivities.
Interference and the Impasse: Looking Awry at Method and Validity

This research originates in my perception of evocative moments experienced while developing and teaching *Criticizing Television*. As I worked to define the parameters of my study, I encountered many areas of obscurity, places where I felt stuck, blind, outside of language without a way in. Over time, I found my own markers of validity, the *points de capiton* where my ability to see and express my way though the research phenomena was palpably uncomfortable and discouragingly unproductive. As explained earlier, the doubt and concern I experienced in formulating a methodology led me to an impasse. I believe now that the paralysis and anxiety experienced within this impasse were necessary obstacles that slowed and disrupted my thought processes until I could eventually learn that I was approaching the research design, and the concept of methodology, through a position of transference. That is, the data and the notion of methodology were positioned by me as a powerful master signifier, a subject of authority.

The relationship of research method and the impasse methodology cannot be underestimated: Impasse is the genesis of the research. This chapter’s articulations and discussions of research methods, then, can only be methodology’s good-enough signifiers, caught here in a series of sidelong glances. There is no other way of using methods than accepting their sidelong glances, their interference with perceiving and expressing experience. As I see it, the ethical validity of a research method originates in the researcher’s acceptance of never finding the unobstructed views of experience that they long to see.
CHAPTER FIVE

Peripheral Vision and the Impasse: Interactions Among Data

Preface

What is revealed and concealed through your reading of this research is constituted through y/our subjectivities. I’d like to believe we are meeting in a space of clarity, where you encounter meanings in this chapter in the very way that I perceive I’ve constructed them; however, congruence is imaginary. Impossible. Together, we feel our way through the text within the limitations of language, attempting to capture, translate, and share experiences that are ephemeral, slippery, in the process of becoming...other.

Crafting the writing in this dissertation, laboring over myriad possibilities of revealing and hiding in/through words, I discovered contradictions, spaces, gaps, and sticky excesses of language. Language that, for all of its nouns, verbs, punctuations, and literary tropes, cannot secure a space of pure congruence between us. Together, as reader and writer, we are misalignment, misrecognition, contradiction. Together, we shift, blur, misread. But we imagine we understand. This is the beauty and terror of intersubjectivity; this is the I/eye of our text.
Lacanian theory views the human subject who thinks and speaks and interacts with others as the Imaginary register of the ego, the “me” that fits with one’s self-image, a coherent, unified sense of self. However, because one’s perception of self-unity and coherence is formed from repression of desires that threaten to disrupt the stability of what is perceived as “me” or “I,” conscious subjectivity is not the complete story of a subject’s self. The self is also comprised of the unconscious, the knowledge that a subject cannot bear to know.

My own unbearable knowledge, like anyone’s, is inaccessible to my conscious awareness. Yet, paradoxically, as the most intimate aspect of my subjectivity the unconscious reveals itself to others without my conscious awareness. The estmate unconscious is also the traumatic kernel of being around which all my signifiers circulate in the service of repressing and deferring what I cannot bear to know. Each of the students I’ve worked with over the years has their own traumatic kernel, their own unthought unknown.

Although I have experienced many years of education which trained me to prioritize answers, truths, and solutions to problems, I discovered through my work with this case that the unconscious desire for ignorance is much more powerful than the conscious desire to know. Moreover, I have learned that I am complicit in the preservation of my own ignorance. I gravitate toward what I cannot read. I desire the unthought unknown, and as I learned though this study, I want my students to desire a confounding of logic and sense themselves. How did I reach this conclusion? By repeatedly finding myself at a loss when working with the data of this study. By finding myself at an impasse, again and again, eventually realizing that my loss of balance,
equilibrium, and direction was deliberate, and was perhaps one of the purest, most realistic forms of critical consciousness that I could experience. I realize now that it was only by loosening my grasp on truth, and by learning to dwell in the anxiety of uncertainty, that clearings might be created for building sense differently, building something other, in a relational space with others. *This chapter is imagined as a clearing where sense arrives differently and in the guise of the other.*

**Introduction**

*Tell all the truth but tell it slant—*

~E. Dickinson, 1890, p. 431

This chapter of data interactions, *Peripheral Vision*, represents an effort to meet the challenge of applying psychoanalytic theory in a qualitative study by problematizing data and meaning and by considering the complications that inhere in these concepts to be “data” in themselves. This chapter, then, is not conceptualized as a container that holds data and the results of an analysis. Rather, this chapter as a whole, and the actions taken in writing it, are considered to be data. This is an encounter with and against data. This chapter is an interaction with, rather than an analysis of, the participants’ writings within and around the case and the research literature and theories which informed the development of the study.

Working with the students’ interview texts, E-mail correspondence, online survey responses, essays written for class assignments, and research literature in psychoanalytic theory, I endeavor to represent here some of the evocations, excesses, and impasses that I’ve experienced in and around the work of writing. I cannot present here authoritative
pronouncements of meaning, or even multiple interpretations. Instead, by considering writing as a site of unconscious intersubjectivities, I seek to create openings for other possibilities of interacting with written expressions. One possibility in particular, *peripheral vision*, is discussed in this chapter. Peripheral vision refers to taking an oblique approach to one’s perception of writing, accepting that human perceptions and written expressions are inevitably off center, always missing their mark, constantly emerging and receding at the edges of knowing. This chapter shares glimpses of my experiences of reading and writing in relation to student writing—interactions that strive to express in words, but perhaps can only gesture obliquely toward, what is thought, felt, and known in relation to data in this case.

Selecting data interactions to include in this chapter meant choosing among a variety of data, knowing that I could not include it all, no matter how vital and necessary each seemed. Given the nature of unconscious subjectivity, Emily Dickinson’s advice “*(t)ell all the truth but tell it slant*” offers a pragmatic and psychoanalytically informed perspective on the matter of selecting narratives, creating truths. Truth, in a psychoanalytic perspective, is effected though positionings within a discourse, yet these positions do not offer points from which a clearer or more truthful assessment of a situation may be grasped. That is, there is no meta-knowledge, and there is “no external point from which it is possible to speak that is not also necessarily implicated in a certain kind of position” (Parker, 2005a, p. 174). Truths, then, are not static knowledge, but are created through the angles and slants of subjects’ relationships and communications with one another. The data interactions in this chapter, and throughout the dissertation, cannot represent a complete picture of the expansive, experiential landscape of this case and the
data. Rather, the selected quotes, vignettes, and observations can be only a slanted, oblique approach toward articulating one of many potential views of this case. Other angles, other meanings, other views, and other truths may be derived from the data, yet it is my (and a reader’s) relational positionalities and subjectivities that produce a particular truth-effect in context.

A Lacanian perspective on truth is compatible with the idea of peripheral vision, a concept which refers to the conceptual locus of the study and its data, especially my (missed)understanding of students’ writing artifacts and intentions. I discovered that writing to interpret and express the significance and meaning of the data was an endeavor that, instead of leading me to central or focal meanings of a text, looped repeatedly around the phenomena that I attempted to convey in language. However, in circling around the case study writings, comprised of student essays, interview texts, survey responses, and my researcher’s journal, I eventually saw emergent patterns. These circular, looping paths of words were perceived by me as metaphorical scribblings upon scribblings, layers of desirous signification that
pulled my attention outward toward thickening accumulations of evocation and affect within the research context. My sense of being pulled outward is captured eloquently by Lauren Berlant (2007) who describes periods of impasse as the feeling of “dog-paddling around a space whose contours remain obscure” (p. 434). Like Berlant, I sensed my self as being caught within circular, repetitive movements around an issue. This perception was subtle. In fact, had I not been familiar with psychoanalytic theories of the unconscious, and had I not been attuned to visualities in my own work (both art and writing), as well as sensitive to visual phenomena in the world around me, I may have dismissed this intuitive sense as inconsequential, a distraction from my goal of understanding the meaning and significance within the data. Instead, however, I took a risk in following the intuition, wondering where it might lead.

The process of interacting with the data of this study was cyclical; moreover, the repetitive readings and writings were often distressingly inconclusive. Over time, however, the repetitions and the layered loops and paths of affective, resonant signification accumulated into what I would later identify as unconscious, evocative data—data that seemed to reinforce invisibilities rather than reveal answers. Eventually, my perceptions began to shift. It was a subtle but significant shift; but over time the circular processes of trying (and failing) to interpret the content of writing in this study pulled my researcher’s gaze away from the pursuit of essential, focal meanings toward an awareness of a more expansive field of potential meanings. In other words, I began to consider not only the tangible, material texts which were present before me, but also

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1 Berlant’s reflections on this sense of dog-paddling also inform the discussion of deferred action in Chapter Three.
consider the affective presence that accompanied these texts, a presence that seemed to be occurring outside the center of my attention, at the edges of my conscious awareness.

Beyond the centrality of my researcher’s gaze, beyond my desires for locating the truth of a situation or the deeper meanings of a text, are thickening edges of perception. These are hazy almost-awarenesses of the accretions of patterns and textures, and these thickened peripheries are a substantiation of human experience in the most holistic, expansive sense. While I have learned that my researcher’s gaze may be expanded by a psychoanalytically informed, peripheral awareness of the larger data-scope of this case study’s context, I realize that it is this very awareness that confirms for me the impossibility of ever seeing, in clear focus, the central “truth” of an experience.

Taking seriously peripheries, haziness, and misunderstandings of a phenomenon does not equate to a disregard of data or an abandonment of systematic research methods. Further, a belief in the ambiguity of meaning does not exempt one from responsibility toward participants or ethical action in writing about the research, nor does it indicate a lapse into nihilism. Rather, taking a psychoanalytically informed perspective on the indeterminacies of knowledge and meaning necessitates locating oneself in a particular position in relation to the data of a study. For example, instead of believing that I’m capable of interpreting what a student intended to express in their essay, or what a student meant to convey to me in their interview, I held myself to a different set of expectations. That is, rather than endeavoring to determine the meaning of a participant’s written expression by interpreting latent meanings in the writing content, I pushed myself to view the writing as a relational space wherein eruptions of the Real might offer opportunities
for speculating on what a student and I may have expected of one another within the context of an assignment created during the course, or within the context of this study.

Lacan’s *Real* is defined as a realm of unconscious subjectivity that lies outside of conscious discourse (Lacan, 1973, 2006a; Parker, 2003, 2005a). By virtue of its position outside of discourse, the *Real*, by definition, is ostensibly inexpressible. However, Lacanian theory offers a unique perspective, finding that the *Real* of subjectivity can indeed be identified and described, but only at the point of a perceived breakdown of meaning. Parker (2005a) explains that the *Real* operates at a point of trauma or shock that is then rapidly covered over in order that it can be spoken of. Those points in a text that indicate something unspeakable, something ‘unrepresentable’, can be interpreted as points of encounter with the *Real*. (p. 176)

My sense of peripheries, haziness, misunderstandings, and impasses became, for me, a significant (and, legitimate) form of emergent data. I believed that these perceptions were points of eruption of the *Real*, and I endeavored to understand how such awarenesses might not only inform this study, but the teaching of writing in art education, in general.

In addition, not only was I interested in exploring the tensions and affects experienced within and around the writing in this case, I was particularly interested in exploring the implications of working within the impasses that troubled my confidence as a researcher. Thus, I perceived the ambiguities and impasses experienced in this study as

2 In a punning play on words, Lacan observes that the *Real* does not actually “lie outside existing chains of signification, but always leads the speaking subject to ‘lie’ inside these chains” (Parker, 2005a, p. 174).
data in themselves. These data provided an opportunity to face the tensions and disruptions that threaten the smooth, coherent surfaces of pedagogy and assignment criteria, weaken sturdy methodological structures of research, and undermine interpretive authority. In so doing, I hoped to achieve the kind of reflective, generative, and creative speculations about experience that psychologist and researcher Nita Cherry (2008) describes in the reflective practice of *symbolic self-curation*. Cherry’s symbolic self-curation refers to a form of reflection on research or other professional endeavors that involves “creative, scholarly engagement with a set of practices found in work or life, in ways that clarify the past and present” (2008, p. 22). Symbolic self-curation offers a means of seeing one’s theory and practice circumstances in alternate ways, with an emphasis placed on imagining significantly new possibilities for the future of the practice. Reflective questions include the following queries which aim for meta-analysis of a researcher’s context, actions, and perceptions:

(W)hat’s being revealed about experiences that we haven’t acknowledged or noticed before? In particular, what is being revealed about our aspirations; about our assumptions about the work we are doing; about our perceptions of the systems we work in; about the ways we engage with anxiety, paradox, and rejection; and about the effectiveness of our practice? Also, what does it (interpretation) reveal about the world we practice in; our care for that world; our impact on it; its impact and shaping of us; and our underpinning, implicit theories? (Cherry, 2008, p. 29)

An important aspect of Cherry’s symbolic self-curation is the validity of reflecting upon one’s ways of engaging with anxiety, paradox, and rejection—characteristics and affects
of a study that aren’t usually the focus of research. Moreover, her emphasis on exploring the connections among felt difficulty and processes of creation expands the realm of what might be considered data. For example, Cherry (2008) shares the story of Ern Reeders, a sculptor whose difficulties in crafting several turned wood bowls became a form of data, and a mode of learning from an impasse. Reeders explains how creating the bowls on a lathe helped him to visualize and reflect upon issues in his life. This experience also demonstrates a peripheral awareness that the context and conditions of the work were just as informative as the development of the bowl itself:

The bowls offered me the option to express something else. I was learning to turn at the same time as learning a new form and context for practice. Both occurred in an uncertain environment. Both entailed successes as well as failures. So my first installation consisted of bowls of both types. But as with practice, the subtext was exploring the conditions needed for success and responding well to challenges that arose in the course of the work. (Cherry, 2008, pp. 20-21)

Reeders also acknowledges the significance of remaining within the impasse, explaining,

I have found stuckness at work paralleled by a piece part-turned on the lathe and my not knowing where to go next with it. There have been pieces of superlative timber that deserved the best treatment and I have sat with them for months wondering how to proceed. There have been pieces that should have presented no problems but nonetheless did so. There have been bowl profiles that flowed without effort and others that demanded stepping back and trying again and again. (Cherry, 2008, pp. 20-21)

Cherry’s concept of symbolic self-curation brings awareness to the importance of
contextual, concomitant activities that surround what is considered to be a focal issue. Specifically, in the context of research, nuanced, peripheral awarenesses can enlarge and complicate the activities of description and interpretation, introducing a realm of perceptions that may not be quantifiable, but add important dimensions of vulnerability and humanity to the research endeavor. Going further, connecting these nuanced peripheral awarenesses to the activity of criticism writing is an affirmation of the vulnerabilities and contradictions that constitute a writing subject’s attachments to visual culture phenomena.

**Excess and Disturbance In and Around Writing: Articulating (Critical) Vulnerability**

One of the most significant consequences of this research and its data interactions is an increasingly complicated view of my intentions for the writing assignments. In addition, I am increasingly aware that there may be inexpressible excesses and disturbances that emerge from the convergences among particularized contexts of an assignment, a students’ lifeworld, and the unique constellations of human relationships effected through transference and countertransference. For example, the reality television genre was a topic of frequent discussion and analysis in the course, and, over the years, popular reality-genre series such as MTV’s *Real World* or FOX’s documentary-style program *COPS*, were recurring topics in students’ final capstone research papers. However, while most students followed the assignment prompt that asked for a traditional, thesis-driven analysis in an expository essay format, I sensed that some students created a critical, analytic ‘reality’ that exceeded the assignment. What I am referring to is my subjective sense that there was an unruly, resonance spilling out
beyond my expectations for the structure and content of the submitted assignment. I speculate that my perceptions of a vivid, inexpressible resonance within and around the assignment resulted from intersections among the choices a particular student made in expressing their ideas and the unconscious transference that I experienced in reading and assessing their writing.

In the early years of teaching the course, I did not instruct specifically about the importance of exploring the academic as well as affective contexts of a critical analysis. While I taught about the theoretical tenets of intertextuality (Kristeva, 1980), I did not introduce in any direct way the idea that a student’s conscious and unconscious subjectivities, along with the interactions of a reader’s conscious/unconscious subjectivities could create a kind of relational, unconscious intertextuality—the I of the text. Nor did I offer to students the idea that this I of the text could be productive of its own, albeit potentially unnamable, realities. While these ideas were not offered directly in class lectures or spelled out in an assignment prompt, students and I nonetheless created these realities within and around the writing assignments. When asked how writing television criticism in the course differed from writing assigned in other disciplinary areas, student respondents to the online survey mentioned the challenge of resisting compartmentalization in their approach to the television criticism. Namely, some students indicated that they perceived the significance of writing from the situatedness of their subjectivity and all the intertextual, relational, awarenesses that this writing demanded of them. One student found it significant that this approach to criticism of television opposed the way in which television seemed to compartmentalize its viewers. The student explains what is at stake when a critical analysis shrinks from
recognizing, and attempting to synthesize, the relational, intertextual qualities of perception and expression:

It was all too easy to lapse into a "critical response"...without bringing other disparate topics into play. And it IS tough because television (the institution) necessarily conditions its viewers to compartmentalize themselves...A psychology paper on brain chemistry, for example, utilizing ten different sources, might call for the author to synthesize his or her knowledge of science, math, socio-political interaction, and evolutionary anthropology, but they (the writers) are taught fundamentally how to adapt these topics into their "clinical" thinking. It is the same with a physics paper on the same topic: other applicable subjects are easily analyzed and integrated. On the other hand, broaching the issue of television involves touching the nerve of an ubiquitous establishment. It (the television criticism pedagogy experienced in the course) is...exactly the kind of cross-cultural, dynamic analysis from which television tries to fundamentally dissuade its viewers. (Anonymous, 2009)

The longer I taught the course, the more I began to perceive the importance of vulnerability, not as a passive state of defenselessness or resignation, but as a persistent openness to dismantling one’s defenses against that which confounds or contradicts imperatives to construct clear, seamless critiques of visual culture phenomena. In my perspective, there was pedagogical validity in cultivating a sense of critical vulnerability through the process of writing and reading television criticism in the course. I viewed the cultivation of a writer’s and reader’s critical vulnerability as a reflexive approach to writing. This approach would conceptualize television criticism, first and foremost, as an
imperfect, vulnerable act—a partial, tentative, and potentially conflicted expression of a writer’s positionality in relation to both the television phenomenon and the reader of the criticism writing.

**Gaining Vulnerability and Relinquishing Interpretive Mastery**

Although I chose to use a psychoanalytically informed methodology in this research, working within the context of qualitative methodologies entailed consideration of established traditions and forms of analysis used in qualitative research. While examples of studies that take creative approaches to naming and theorizing data can be found (Mazzei, 2007; Pitt & Britzman, 2003; Rogers, 2007a; St. Pierre, 1997b), there is often the implicit expectation that a study will yield verifiable results (Lather, 2003). Thus, many qualitative studies entail some form of systematic data treatment involving coding, sorting, naming, and interpreting meanings of data. In this case, the notion of peripheral awareness, and the assumption that the unconscious register of subjectivity could be a valid form of data, necessitated an approach to data that acknowledged the impossibility of interpretive authority.

Interpretive authority is not a priority in a Lacanian psychoanalysis. To reinforce this point, psychoanalyst Ellie Ragland-Sullivan (1985) notes Lacan’s belief that an “analyst does not have the correct reality paradigm to help an analysand with his or her impasses in knowledge and desire” (para. 2). Instead, Lacan argued that an impasse itself, “(including the fact that it includes feelings of love and hate) tells us more about an unstable base for knowledge in being, than it does about who actually has the correct theory” (para. 2). Ragland-Sullivan explains that it is the emotion which hides behind the intellect that is of greatest interest to the analyst. In Lacan’s perspective,
frustration forms but the tip of the analytic iceberg, and (Lacan) is intrigued by the metaphysical plight that makes frustration such a telling response. Analysts know how to induce it, he says, and how to link it to anxiety, aggression, and regression, but they cannot explain its source except as an empirical description of a function. (Ragland-Sullivan, 1985, para. 13)

My perception of evocative data in this study (see Table 1, Data Sources, p. 188 in this dissertation) exemplifies the vulnerability and lack of mastery I experienced in relation to interpreting and responding to students’ criticism writing. The experiences of evocation in my encounters with student essays were confusing and disturbing at times; my teaching journal from the first few academic terms of teaching the course holds glimpses of my musings about how to respond to writings that pushed at or defied my ideas about what constitutes critical discourse about television. Occasions of bewilderment were accompanied by constant questioning of myself and my intentions for both the assignments and the feedback I gave on the writing. Eventually, I began to speculate that perhaps my experiences of vulnerability in not knowing how to respond to certain assignments were shaping my understanding of writing’s function within critically conscious visual culture pedagogies.

Examples of my self-questioning and the concomitant vulnerabilities that I eventually began to see as essential to the cultivation of a position of critical vulnerability are found throughout my teaching journal. One instance in particular exposes my discomfort in, and lack of confidence about, my role in the critical writing endeavor. Several years into teaching the course, I developed an assignment that required both a written essay and an alternative (non-writing) expression of criticism that exemplified
television’s positioning of the student’s subjectivity (Appendix G). In response to this assignment, a student submitted a video that was intended to show the way in which she and her friends used televisions throughout their apartment as creative inspiration and social atmosphere during parties. Sitting at my computer, I had a panoramic view of a cluttered, smoky room. Above tables overflowing with beer and liquor bottles, I saw shadowy shapes moving about, and as the camera continued to move around the apartment and zoom in close to the crowds, I got a clearer view of faces—probably the student’s classmates and friends. Sure enough, just as the student had explained in the written essay that accompanied the video, there were several televisions, most of which were tuned to the Adult Swim network.

I was entranced but uneasy as I watched this video. I was drawn to the dreamy, smoky intricacies of the visual atmosphere; the scene was a dense tapestry of sounds, shapes, colors, and movements. The flickering illumination of the television screens seemed exotically ethereal, but, at the same time, it was familiar and mundane. While I felt a strong desire to get lost in the unfolding imagery, I also felt twinges of intense discomfort. That is, even though I felt compelled to continue watching the video, I felt a bit like a voyeur. I wondered if I would see students that I recognized if I continued to watch. In my teaching journal, I wrote: “What a strange feeling to experience this unexpected ‘video window’ into my student’s world….Even though there is a cautionary message at the beginning of her video (warning about drugs and language), I never expected that I would see actual situations of drug use.” In my journal, I reflected on the my reactions to watching the video:
I think I am most affected by the appearance of the apartment. A TV is flickering in the background, just as she described in her rationale… And, in other rooms there are additional TVs…There is the constant sound of laughter, embedded in the low hum of conversation. Here and there, vigorous exclamations break out from the thick blanket of chatter. Each slow moving pan around the room reveals a clutter of bottles and drug paraphernalia...groups of people talking and smoking pot...I realize I am watching a bubble-blowing game—and an empty toilet paper roll is used for inhaling smoke... I wonder to myself: What is my audience role for this student? How am I, as the instructor and creator of the assignment, positioning this student’s subjectivity? In general, how does this process of positioning subjectivities shape students’ expectations of an instructor-as-audience and, in turn, shape the content of a student’s written critique? (Teaching Journal, 2007)

Until I began to pay closer attention to the impasses provoked by my interactions with student writing, I didn’t realize that there might be important learning experiences for both the students and myself in articulating and sharing points of discomfort and impasse in writing and responding to the assignments. As explained above, Lacan believed that an impasse itself was proof of the unstable base of knowledge. Further, as Ragland-Sullivan (1985) points out, the frustrations and impasses which lead the analyst and analysand into productive and therapeutic analytic territory, suggest that taking a reflexive approach to discomfort may be a form of learning about oneself. Considered in this way, the uncomfortable impasses and frustrations experienced in teaching and learning may also be employed as a pedagogical strategy. Although I did not consciously aim to share my
frustrations and discomforts with students in my writing feedback and assessment, these affects were nonetheless present in the tone and content of my responses to students’ writing. And, as explained in Chapter Eight, I believe that my unconscious drive to create situations of impasse and frustration for myself and my students led me to create the alternative criticism assignment which served as the prompt for the criticism video and rationale described above.

Students’ perceptions of their experiences of writing criticism in the course suggest that they struggled with the task of writing from perspectives that prioritized exploration of their subjective investments in television phenomena. Students also acknowledged that the television criticism writing created in the course was quite different from the writing they produced in other disciplines and classes. Some students found it challenging to take the lead in developing their own critical perspectives on an aspect of life that was so intimate and familiar. While the concept of criticism or critical perspective was not unfamiliar to students, many were unsure of how to think critically about their own desires and resistances, particularly when these deeply held affects were buried far beneath the generalized, sweeping critiques and reductive, cavalier attitudes that characterize popular culture’s positioning of television as a media text. As many students were to realize, it was challenging to locate an authorial position from which they could see themselves in relation to TV.

It was a point of struggle for many students to move beyond a reductive binary perspective that views college writing as either ‘academic’ and empirically defensible or ‘personal’ and lacking in objectivity and authority. One student notes that “the personal relationship (of subjectivity and television) was more than I cared to admit. It (writing
television criticism) felt at times like writing journal entries or fiction” (Anonymous, 2009). And, another student observes that “(s)ubjectivity is something not seen or allowed (at least for me personally) in most of my other classes” (Anonymous, 2009). In addition to the slipperiness of articulating one’s subjective investments in television, students were often stymied by the effort needed to see this familiar media through a critical perceptive: “(Criticism) is just a completely different way of thinking because you rarely think of television in a critical, educational way while you are watching it.” (Anonymous, 2009). Another student adds,

> It's very unusual to have to come up with concepts on your own about things you like. As students, it's very common we have a specific subject matter we are focusing on and then we are given a specific prompt in which we write a paper. With this class, it was unfamiliar to actually be allowed to pick a topic about whatever we wanted and write about it using the concepts we had discussed in class. It was refreshing and challenging all at the same time. (The criticism writing assignments) really made you think about what you were watching, how you were watching it, how it was created, and the natural responses people had to television. Writing for this class was hardly work, because I enjoyed doing it. But it was a lot of work because I cared about what I was writing, so I put a lot of effort into it. (Anonymous, 2009)

In summary, the affective work of criticism writing in the course was, at times, challenging for students, and it was also challenging for me. In this case study, my perceptions of evocation and resonance in student writing are doubly inscribed by my dual roles as researcher and course instructor. Originating in the unconscious register of
my subjectivity, feelings of evocation and resonance are not overtly visible or observable in my interactions with the data, yet are nonetheless very real. These affects invoke in me feelings of empathy and rapport as I interact with the study participants and their writings, while also influencing what participants reveal and what I perceive in their revelations. The resonance I perceive in relation to certain texts is a powerful peripheral awareness. Bracher (1993) speaks of the “emotional vibration” of powerful images and texts, an experience which can even evoke a sense of the uncanny or the abject.

There is a strong affiliation between expressive texts and images and an aesthetic of being. Psychoanalyst Christopher Bollas (2002) refers to subjectivity as a “poetic truth” constituted through the connections among concepts of self, aesthetic response, and creativity:

If our way of being refers to our very precise means of forming our world, both internal and intersubjective, then each of us is a kind of artist with his or her own creative sensibility…It is a pleasure to express and articulate the self...the pleasure is in the entire movement which nonetheless remains something far too complicated and condensed, too thick, to be reduced to a single meaning, or even two or three meanings. (Molino & Shumar, 2002, p. 103)

Bollas’s description of the aesthetic, creative qualities of being is compatible with Mark Bracher’s description of the self as inchoate, undisciplined vibrations (1993). Further, Bollas’s description of the creative and multifarious articulations of subjectivity also recall Schwandt’s (2001) description of the messy text—its open-endedness and its unresolved qualities of expression. The aesthetic, creative, and inherently unruly qualities of the unconscious are present within, and contribute to, the perceptions that I refer to as
peripheral awareness—and these qualities undermine interpretive authority and mastery in this research.

**Psychoanalytically Informed Research and Artistic Process**

Turning to Lacanian theory, I sought guidance in reconciling a qualitative research-driven analysis of data with a psychoanalytic perspective that, in focusing on interaction, rather than analysis, could acknowledge language’s failure to hold and secure meaning. Importantly, however, I was not willing to stop at simply acknowledging language’s failures. I wanted something more—I wanted the beyond of failure, where futility turns and shifts into something previously unthought and unknown. *I didn’t want a tourniquet. I did not want to turn and quit*; I wanted to experience productive anti-production—failures of sense-making that might reveal something of the unconscious. Although I didn’t perceive it at the time, I theorize now that my desires for productive anti-production were a desire for a *pedagogy of patience*. That is, in striving to translate language’s failure to hold meaning, I was attempting to learn what a failure of sense and logic might teach me. At first, seeking to define what this kind of data interaction might look like or accomplish was an endeavor that provoked great anxiety and uncertainty. However, I’ve since come to accept this discomfort as a part of the creative process of working within the illogical, and perhaps even poetical, territories of the unconscious.

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3 The association of tourniquet and “turn” and “quit” is derived from my interactions with the texts of Robert, an interview participant. A discussion of this word association can be found in Chapter One.

4 Lauren Berlant’s advice, appearing in Chapter One, served as a guiding principle for this research; her perspective also informs my approach to the teaching of criticism writing: “patience…is something to teach: it’s related to pacing, and to taking the time to acknowledge being overwhelmed by, and to become scholars of the complexity of, the distillate that appears as the satisfying object” (2007, p. 437).
a result of her own experience of working with patients, psychoanalyst Annie Reiner
believes there are strong connections between poetry and psychoanalytic processes.

Reiner’s experience of affective connections in her work, like Ragland-Sullivan’s sense
of *paralinguistic points of join* in a Lacanian poetics approach, are characterized by a
feeling of profound resonance that defies words. Reiner explains:

> In my own life, the relationship between poetry and psychoanalytic work has
proved to be mutually nourishing. Over decades of clinical practice, many
moments have been illuminated and many more have evaded illumination. In
particularly obscure moments, I was forced to await a means of deciphering the
accumulation of sensory data from my patients’ material, and I continued to
experience, often very painfully, overwhelming feelings that I could not
understand or mentally digest in the session. In the midst of this mental chaos a
poem would at times begin to cohere in my mind as if from nowhere, a gathering
storm like the formation of planets out of wildly hot gases. (Reiner, 2008, p. 620-
621)

> Perhaps most illuminating for me in Reiner’s work is her characterization of the
psychoanalytic process as a mutually resonant interaction that contributes to the lives of
both analyst and analysand. Further, for Reiner, these interactions comprise a highly
creative process, which may be explained through the form and function of poetry:
The nonlinear, nonverbal music and rhythm of a poem provide a container for the
words, a vehicle by which the words are driven. These create physical as well as
emotional sensations that can serve as a bridge between psyche and soma. This
integration of two aspects of the self is analogous to the relationship between the
mind as a container and its contents of thoughts, feelings, and so on—between “container and contained” — a dynamic relationship that (serves as) origin and model for the capacity to think. (Reiner, 2008, pp. 599-600)

Reiner’s and Ragland-Sullivan’s conceptualizations of the creative nature of encountering and interacting with self and other within the gaps, failures, and impasses of language, fit comfortably with my experience of interacting with imagery. Specifically, I perceived an affinity between their indirect approaches to (and escapes from) meaning through locating linguistic-affective points of join and my own experience of seeing and experiencing writing as imagistic shapes and textures. Whether I was interacting with the writing of others, or whether I was seeking to derive awarenesses and understandings in my own journal writings, I could not shrug off my perceptions of writing’s presence as an entity of depth and dimension. Holding these perceptions in mind, and not dismissing them as irrelevant, was a significant part of my research journey. This journey which originated in an impasse, involved the gradual realization that I was experiencing the data of this study through a perceptual-metaphorical kind of peripheral vision.

I discovered that a peripheral view of data (and the research experience in general), was not only valid for my study, but was an approach that fit within a psychoanalytic perspective on artistic imagination. Related to my belief in the validity of peripheral awarenesses that can penetrate the analytic process to bring different awarenesses of a phenomenon, psychoanalyst Sophie de Mijolla-Mellor (2000) notes the importance of suspended attention, or, rather, evenly distributed attention. Similarly, Anton Ehrenzweig (1967), writing about artistic process, describes a mode of attention that is evenly suspended, creating a field of possibility for invention to occur. According
to Ehrenzweig, an artist must cultivate an undifferentiated structure of profound vision—a diffuse and dispersed perception of a situation, that is, an act of “scanning” (de Mijolla-Mellor, 2000, p. 65). Scanning refers to an ability to open up oneself to the unconscious, to create a space of holding for exploring the expansive realm of a context without rushing to conclusions about or connections among constituent elements. Scanning involves de-focusing the eyes, disturbing the order of things as they appear, allowing for the possibility to reconceptualize an image or perception according to another logic (de Mijolla-Mellor 2000).

Scanning, according to Ehrenzweig (1967), allows an artist to “achieve an integration both of his work and his own personality at the same time” (de Mijolla-Mellor, 2000, p. 65). This integration of an artist’s work and “personality” is strikingly similar to psychoanalyst Christopher Bollas’s (1987, p. 205) method of creatively integrating countertransference and subjectivity into his analytic work with a patient. As explained earlier, countertransference refers to an analyst’s reaction to a patient’s transference. That is, a patient’s unconscious subjectivity brings associations from significant relationships into the relationship with the analyst, merging past affects seamlessly with the present experience. The countertransference refers to the analyst’s unconscious response to the patient’s transference affects. Bollas finds that an effective treatment method is to use his own subjectivity and countertransferential affects as an object that can be put into play between the analyst and analysand. This “object,” which arises from Bollas’s free-form scanning and hovering within the conversation with the analysand, is a unique confluence of transference and countertransference within that particular session. Passed back and forth between analyst and analysand, this unique idea-
object is parlayed into conversation, becoming a catalyst for the analysand’s development of her own nascent awarenesses.

While *scanning* and *peripheral vision* are not recognized methods of qualitative analysis in the social sciences tradition, the peripheral and scanning interactions that I experienced with the writing processes and artifacts in this case study were systematic in their own way. Scanning visually and affectively the corpus of data generated through my interactions with the study participants and related texts, was a recursive process that eventually produced my own images and texts which, in being parlayed into various interactions with the data, brought unexpected, cumulative awarenesses about the study. Psychoanalyst Sophie de Mijolla-Mellor (2000) explains this recursive phenomenon of progressive insight:

>(T)here are many successive phases to the process, which are interlinked, from a momentary emptiness to the resurfacing of a creative spirit which has meanwhile been enriched with more profound contents. These different moments do not oppose each other, they complement one another. (p. 65)

In addition to cultivating a scanning sensibility toward the case, an openness to being surprised or thrown off track was vital to cultivating conditions for scanning to proceed and insights to take root (Ehrenzweig, 1967; de Mijolla-Mellor, 2000). As demonstrated in the data interaction sections below, my psychoanalytically informed text analysis operates through a similar rubric—that is, the conclusions I reached about my experiences with the writings involved an openness to the entirety of the expressions, including my perceptions of deferred meanings within the written expressions.
In my explorations of the corpus of writings in this case, cultivating conditions for scanning and surprise—qualities purported to be conducive to development of psychoanalytic insights—often felt uncomfortable and counter-intuitive. As a result, even though the psychoanalytic methodological approach used to conceptualize this case study offered advantages over other theoretical perspectives, I struggled frequently with doubt and concern. As part of the ecology of this study, the doubts, concerns, and anxieties became yet another form of data, that is *evocative data*, which were generated through my interactions within and among multiple data forms in this study.

Psychoanalyst Christopher Bollas (2007), working in the post-Freudian tradition, acknowledges the validity of evocative affects, as well as the value of their inherent mystery and resistance to interpretation. Bollas cautions against the rush to interpret or impose meaning on an analysand’s words, and he also “makes an eloquent case for privileging process over meaning” (Cheshire, 2010, p. 111). Moreover, Bollas’s view of analysis is that of a progressive enlargement of experience. That is, as Bollas puts it, analysis is essentially about a mysterious and uncertain attempt to engage, and enlarge, the capacities of the analysand’s unconscious mind. Interpretations that may emerge should set in train succeeding psychic material; everything is always breaking up to allow new trains of thought to emerge. (Cheshire, 2010, p. 111)

To summarize, my anxieties in this case coalesced around the problem of translating psychoanalytic theory into research methods for exploring and explaining the affectively charged resonances and resistances that I perceived in my reading of students’ criticism writing. Further, my anxieties only intensified with the proliferation and accumulation of writings that emerged from my interactions with the texts of this case.
study.

Early in the research, I held fast to an assumption that I could develop a method of psychoanalytic writing analysis that would be generalizable and transferable to other research or teaching contexts. Given that assumption, I came up against questions I could not answer. For example, I wondered: If subjectivity originates in unconscious drives, and the “very foundation of interhuman discourse is misunderstanding” (Lacan, 1993, p. 184), then how would I identify and explain the affective resonances that I intuited around students’ criticism writing? Moreover, how would this kind of analysis of texts be generalizable and transferable to other situations? These questions became a motivational force and creative impetus in my approach to exploring and explaining the research data, pushing me to re-articulate for myself how writing means—not only within this case, but how it means within a larger context of visual culture critical analyses.

The questions above, which at first seemed unanswerable, were later replaced with new questions and priorities. For instance, I eventually distanced myself from the belief that my study must be generalizable, realizing that this concern might be overly invested in positivistic perspectives. In loosening my attachment to traditional modes of transferability and generalizability, I discovered other valuable qualities in the psychoanalytically informed case study. Namely, I realized that the conflicts and resistances around transferability and generalizability were an impetus to attach the concept of critical consciousness to the effort to express and communicate meaning. Thus, I looked more carefully at my interactions with the writings of this case. Going further, I also sought to explain what was significant to me in these interactions, and I endeavored to determine what might hold significance for the art education discipline in
regard to the use of writing in visual culture pedagogies. In response to these goals, I worked to cultivate a visual textual dialogue that might gesture toward expressing the compressed simultaneity of affect that I often perceived within my interactions with the data.

Methods and Gestures: Compressions, Ruptures, Layers as Visual-Textual Dialogue

A visual-textual dialogue emerged in relation to my interactions with student participants’ interview texts, online survey responses, E-mail correspondence, and critical essays. These interactions, which led to writings and drawings in my teaching and research journal, provoked perceptions and affects that are a form of data in themselves—the data of a researcher’s unconscious subjectivity. In the case of this particular research, my failed attempts to locate, interpret, and represent meanings within the writings of this case led to peripheral awarenesses, the most striking of which was the recurring feeling that I was inhabiting an impasse. This impasse, an overwhelming feeling of insufficiency, anxiety, and confusion, eventually became synonymous with what I refer to in this research as I of the text, a contingent site of unconscious intersubjectivities that anchor, but also disrupt, written expression.

~C. MacDonald, 2009, p. 92
To acknowledge the indeterminacies of intersubjectivity is to face realistically the responsibility that comes with one’s methods of reading and responding to the expressions of others. As Kelly Oliver (2000) explains,

Subjectivity as the ability to respond is linked in its conception to ethical responsibility. Subjectivity is responsibility. It is the ability to respond and to be responded to. Responsibility, then, has the double sense of opening up the ability to response — response-ability — and ethically obligating subjects to respond by virtue of their very subjectivity itself. (p. 196-197)

A consideration of subjectivity, then, must branch outward from exploration of one’s self to the sites and experiences wherein subjectivities are emergent and in flux. Student writing created in the Criticizing Television course, and the writings generated through this case study, are sites where an ethics of response-ability was vital. As North (2006) puts it, interacting ethically and justly necessitates that we develop a “fuller realization of our mutually constituted selves” because “we have a responsibility to respond to others by virtue of the reality that they, like us, demand the recognition of their needs, desires, and perspectives” (p. 526).

In the sections below, I endeavor to face the issues of response-ability and responsibility by considering the writings of this study through several different approaches. Specifically, I present three different data, and interact with them in different, but related ways. First, I share a pictorial representation, a metaphorical landscape which is intended to provide a holistic view of the study and its evocations of distancing and compression. Next, I take a narrative approach in representing some experiences with student writing, and, lastly, another lens on the writings of the case
study is generated through a method of gathering into a grid selected writings and an image that provoked insights about the nature of simultaneity (and excess) of affect in this study.

**Visualizing | Writing Desire: The Shape and Texture of the Case Study Data**

![Image](image.png)

**Figure. 1 Compression**

The image above (Figure 1) is a pictorial representation of my experience of conceptualizing and writing this case study; I think of it as a landscape. I’ve spent several years drawing and writing this scene. Even before committing marks to paper, even before I began this case study, the scene was present. Not in a literal, tangible sense, but the structure lingered in my unconscious becoming visible to me later, when I began to explore and assess the corpus of writings in this case. In the process of grappling with the
task of identifying and analyzing data, I encountered the unavailable design of my unconscious subjectivity.

Art educator Sydney Walker’s (2009) psychoanalytically informed research of artistic practice affirms the role of the unconscious in the development of an artwork. As Walker’s research of Ann Hamilton’s art process reveals, messages from the unconscious sometimes arrive as uninvited visitors, puncturing the conscious order of artistic practice, much like Freud and Lacan described the “disruption of conscious speech with slips of the tongue, jokes, and so forth” (Walker, 2009, p. 81). Importantly, these significant ideas, influential intuitions, and deep insights may be cultivated by designing modes of artistic practice which allow for an emergence of the unconscious (Walker, 2009). The use of repetitive drawing processes that follow a list of mark-making commands, incorporating chance into one’s work, and relinquishing the urge to intellectualize or control the results of an artistic practice are methods of creating space for the unconscious to emerge (Walker, 2009). A significant idea in Walker’s research is the prioritization of structure and process in artistic practice, specifically the ways in which a structure or process of working becomes a landscape within which the unconscious might appear in the guise of errors, insights, affects, or other notable experiences.

The metaphorical landscape that emerged through my work with students writing in the *Criticizing Television* course represents visually for me the shape and texture of my unconscious subjectivity.

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5 As explained in Chapter Three, practices of reading and writing are shaped and constrained by a culture’s unspoken and unquestioned conventions for that activity. These conventions are considered available designs (Wysocki, 2005) made visible when the transparency of an activity is shifted into opacity through changes in material practices. Wysocki sees such shifts and changes in material practices as seeds for new awarenesses—or, encounters with unavailable designs.
teaching, the varying opacity and clarity of my perceptions, the structure of my positionality as educator and researcher, and the overall shape and texture of the study, as I perceive it currently. This image became emblematic of my sense of relational space created through my interactions with students’ criticism texts. It is also a representation of my sense of writing’s mediation of experience and being, in general.

The image was created early in the study. It began as a mixed media drawing, however, it was not initially connected to this study in any overt way. It was instead a parallel project. Looking back, I recall working on the drawing off and on while beginning to conceptualize the study. The general structure of the image—tri-partite with an empty center—turned up frequently in my work at that time in doodles and scribbings in my notes and in my other, more formal, drawings. In particular, however, the nascent image that later became the composition entitled Compression held my attention. I returned to the sketch often, frequently engrossed by the edge panels of the drawing. Over time, the left panel began to take on the appearance of an abstracted tangle of branches, and I found myself trying to amplify the blurriness and depth of the imagery. The right-hand edge of the composition is comprised of finely rendered lines that, through multiple layering, eventually revealed delicate shapes. The constellation of color and shape reminded me of wintry, snow-covered ground—an early winter snow that barely covers fallen branches and dormant grass.

I worked on the image over many months, a process of repetitive, layered mark-
making. In re-working areas of the drawing\(^6\), I tried to relinquish the goal of achieving a particular composition. I resisted the strong impulse to make sense of the marks while I worked, but instead heeded instincts about what sort of lines and shapes were needed in various areas of the composition. In short, I tried not to overdetermine the meaning or potential result of what I was doing. In fact, I was unaware at the time that the developing image had any connection to the case study which was absorbing so much of my time and thought. Rather, the process of drawing was a respite from other work that overwhelmed my mind and my schedule at that time.

The sequential, monotonous repetition of drawing processes functioned to create distance and disconnection from the original image within a structured dialogue. I’ve since come to understand that experience as a necessary dialogue among process, time, perception, and representation, a process that feels very much like the revision process I experience in writing. Both are negotiations with the impossibilities of representation. Both are a repetitive dance around the otherness of self and signification.

Although, at the time of its development, the Compression image was not consciously connected with my efforts to study students’ criticism writing, it was an important aspect of the data interaction processes. From my present vantage point, I

\(^6\) The original mixed media drawing (paint, silicone glue, graphite, and charcoal) was scanned and reworked using PhotoShop software. After printing the drawing in inkjet media on paper, the composition was altered and reworked with additional graphite and ink drawings, then scanned and reworked again in PhotoShop. This cycle was repeated at various times in 2007.
speculate that the drawing was a form of peripheral interaction, perhaps a space for the unconscious to operate upon possibilities of representation. In my perspective, the Compression image represents, most succinctly, what I refer to as the “I of the text.” The labor of producing the image is not unlike the labor of seeking coherence and self-cohesion within intersubjective encounters with others. In fact, the panel arrangement might even be construed as a tri-partite view of subjectivity. The Real is at the center—a field of profound silence and blankness that pushes against, and holds apart Imaginary and Symbolic resisters of subjectivity. In the image, the Symbolic is the frozen, wintry ground, sharply defined, almost painfully brittle. The Imaginary, the larger of the edge panels, is a view that is recognizable to me, yet somehow loses me in its deep blurriness.

As a visual representation of peripheral interactions with the data, the Compression image is also a form of data, offering yet another lens of signification to thicken and confound the notion of interpretation in this case. Specifically, this landscape, created through repeated re-seeing and re-drawing of a particular section of an existing image, represents for me a laborious, intense focus upon a small region of experience. Relatedly, a distinguishing quality of this case study is its intensive, repetitive focus on layered accretions of perception and experience. However, while patterns, layers, and sedimentation may reveal where and how subjectivities thicken and collect around particular actions and affects, in my experience, deferred meaning causes

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7 As explained in Chapter One, my efforts to articulate and explain the dense stickiness of perceptions that flooded and stalled my attempts to signify the data was a process that I began to think of as thick interpretation. This was a process of straining toward and grasping for coherence in the thickness of so many competing texts.
perceptions and insights to exceed and spill out of the literal boundaries of the study. That is, one’s sense of meaning in the present is always contingent upon what one experienced previously and what is being experienced concurrently within the present situation. The concept of deferred meaning bears close resemblance to the concepts of transference and countertransference in the analytic context.

The concepts of deferred meaning, transference and countertransference, and peripheral awareness, have particular importance for this case study of students’ television criticism writing. Specifically, their importance derives from the idea that meaningful data can exist outside the boundaries of a focal analytic context. An acceptance of the idea that peripheral, even unconscious, data will exert significant affective resonance—resonance that influences perceptions of a focal issue—may be troubling for positivistic research, yet this possibility creates an intriguingly rich complication for this study of visual culture writing. Relating this issue to the pursuit of critical consciousness in the Criticizing Television course, concepts like peripheral awareness, deferred meaning, and transference/countertransference, disrupt the assumption that topic-focused writing created to meet the criteria of an assignment is the writing which is of greatest importance in a student’s learning experience.

It wasn’t until I’d spent considerable time immersed in the writings within and around this study that I began to shift my attention from the writings in which students followed assignment criteria to produce exemplary essays to consider those examples of writing that I initially dismissed as irrelevant or too difficult to categorize. Several years ago when I began to conceptualize this study, I was strongly attached to the idea of exploring the relationships among unconscious subjectivity and critical consciousness.
Recalling the first two research questions in Chapter One, I demonstrated an interest in what could be known about subjectivity, and how I would know it:

1. *Within the writings of this case, what can be known about subjectivity and critical consciousness?*

2. *How do I know what I know about subjectivities within and around the writings?*

In formulating the first question, I was operating under the assumption that I could look to specific data (students’ writing and my own writings) to discover answers. However, it is the second question, and the phrase “around the writings,” that was to later prove significant. Within the present context of this study, a letter that I’d received from a student in June 2007 took on new meaning, offering me an opening to a different perspective on the writings of the course. This new perspective was an outward-looking, peripherally positioned, and oblique view of the students’ writing.

Raphael’s letter came as a surprise in 2007. The correspondence was motivated by a desire to explain why his final paper (which accompanied the letter) did not possess the creativity and depth that he believed he was capable of demonstrating through his writing. Raphael wrote:

> I really want to impress upon you the effect and resonance this class has had on me...this class was, paradoxically, the best class in college for me. Paradoxically, only because, rather than focusing me on the literal topic of this class, I have come to subjectively discover—and have had an opportunity to articulate—some very important things for myself, much to the detriment of my scholastic achievement this quarter to be sure. (Personal correspondence, June 2007)
Raphael’s letter was significant, in this present research context, because his observations regarding what he’d learned outside of the focal topic of the course provoked me to see a select group of essays differently. As a result, those papers that I’d initially dismissed because they were too difficult to categorize were eventually perceived as vitally meaningful for this study. In the midst of numerous impasses in which I often felt incapable of making progress in the research, this discovery was a turning point that led eventually to insights about the peripheral qualities of the writings in the course. In summary, the data interactions of this chapter emerged from my explorations of peripheral awareness and deferred meaning in relation to the writings within and around the course.

**Repetition and Data**

Taken literally, the word “research” means to *search again*. A repeated search within the same body of data can be the genesis of insight. For example, in *Practice Makes Practice: A Critical Study of Learning to Teach*, Deborah Britzman (2003b) “disrupts” her “own retelling” of student teachers’ stories by rewriting each chapter, using her own narrative to “form a kind of photographic negative” to the student teachers’ stories. (p. 250). Britzman credits Walter Benjamin for inspiring this method, explaining that Benjamin’s photographic technique of enlarging a snapshot was not expected to render more precise what was visible yet unclear—rather the enlargement could reveal “new structural formations of the subject” (Britzman, 2003b, p. 250). Importantly, however, we cannot assume that an enlargement of perspective or the repeated scrutiny of a phenomenon will reveal truer, more accurate views. Rather, these attempts to retell, re-see, re-present merely confirm the various positions from which the
phenomenon is rendered intelligible. As Britzman explains, “subjects cannot be uncoupled from the conscious and unconscious discourses that fashion how subjects become recognized and misrecognized” (2003b, p. 251). Like Britzman, I feel compelled to call attention to my own complicity in the naming and constructing of data. The Compression image above is, perhaps, an instance of enlarging and revealing my researcher’s gaze, yet it cannot represent a comprehensive explanation of my research motivations and assumptions. Instead, the landscape of the researcher’s gaze will be enlarged and reworked by a reader, in the process of their interactions with the text. That is, the unconscious resonance which shapes my researcher’s gaze may become visible to readers through what they notice, puzzle over, and respond to within my data interactions, and within the dissertation as a whole. This interaction of reader and data is the origin of the contingent, indeterminate “I of the text,” a phenomenon that also resembles the psychoanalytic concept of analytic third, discussed in the section below.

Transference, Countertransference, and the Analytic Third: The Emergence of Peripheral Vision

The psychoanalytic concept of the “analytic third” (Wilson, 2003) thickens and complicates what I (think I) know and can express of human experience. The analytic third is a result of the transference and countertransference produced through my relationship with the data and participants of this study. A clinical concept used to theorize the attachments and resistances enacted in the relationship between psychoanalyst and analysand (patient), transference refers to an analysand’s unconscious projections of their significant past relationships, desires, affects, into perceptions of their present context; the transference is a “superimposition of past and present, in which the
past is contained in the present” (Etchegoyan, 1999, p. 357). Countertransference is an analyst’s own unconscious projections that respond to the analysand’s transferences. These clinical concepts of psychoanalysis are not easily transferred to the researcher-participant relationship in a qualitative study, for my relationship to the student participants and the data of this study does not originate in a therapeutic intervention. On the other hand, the concepts of transference and countertransference can illuminate some of the complexities of affect within and around teacher-student or researcher-participant dialogues. For the purpose of this research, the terms transference and countertransference are used in identifying and theorizing some of the strong affects I experienced in working with this case. These affects point to the presence of the analytic third, the other of the Other (Felman, 1987) in this study’s interviews and in my interactions with what I am calling data in this case.

The naming of data in this study enacts a demand similar to that which structures the analyst-analysand relationship—a dual-relationship that, according to analyst Roger Kennedy (2000), involves both openings and closures, visibilities and invisibilities, in the constitution of subjectivity/ies. It is this dual relationship that creates the conditions for a third entity, or the analytic third to emerge, a phenomenon that is neither wholly attributable to my subjectivity, the subjectivity of the participants, or the content of the writing. Psychoanalyst Mitchell Wilson (2003) explains this development of the analytic third as a function of the analyst’s recognition of the countertransferential desires and demands that the analyst places on the analysand:

(T)he analyst’s recognition of his demands on the patient, his recognition of the desire and will inherent in the endeavor of analyzing, is the first step towards
moving beyond the dual relation. Such recognition is often crucial in creating a space for “something other” to emerge, a “third thing,” born of the analytic interaction but slightly separate from the individual participants, a discourse less contested than shared. (p. 95)

I find helpful Wilson’s (2003) view of the analyst’s desire, translating his assertions that there can be no analysis without transferential and countertransferential resistances between analyst and patient into a method of locating and naming data in this study. For example, heeding Wilson’s Lacanian-informed perspective which finds that gaps, silences, and difficulties experienced in the analytic situation are indicative of unconscious conflicts among analyst and analysand desires, I consider my own perceived difficulties with the study, and my uncertainties about interactions with the participants, to be valuable data. Like scanning the horizon in a landscape, or reading the patterns, shapes, and empty spaces in a drawing such as the image above, I engage in readings of, and interactions with, the writings within and around the study. These interactions find significance in the form and context of an experience, instead of seeking interpretative readings that assume a presence of static meanings within data.

Wilson (2003), like Parker (2005), Markham (1999), and Felman (1987) conceptualizes reading as a mis-reading or misalignment of egos in the Imaginary register of subjectivity. Wilson points out that Lacan’s method of reading within the analysis event avoided “logical and ‘sense-building’ interventions with the analysand” (p. 88). Instead, Lacan “emphasized punctuating that which is ‘other’ to the patient’s conscious discourse, such as slips, repetitions, puns, forgetting, contradictions, and the like” (p. 88), theorizing that these unintentional utterances and presence of affects are
evidence of the unconscious. Lacanian theory would characterize these experiences as an emergence of the analytic third, and an important development in an analysis; relatedly, this case study characterizes experiences such as contradictions, intuitions, and affects as important data.

**Peripheral Vision: “Seeing” the Shape and Texture of Data**

In thinking about writings of this case, I eventually learned to pull my attention away from the object of inquiry, the writing itself. Like researcher of writing Phyllis Creme (2002), I discovered the fruitfulness of approaching academic writing “at a tangent” or “obliquely,” in an effort to “free up” (p. 156) my relationship to the writing, the author, and my own writing self. In other words, rather than focus exclusively on the content of the text, believing that the author placed meanings there that I could understand seamlessly, I tried to see the shapes and textures of the texts themselves. That is, I endeavored to create some distance from the desire to interpret meanings and instead tried to articulate how certain texts seemed to intersect with, and rub up against, or disrupt my other perceptions of the data. I held onto a peripheral view of the writing, leaning into the blurriness and softness I perceived in and around the students’ and my own writings in the case.

Relatedly, a Lacanian approach to writing is concerned with the patterns of signification in a text, not an interpretation of meanings hidden within the text. This approach to interacting with the writings of the case helped me to theorize and articulate not what was concealed *within* the content of the writings, but instead to describe and

*What I look at is never what I wish to see.*

theorize my *method of interacting* with the corpus. As explained in a previous chapter, I chose to position my relationship with the data as one of interaction, not analysis. In so doing, I wanted to foreground my concern about performing an analysis on students’ subjectivities or their intentions in relation to their writing. Instead of viewing the writing as an object to be analyzed and interpreted, I wanted to cultivate a context of interaction wherein the writings and I were implicated in one another, creating an indeterminate “I”—an I of the text, or, in Mitchell’s’ words (2003), an analytic third. This third entity—the *indeterminate I*, cannot be claimed by researcher or the researched because each is implicated in the constructions of one another’s subjectivity. While I cannot assert that I’ve never exerted authority over these texts and their meanings, I am willing to hold myself open to scrutiny in regard to the complicated desires and reasons that shape my work with the writings of this study. Theorist Jodi Dean’s (2008a) pragmatic, psychoanalytically informed perspective on the impossibility of purity in one’s reasoning is applicable here:

> There is no such thing as pure reason; the very drive for purity produces a stain of enjoyment. To express this stain is not to excuse the obscenity but to acknowledge it, to grapple with it, to hear its call and feel its unbearable pressure…We might laugh about it. This laughter expresses our unease and discomfort with those obscene dimensions of life we hate to acknowledge, cannot excuse, and must not avoid. (para. 7)

Dean’s description of the laughter that seeks to cover or distract from unease about one’s “enjoyment” of the obscene dimensions of life can be equated with other coping mechanisms used to alleviate epistemological discomfort. For instance, pedagogy is one
mechanism used in dealing with the pressures of the unknown while striving toward purity of reason. Relatedly, activities such as critical writing, and concepts such as critical consciousness, offer yet other approaches toward purifying the messiness, contradictions, and unease caused by the inevitable indeterminacies of human relationships and life in general.

The shift in purpose from decoding meanings hidden within the case study writing to consider the visual and affective qualities of my interactions with the writings is a move away from reliance on central, dominant meanings and an affirmation of the significance of the peripheries of texts. This shift is also characteristic of a Lacanian informed approach to discourse analysis (Felman, 1987; Parker, 2005a, 2005b, 2010). Further, a Lacanian analysis of writing seeks not to identify literal meanings in the texts, but traces what the researcher perceives to be “irreducible, nonsensical—composed of non-meanings—signifying elements” because, “for each subject there is a signifier that is ‘irreducible, traumatic, non-meaning’ to which they are ‘as a subject, subjected’” (Lacan, 1979, p. 250). Psychoanalyst and researcher Ian Parker (2005a) emphasizes that a psychoanalytically informed discourse analysis does not seek to identify words or phrases that sum up what has been said as if they were ‘themes’ that expressed what the real meaning of the text was, or repertoires or discourses that were responsible for producing what occurred in the course of the text...but it would be searching out the signifying elements that do not make sense and specifying the role these nonsensical elements play in organizing and disrupting the flow of a text. (p. 168)
Following from Parker’s (2005a, 2010) psychoanalytically informed approach to the form of texts, I wondered if my visual arts training, along with years of experience in creating and responding to visual compositions, shaped my patterns of response to criticism writing. I cannot deny a sensitivity to the way in which words occupy the space of a page. In my journal, I noted this sensitivity, remarking upon the connections I sensed among the writing content and form. For instance, regardless of an essay’s length, topic, or style, I perceived some students’ writing as denser and thicker than others’. Some texts seemed to have soft edges, some seemed to be formed of sharply defined shapes. I experienced some critical essays as flat and one-dimensional, while others were perceived as intricately textured. My interview with Duane was an interaction that I perceived as smooth and flowing. It felt almost effortless to respond to his E-mails. Duane’s remarks about the nature of writing offer a glimpse of a writer who is attuned to the unpredictability of process. As I read Duane’s description of his writing experience, I wondered why some students are comfortable with the discomfort of messiness in the process of writing, and some freeze and shut down, or move too quickly to abolish discomfort by choosing safe, familiar paths of representation?

Every piece of writing I do seems to have a nature all its own. Sometimes it helps me organize my thoughts and other times it seems to just create new questions and ideas...meaning will become disrupted in the writing process...I have learned through writing that the writing process is nearly as important as

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8A significant, unanswered question that emerged from this research concerns the possible connections between visual arts training and psychoanalytic discourse analysis. A question for future research: How might an art practice background, disciplinary context, or theoretical and philosophical orientation sensitize art educators in their responses to writing?
the mental processes which are supposed to guide and govern it. (Duane, August, 2009)

I responded to Duane, acknowledging the unique messiness and unruliness of writing process:

“What you say about the disruption of meaning in the writing process is significant, I think. Writing (and critical thinking for that matter) IS disruptive. People don’t think in the same way they write. Thinking is messy, fragmented, slippery. Usually insights and understandings don’t arrive in an orderly, linear fashion. In contrast to thought, writing processes must work toward pulling thoughts into coherent order; writers have to make choices to follow some ideas, discard or ignore others. (August, 2009)

Recently, I revisited the text of my interview with Duane, wondering about the choices that people make in the service of assembling a coherent narrative. What might be learned from the bits, pieces, or pages of expression that are discarded or ignored as writers develop a critical perspective on a part of their life that they may not have considered critically in the past? I think of the pages upon pages of text that were eliminated from this dissertation. There are hundreds of pages which, if collected, would likely tell a very different research story. As I contemplate the complex negotiations from which expression emerges, I realize that a paper’s rational, coherent representations exist only because of its “sub-thesis”—the repressed unconscious, full of contradiction and paradox. I am reminded of German philosopher Vilém Flusser’s (1990-1991) disposition toward writing. Flusser’s conscious experience of writing has been described as
something like a violent attack on his own ideas – ideas he experiences as images, with associations that branch out and cycle back, seeming to go nowhere... He must tear the image apart, force it to form a sentence in a particular language, and then again force that sentence to conform to that language’s rules of writing. (Roth, 2010, p. 260)

**Writing, (In)Visibility, and Response-ability**

The visual, textual, and cultural attributes within a television text or associated with the phenomenon of watching television are not distinct, but are blurred and blended. Untangling the thickly woven associations is part of the challenge and reward of studying television. This visual textual awareness extends to students’ critical essays; a number of students work creatively with their text’s appearance as well as its content. Moreover, I am aware that I’m unable to assess an essay without taking notice of its visual qualities. For example, after I’d been teaching the course for about a year and a half, I had an experience with a student which reinforced for me the teaching and learning possibilities that might stem from attention to the visual qualities of criticism writing. A student who had consistently submitted challenging, theoretically ambitious essays turned in an essay that contained on the bottom edge of the final page a thick, irregular line of ink. On closer inspection, the inky edge of the paper revealed a layering of words; it looked as if the bottom of the page had gotten stuck in a printer, causing a thick, concentrated build-up of black text. When writing my assessment feedback for the essay, I included some questions about the inkblot. I drew an arrow to the ink and asked if the strange margin of layered words was perhaps a signifier of his arduous efforts to deal with the densely layered ideas in his paper. I noticed him studying the feedback as he walked toward the
When he reached the last page of the essay, he looked up and laughed—but there was also a look of surprise and recognition in his eyes. As he left, he admitted that, no, he “hadn’t even thought of that connection,” however he was struck by how perfectly that inky edge illustrated the density of his thoughts and the congestion of coherence that characterized his writing process in the essay.

**Reflexivity and Enmeshed Subjectivities**

Achieving reflexivity in research and teaching involves deconstructive processes that seek to locate and interrogate the intersections that join self and others, texts, and perceptions of reality. Further, an important aspect of reflexive awareness is the imperative to penetrate the representational exercise itself by complicating and contesting monolithic views of reality and descriptions of experience that essentialize or colonize the subjectivities of others. (Inter)acting reflexively then, necessitates development of a fuller, more sensitized awareness of our mutually constituted selves and cultivating greater attentiveness to the responsibilities inherent in the ways we speak to and listen to others.

In a study of the construction of subjectivity in the women of her hometown, Elizabeth St. Pierre (1997) is reflexively attuned to the ways in which her physical, embodied experiences with the researched might have produced mental mappings that shaped and influenced her perceptions and responses to her study’s data. St. Pierre notes that the “physicality of theorizing” (1997, p. 184) may be a concept of import for other researchers’ studies. She suggests that “perhaps we need to think about our physical as well as our theoretical grounding in our research projects” and she asks, “(h)ow are these
physical and theoretical sites of knowing related and what are the effects of those relations” (1997, p. 183)? St. Pierre’s reflexive observations resonate with my own experience of researching students’ writing. My experience of teaching the *Criticizing Television* course carved indelible maps of memory and affect into my conscious and unconscious registers of subjectivity, maps that inevitably shaped my perceptions of the study and its data. My research and instructor reflexivity, then, must be foregrounded in this research. In this research, I have objectified my reflexivity by conceptualizing it as a particularized position, peripheral vision, a perspective that calls attention to the distancing which has helped me to fashion some of the unruly affects and uncomfortable impasses of this study into a form that I can begin to represent in words and imagery.

The concept of peripheral vision, as I use it here, refers to a Lacanian informed perspective on the relational constitution of self and other, with the caveat that this ‘relationship’ is an object that is meant to be manipulated, stretched, and explored for what it might gesture toward in terms of critical consciousness. Following from Lacan’s ideas on the constitution of subjectivity within language in the symbolic order, and the mobilization of the *objet a* (unconscious desire for recognition completion, or desire of an other) which perpetuates the ongoing negotiations between a self that lacks and its fulfillment, peripheral vision is the perspective from which affective engagements with others might be considered.

Purposeful efforts toward reflexivity offer a means of exploring an enmeshment of subjectivities. Over the years, educators and theorists from various disciplines have written about the complex dynamics of enmeshed subjectivities in education (Cho, 2005;
Ellsworth, 1997; Gallop, 1982, 1999; Jagodzinski, 2006; McWilliam, 1996; Todd, 1997, 2001; Ungar, 1982). In the classroom, love, desire, power, and resistance circulate around the pursuit of knowledge where a teacher “performs what it means to know things” (McWilliam, 1996, p. 309). The performative dimension of teaching is manifested in texts, utterances, and bodily gestures; even the materials and activities of a course are performative of desire and power, mobilized by belief in the authority of a discipline’s structure of knowledge. Erica McWilliam (1996) explains,

(t)hrough oral, physical and textual 'performances' as teachers, we indicate a range of positions in relation to a 'body' of disciplinary knowledge. We model knowing by striking a range of scholastic, and even discipline-specific poses, through which the learner is mobilized to desire to learn, to reject the seductive power of ignorance. (p. 309)

Modeling the subject position of critic is challenging when the object of criticism is one’s self, family, and lifestyle, and the implicit goal of a curriculum seems to be the rejection of one’s cultural ignorance in pursuit of critical consciousness. French literary critic Roland Barthes recognized that the endeavor of pursuing knowledge in education is “more of a personal practice and affirmation of values” (Ungar, 1982 p. 82) than an institutional function. Barthes’ critical practices affirmed the complexities of education and the value of affect in critical discourse. For example, Barthes’ A Lover’s Discourse: Fragments (1978) demonstrates that “affective motivation for theory needs to be recognized in the face of what is otherwise mistaken for an objective or scientific project of critical understanding” (Ungar, 1982, p. 82).
Narcissism and the Objectification of Reflexivity

Narcissism in education relationships can manifest in situations wherein students are subjectively (but unconsciously) perceived as part of the teacher’s self. The concept of narcissism originates in the myth of Narcissus, a tale of a young man’s love of his own image, which is reflected to him from the surface of a pool. Freud theorized narcissism as a stage in child development which is connected with certain characteristics of parenting. Freud theorized that that parents will inevitably form narcissistic investments in their children by confusing their own desires with those of their children. In projecting their own hopes and priorities on their children, narcissistic parents perceive these qualities as belonging to the children themselves.

Narcissistic relationships in education are not uncommon. The education system creates a hierarchy of authority which ensures that students and teachers perform specific subject positions. A student satisfies a teacher’s narcissistic desire for admiration, respect and understanding when demonstrating belief in the pedagogical narratives that structure the education event. A student’s appreciation of a teacher’s knowledge, concepts, and skills validates the teacher’s identity, which in turn extends stability for the student’s identity. Thus, education is an intersubjective relationship wherein each person is engaged in desire for an Other’s attention, knowledge, and desire, while at the same time trying to maintain their own ego-integrity.

Narcissism in research is also a potential outcome of relationships among researchers and participants—particularly when a researcher, like an educator, has invested considerable affective and ego-centric desires in the relationships. Thus, in an effort to create a reflexive study, it becomes necessary to foreground and begin to
articulate the ways in which researcher and participant desires and expectations may be colluding to reinforce narcissistic investments in the research relationship. Placing a strong emphasis on the explanations afforded by theoretical perspectives, the structure of logical arguments, and the clarity of articulations of ideas helps to manage the unruly affects of a teaching or research context. In this way, theory, reasoning, and even the structure of an assignment can function to create a diversion from the narcissistic investments that structure the research or teaching relationships.

The consideration of narcissism and reflexivity is of importance in this study, and this chapter, in particular. Specifically, this consideration is intended to call attention to one of the significant discoveries in this research: The pedagogical value of objectifying, through contingent, responsive, and creative representations of an analytic third or relational space that cannot be claimed exclusively by either party in the relationship. This idea is elaborated further in Chapter Nine. For now, however, I endeavor to explain how this idea came about through my interactions with the data of this study.

In teaching and researching the Criticizing Television course, the unruly, affective underpinnings of critical theory were difficult to tease out of the tangle of perspectives and subject positions reified through assigned readings in postmodernist theory, feminist theory, studies of television genre, and audience response theories. While television is often dismissed as a simple, predictable activity lacking depth and creativity, television, as theoretical text and as a phenomenological, lived experience, is actually complex and messy. The students and I sometimes found ourselves at odds with the critical perspectives we read, theoretical perspectives that at times seemed too tightly wrought, too self-assured about their representation of the world. The unruliness of
television’s influence, as cultural phenomenon and as personal experience, sometimes inserted itself into the most rational of critical statements, disrupting the smooth façade of critique.

The unruliness of the phenomenon of television originates not only in the programming itself, but in the subject positions that television creates within complex socio-historic contexts. As viewers of TV, we categorize, simplify, and structure television’s messiness into constructs such as genre and programming schedules; we devise critiques about the qualities of TV shows and their effects upon audiences. However, what is to be done with the excess and unruliness of affect that can arise from having to reconcile one’s criticism of televisual texts, images, and the messages encoded in them, with the pleasure derived from them? The contradictions and confusions resulting from intersections of affect and academic rigor were not always visible in the face-to-face interactions of students and myself in the classroom; however, at times I believed I could sense the presence of contradictions, confusions, and affect in the television criticism writing.

What do I mean by ‘sensing the presence of affect’ in students’ writings? And, what sort of feeling is it to intuit contradiction, confusion, excess, and unruliness when reading and responding to a student’s television criticism essay? Answering these questions is not easy. Given the fugitive nature of the unconscious, and the imprecision of conscious awareness, my answers to these questions are necessarily contingent, uncertain, and steeped in the flux of subjectivity. Psychoanalysts Lisa Baraitser and Stephen Frosh (2007, p. 76) concur, observing that “(a)ffect is murky stuff, hard to define or grasp; its relationship to its wayward sibs, 'feeling' and 'emotion', is uncertain and

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variable." Given these difficulties, Baraitser and Frosh are less interested in defining what affect is⁹, and more interested in exploring “what affect might be doing when people come into contact with one another, how it is produced or what it might signify or produce in the intersubjective sphere” (2007, p. 77). Explaining my sense of affect, as experienced in relation to this case study is challenging in that affect is resistant to representation in the first place. My efforts to articulate my perception of affect in and around my interactions with the writings is best described as an experience of simultaneity and compression. Simultaneity, because so many activities, thoughts, and perceptions seemed to occur at once, and compression because of the repeated experiences of these clustered actions and affects, repetitions that compressed detailed awarenesses into blurred shapes.

While working with the writings of this study, I began to realize that I often gravitated toward maintaining simultaneity in my interactions with the writings. In retrospect, I can see that I may have been seeking ways of holding affects and perceptions together simultaneously in a tensioning space—a relational space where disparate elements might bump up against and activate one another. Within my journal, certain images and texts seemed to gravitate toward one another; sometimes there was a

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⁹ Baraitser and Frosh provide some general characteristics that help to parse out distinctions among feelings, affects, and emotions: “Feelings refer to the central, subjectively experienced state (which may be blocked from consciousness); emotions, to the outwardly observable manifestations of feelings; and affects, to all the related phenomena, some of which are unconscious” (2007, p. 78). Baraitser and Frosh (2007) elaborate on the physicality of affect, observing that affect can involve a reaction to “stimuli (‘internal or external’) that are experienced as feelings or emotionally charged physical enactments. This suggests that affect is indeed expressive: it gives rise to psychological phenomena that are communicational and hence interpretable,” however, affect itself remains “unknowable” (p. 86).
sense of alignment of images and words, however, sometimes the connectedness was a result of opposition and misalignment. The significance of simultaneity was felt in awarenesses that relationships were present, however obscure or nonsensical the connections seemed at the time.

The concepts of affective resonance, excess, disruption, impasse, evocation, and other forms of significant perception discussed in this dissertation are of consequence for the consideration of criticism writing in this case study. Moreover, these perceptions may also be of import for art educators who teach or use writing within their practice. A distinctive quality of the analytic encounter within the practice of psychoanalysis helps to shed light on the connections I see between affect and criticism writing in art education. Frosh and Baraitser (2007) explain that, in theorizing the significance of affect in psychoanalysis, it important to consider context. They note that there is something very specific about psychoanalytic practice, this being its setting, with its enforced focus on the intersubjective exchange to the exclusion of everything else. In its rawness, even its brutality, as it dispenses with the normal niceties of social intercourse, this setting makes something stand out. (p. 91)

The austerity of the psychoanalytic encounter, with its emphasis on the analysis of experience, makes affect and emotional expression that much more noticeable. Similarly, a structured critical essay assignment which relies upon on a theoretical critical perspective, such as sociocultural theory, for example, may only amplify an instructor’s perception of affect and disruptive excess in students’ work. Importantly, it is not merely the presence of affect in and around writing that is of concern in this study, rather, my interest is in the type of maneuvers and positionings that emerge in the management of
these affects. Management of affect, for example, may occur quite naturally and invisibly through the regulatory apparatus of assignment criteria, learning goals, course objectives, and so on. However, an eruption or seepage of excess affect, the type which provoked and unsettled me when teaching the course, merits a psychoanalytically informed reflexivity—an attunement to forms of critical consciousness that acknowledge the unconscious within writing.

The meanings given to the presence of affect in my intersubjective encounters with student writing were shaped not only by experiences and insights in the present, but are also influenced by resonant affects from the past that stretch forward to inform and complicate my current perceptions of this research. Additionally, I’ve discovered through my experience with this research, that I find it less important to actually name, describe, and interpret the presence or meaning of affect than to approach these experiences as a relational space that gathers resonance and meanings that are simultaneous, compressed, and contingent. In this way, I believe that I can honor the complexity of a person or experience, rather than impose tight, linguistic containment upon those experiences that evade containment in the first place.

The Simultaneity of Writing: Excess

Lacanian analyst Bruce Fink (1997) offers a succinct answer to the problem of finding meanings within a text: Pay attention to the letter. Taking the expression “the letter of the law,” Fink explains a method of reading texts built upon following the letter of the law, that is, an approach which emphasizes “the way the law actually reads, as opposed to its overriding meaning or spirit” (p. 25). Fink’s approach, like the method of analysis Lacan used with his patients, and like Ian Parker’s approach to texts (2005a,
eschews the goal of locating meaning within a text. Rather, a text itself—such as the critical essays considered in this study—would not contain meaning, but would function as a part of a contextual continuum in relation to other texts. This perspective affirms my belief that people cannot learn isolated facts and theories separate from the rest of their lives; learning—and writing—occur within the context of what is already known or not known. Learning occurs in relationship to one’s hopes, fears, desires, and resistances. Learning, like this process of constructing a psychoanalytically informed case study, is an endeavor of simultaneity and continuity.

The grid (Excess, Figure 2) emerged in relation to my experiences of interacting with Robert, one of the E-mail interview participants. The choice to arrange the images and words in a grid evolved naturally in that this particular mode of representation and organization is one I sometimes use in my journal. My choice to use the grid format may have gone unquestioned if I had not engaged in this research. In fact, I did not really “see” this format as significant until I began to think about how I would interpret the interview texts in the dissertation. As explained earlier, my inclination in the beginning of this study was to examine the texts through a content analysis method. However, readings in Lacanian theory which emphasized the significance of form over content (Fink, 1997; Parker, 2005a; 2010) resulted in a gradual shift in my intentions. I began to group together texts and images that created, for me, a relational space that amplified my sense of the text’s meanings as well as represented for me a visual ‘identity’ of a relationship with a participant.

_Excess_ is a confluence of excerpts from Robert’s words and my writings to him, connected with an image. The image, a drawing excerpt from an earlier monoprint, was
developed in the same repetitive, cyclical progression as Compression (Figure 1). This image is a rough draft of my sense of interaction with Robert—a behind the scenes glimpse of the disorder, disconnect, and unruliness that pushes against the façade of this chapter—but is, nonetheless, a vital part of the data interaction process. I include this image as a supplement to the discussion of the data interaction process, but also as a preface to the discussion of writing methodology in Chapter Nine.

Figure 2. Excess
On Reading and Being Read by Writing

Apart from the more developed drawings that emerged in relation to the study, my multiple readings of selected critical essays and interview texts were noted in writings and simple line drawings that traced my affective responses to the texts. What I had first perceived as my reluctance to locate meanings within the content of the text was actually the presence of a conflict between what I read—the literal words on the pages—and the affects stirred up by my readings. Unable to reconcile these divergent responses to the data, I felt frustrated and paralyzed. Eventually, however, what I assumed to be the data twisted and changed position and shape in moebius-strip fashion. This movement shifted what I assumed to be the data of the study—the essay texts, survey and interview content, and my reflexive writings about the study—to a slightly different position and meaning. For example, the more I attended to my own resistance to assigning meanings to students’ words and motivations, the more I began to see different patterns. I resisted urges to suture the texts to my own narratives, eventually learning that my readings and attempted interpretation were merely scribblings, densely layered marks around the edges of a text I couldn’t perceive clearly in the first place. These “scribbles” are the tracings of my ego, the evidence of my subjectivity against (and because of) these texts. Becoming progressively thicker and denser in places, the marks made in tracking and recording coherence among the writings of the study eventually revealed empty spaces, blind spots. In other words, instead of discovering narratives and meanings in the texts, in the way one might proceed in a grounded theory approach, I instead found that the texts were actually “reading” and displaying my own subjectivity. Recalling repeated attempts over
the years to help students find clarity and coherence of expression, I began to wonder if my focus on clarity and coherence was itself a constellation of (k)nots that belied an unconscious pedagogical desire.

As I worked through the case study texts in an iterative fashion, thematic threads emerged. Recording the affects I experienced around my interview correspondence with study participant Robert helped me to visualize a theme of silence/cacophony, for I perceived Robert’s responses to my E-mail interview questions as a thick torrent of words. His messages were richly descriptive containing detailed reflections on his writing in the course, recollections of other writing experiences in his life, and musings on criticism writing as a mode of visual culture critique. Although Robert’s responses were sharply articulate and sensitive, I perceived his E-mails as a bristling cacophony, an unbearably overwhelming rush of language straining to contain an excessive noise. My ritual was to read Robert’s messages once, hurriedly, then close the E-mail. Stunned into silence, feeling frozen with uncertainty about how to respond, I would spend the next week or so trying to disassociate from the tension, trying to think my way through the excessive affect-noise that I’d swallowed in my reading.

During the time of this interview, whenever I finally did respond to Robert, I felt compelled to share not only my responses to and questions about what he wrote in his E-mail, but also my ambivalence and uncertainty about how to respond to him. I couldn’t bear the thought of removing the friction of these interactions by omitting my hesitations and uncertainties. These affects are valid, I believe, for they are part of the cacophony of signification. They gesture, perhaps, to the “sub-thesis” of my comments, the unruly signifiers that must be repressed in order to produce smooth, coherent communication.
and also preserve my master signifiers which position me as “knowledgeable instructor.”

By taming these unruly aspects of my subjectivity by containing them in words, I was, perhaps, trying to objectify (my) affect in order to release it into the discourse in a different form, where it might contribute to the formation of the “analytic third,” or the object-as-catalyst that Bollas speaks of. Further, I can speculate that, in revealing my vulnerability as a lacking subject, I was endeavoring to locate myself within the Analyst’s discourse subject position, the position of ethical communicator who creates space for the fullness and unpredictability of discourse among desirous subjects who lack.

As explained in the previous chapter, I didn’t ask many direct questions of the interview participants—rather, I chose to describe some of the work I was doing with the writing research, including some of the general emergent themes I was formulating through my interactions with the writing. I intended my descriptions to be prompts for a free-associative type of dialogue with the students. While this was a valid approach to eliciting dialogue, I was unprepared for how moved I would be by the responses. A typical response contained not only reflections on the writing created in the course, but also discussion of childhood experiences and their impact on his writing.

Although I’d typically send my E-mail interview prompts to Robert quite late in the evening, his replies usually arrived very early the following morning. I was startled by the rapidity of the replies as well as the length and detail of the messages. Upon seeing an E-mail from Robert in my inbox, I would open it immediately. However, as was often the case, once I’d skimmed the message, I couldn’t bear to read any more. I felt disturbed, confused. In retrospect, I believe the overarching feeling of disturbance was confusion regarding what I’d hoped to learn in this research. If I’d hoped to experience
affects and confusions that clouded my perception and understanding of writing processes and artifacts, then I was certainly succeeding. The discomfort I felt not only was unsettling, but also eroded my confidence about my research plan and raised concerns about how I would respond to the interview participants. I felt the impasse before I could ever name it: The impasse originated in the paradox of eliciting and responding to writing that traversed affective territories, within an institutional milieu (the realm of language, the expectations for research rigor, the ethics of pedagogical relationships) that rendered these territories suspicious and sensitive. This was the very paradox that led me to research the criticism writing in the first place. I include here several paragraphs from one of Robert’s E-mail narratives:

I write essays or critical pieces or what have you, largely as an outlet for frustration. My frustrations usually stem from a sense of a lack of agency due to class structures. I think I’m especially attuned to or unable to ignore class differences as a result of how I was raised. My mother and father separated when I was 5 or 6 and divorced when I was 7 or 8. My formative years were spent full time with my mother - a woman who postponed or abandoned her own career in nursing to rear me and my three older siblings, one who died very young. After not being a part of the work force since she was roughly my age, my mother had to suddenly find gainful employment to support three children between the ages of 7-16 at the age of 40. After a variety of positions, she took a job as a clerical assistant at the university hospital because it would supply health insurance, help with college. Even today, after something like 13 years in the university system, she makes around 24-27 thousand a year. We lived in a lower middle class suburb
originally planted in the middle of corn fields in the seventies. When my family first moved there, the area was absolutely empty save scattered farms which had been there since the turn of the century. By the time I graduated high school all of these farms had been hastily turned into planned obsolescence apartments and housing, billboards and pavement. The lakes had been dried up, the independent businesses sold, the farm houses destroyed. The area went from something like a nowhere's-ville to this overly crowded area of banalization - shopping strips of tanning salons, etc. What was never exactly middle class devolved further into economic obscurity.

My high school was a wasteland. Drugs, low expectations, lots of kids in Iraq, a lot pregnant. Most of my friends dropped out. I missed something like 100 days of my first period class junior year, and at least a full 50 each year of high school. At the end of high school I had missed enough days to compose a whole year of classes. And these absences were the only thing which marred my grades... I just hated it. BECAUSE, meanwhile, my father had moved away in the early nineties (when I was 7, 8) with my stepmother. My stepmother’s father was a state senator and industrialist in the old school tradition. A home in the city with a guest house larger than my mother’s home, a home on the coast, a building named after him at a prominent university. Like most divorce settlements, I gather, I spent holidays with my father and a week or so in the summer with him. Consistently through my formative years we vacationed together, with my stepmother and her extended family. Skiing at resorts, 150 dollar bottles of wine, conspicuous consumption, etc. Then I would go home and live with my mother
who was chronically in debt, with a home falling apart, etc. Um, a few things were made clear by this. Kids I knew in Iraq were being sent there by Republican politicians like my stepmother’s father. The kid who taught me to skateboard was killed in Iraq the day I graduated high school.

The excerpt above was part of a longer message that I received early on in the interview. It took me several days to return to that E-mail to read it more thoroughly. Pushing myself to respond, I wrote the following message to Robert a week later. The passage below, excerpted from a longer E-mail, begins with my thoughts about his childhood and young adult experiences, specifically the death of his friend in Iraq:

...I’m aware of how inadequate words are when placed against the complexity of experience. I could read and read and re-read and never be able to grasp what it is that these experiences have meant to you. I underlined the word “absences” above\(^\text{10}\). I wasn’t certain why that word seemed significant to me—at my first reading of your message, it resonated with me. Now I’m connecting the idea of absence and the function of language… thinking perhaps “absence” is a gap that language tries to cover. Which is what I was thinking when I read your observation that writing criticism can be like a “tourniquet” (Note: I am referring here to an observation Robert made in an earlier E-mail, described in Chapter One)...How writing can function as a tourniquet that staunches the flow of absence (non-being) that people are all always swimming within/against. Maybe absence is the baseline condition of being, and presence is what we are always

\(^{10}\text{This “underline” refers to notations I made in my reply to Robert’s message. I typically wrote my responses in Word document format which I then attached to my E-mail to Robert.}\)
struggling to articulate……being able to communicate….writing…and making things keeps us afloat on the sea of absence, makes it possible to bridge the gaps…connect with one another across the gaps. (Vicki, August, 2009)

At the time, revealing my uncertainty to Robert was very uncomfortable. I was concerned about how he would perceive my disclosures: Would he feel uncomfortable, himself, by my uncertainty? Would he feel manipulated into disclosing his own discomforts? Might he feel pushed into making other personal disclosures? In asking these questions, I was beginning to gain a strong, experientially driven sense of what it means to occupy the Analyst’s position—the imperative this position carries in self-reflective questioning, the imperative to use one’s sense of the transference and countertransference to facilitate spaces for discourse to unfold in whatever vulnerable, unformed, uncertain ways it must develop in order to cultivate what Lacan calls full speech, or the language of the unconscious Real, rather than the empty speech of the ego in the Imaginary register of subjectivity (Parker, 2005). Because it is the activity of communication itself, and, in this specific instance, the E-mail correspondence that positioned Robert’s and my subjectivities in relation to one another, there can be no metalanguage—no “external point from which it is possible to speak that is not also necessarily implicated in a certain kind of position” (Parker, 2005, p. 174). Therefore, if one subscribes to a Lacanian-informed view of discourse, much of the interaction in classrooms, including the creation of critical essays and an instructor’s feedback and assessment of these assignments, are empty speech acts that lie (Lacanian pun intended) on the line of the Imaginary—even though subjects themselves may believe they are being sincere and direct in their communications. Interestingly, the Imaginary discourse is rarely detected or called into
scrutiny. That is, unless bits of the Real break through and disturb the smoothness or coherence of discourse, felt as unruly affects, periods of confusion, discomfort or dissonance, or points of impasse. Given this perspective on discourse, a question must be asked: *To what ends might an educator use these experiences of discomfort and impasse in the development of writing pedagogy theory and practice in visual culture art education?* Possible responses to this question are addressed, in part, at the end of this chapter\(^{11}\) and also discussed in Chapter Nine.

In considering the implications of a psychoanalytically informed research project for visual culture writing pedagogy, locating the presence of the unconscious in texts or in images is only part of the story. As I see it, the real issue of interest, in relation to this case study’s data interactions specifically, and for potential writing pedagogies in general, is the way in which a psychoanalytically informed approach to a text will affect a reader. A psychoanalytically informed approach to a text dismantles authority and interpretive mastery. It humbles and unsettles a reader, shaking confidence in strategies such as reflexivity. However, this is precisely where the work of critical consciousness begins: at the point where we are charged with the task of finding ethical, non-exploitive ways of interacting with others within the context of uncertainties and impasses. The following is another glimpse of uncertainty and disturbance in the research—an experience of working within shifting temporalities of perception.

\(^{11}\) While it is vital that developments in pedagogy are tangible and accessible for the improvement of practice, some of the significant developments in pedagogy aren’t tangible or measurable. Pedagogical change often begins in the unconscious registers of subjectivity, in the hidden curriculum of the unconscious. The flow of repressions and desires that constitute the unique thumbprint, or objet a, of individuals and cultures will shape affect, behaviors, and attitudes toward teaching and learning.
Where is the Data? The Shifting Time of Perception

It’s 7am on a Friday morning in early March, 2007. A stack of ungraded television criticism essays awaits my attention, but I am absorbed in reading an E-mail from Alix, a student in my Criticizing Television class. His E-mail is several paragraphs of theoretically dense, philosophical musings, not quite free-association in structure, but certainly abstract. This is an early draft of ideas for Alix’s upcoming paper. Someone unfamiliar with Alix’s body of work in the class might find the writing confusing and without focus, but, I sense a resonance with themes in his previous writings. I re-read the E-mail, feeling both overwhelmed by the density and complexity of the ideas and exhilarated from the rollercoaster effect of the text’s blending of sense and nonsense:

1. (Pre)Utopian television and the realization of subjectivity.
2. PAPER RAD “TRASH TALKING”, WONDER SHOWZEN, the sitcom of the post-ideological.

My Cup Appeared to Runneth Over

Fake moments

Have you ever seen those fake deer that people put in their front yards? They are hollow and plastic, and sometimes they have Christmas lights wrapped around them? There were a lot of those where I grew up. There is an especially heavy, thoughtful moment during Trash Talking (video) where the tape breaks and we look, for a few seconds, at one of these deer. All it takes is those few seconds to realize that we must be living in some kind of post apocalypse. The feeling wears off, but it is there, for a second. The idea that we are not only willing to engage in fake dialogue with our television, but also with some kind of fleeting moment of nature is a disturbing one. (Alix, March, 2007)
My teaching journal from 2007 evidences efforts to understand Alix’s writing and its affective resonance for me. Also visible, however, are my efforts to articulate what I expected from writing, in general, in the context of the course. An excerpt from my teaching journal, dated March 15, 2007, offers a view of my attempts to understand how to teach writing that could provoke, unsettle, and resonate with students, perhaps even leading to a personally meaningful form of critical consciousness:

Alix is an interesting student. I find his writing challenging and sometimes intimidating. His writing takes up more of my time and attention than I can usually give to student essays, but I can’t pull myself away from reading the work. There is something about the writing that both fascinates and repels me. It’s not only ambitious in regard to subject matter, it is usually structured in a unique way. Not the typical expository essay format, but more like a breathless dialogue. Unlike most undergraduate students who take my course, Alix’s previous reading interests comprise a hefty bibliography. He’s actually read Foucault and Bataille, and he has some familiarity with psychoanalytic theories. A fine arts major, he and several of his artist friends who are also taking the class this term, have amplified the class discourse both in content and in creative tension. The students in this class are unafraid to speak out, debate, argue and challenge one another, and me. The students in this class affirm for me the necessity of teaching criticism writing through a self-critical lens. Therefore, rather than teaching television criticism as a neutral, disinterested text, I want to turn the critical essay inside out, exposing the subjective qualities of the writer to the same scrutiny directed at the
television phenomena itself. To do otherwise feels like a breach of integrity; the students seem already aware that critical writing, no matter how hip and contemporary the subject matter, is meant to perform a particular type of subjectivity within the academic context. As someone who already doubts the efficacy of writing’s ability to facilitate critical consciousness, I want more from writing. I think of Deborah Britzman’s desire for readers who ask “the dangerous questions: what is it that structures my own stories and my own intelligibility? What do my moral imperatives cost” (2000, p. 32)?

I responded to Alix’s E-mail message that morning, enfolding into my reply some observations about a paper he presented in the previous day’s class:

Hi Alix,

The paper idea you shared in class yesterday is intriguing. Your comments about the subject positioning (or lack thereof) of Paper Rad or TV Carnage have a lot of potential...and you are making strong connections with your other investigations this quarter....Along those lines, I read an article from Fibreculture Journal that may be of interest to you. The topic is aesthetics, digital/technological aesthetic experiences—actually a re-working and/or reconceptualizing of modernist aesthetics that acknowledges the “uncomfortable proximity” experienced by subjects-in-process within embodied experiences...

The article concludes with a proposal for a “contact aesthetics” that acknowledges the legitimacy of the experimental and “not-yet-arrived” by subjects “still in the making”... What I’m wondering after reading the article, is what sort of effects Paper Rad and TV Carnage have on subjectivity?....does the
lack of identifiable subject positions/spaces for a viewer create a disjuncture wherein subjects elide identity and reflexivity (uncomfortable proximity)?, or does the lack cause a jamming of the circuits/switchboards of reflexivity (another kind of discomfort...)? And, might this lack also bring a viewer closer to Lacan’s notion of the Real---that realm of affective, undifferentiated, unsymbolizable being? No need to answer or respond to these questions—these are just some things that come to mind as I contemplate your ideas. (Vicki, March, 2007)

Deferred Meaning: The Shifting Time of Significance

The psychoanalytically informed approach taken in this research acknowledges the special relationship of time and subjectivity in the interpretation of data. The passage above, excerpted from an E-mail conversation with Alix in 2007, was meaningful to me at the time it occurred, however the text gathered new significance for me through deferred meaning, that is, after its contextualization within the more recent data of the study. At the time it was received, Alix’s message was interesting to me in that it helped me gain a sense of where he was going with the development of his paper. However, in the present, in the context of my attentiveness to the presence of the unconscious, I wonder why I didn’t notice back then how many times Alix refers to the quality “fake” and the way in which he assigns meaning, retrospectively, to the fake deer as a result of

~A. Youngblood-Jackson, 2003, p. 705
his experience with the television program. Continuing on, a deferral of meaning continued in my encounter with the text, which was vaguely unsettling for me at the time, but now unsettled me in ways that I could articulate with specificity. In the present, I felt aversion as I recalled the plastic deer of my childhood neighborhood, but I also realized that I felt a deep sensitivity about being perceived as fake, or inauthentic, particularly in my interactions with others.

In addition, I notice now that my academic reference to “uncomfortable proximity” (set apart from the surrounding text with quotation marks) may have been an effort to change the chains of signification and related affects that colored my reading of and response to his message. And, from my present position as reader-researcher, I also wonder about my unconscious (at that time) efforts to avoid certain subject matter in his message. I am startled in the present when I realize that I never actually responded to what Alix wrote, but instead attempted to defer the dialogue elsewhere, toward the *Fibreculture Journal* article. My message to Alix holds signifiers that gesture toward my unconscious subjectivity, namely the signifiers of deferral and evasion that reveal my own uncomfortable proximity to the writing.

**Who/what/where is the “I” of the text?** The slippery pedagogy of transference and countertransference

A Lacanian analysis seeks not to identify literal meanings or essentializing truths in a text, but traces what is perceived to be “irreducible, nonsensical—composed of non-meanings—signifying elements” because, “for each subject there is a signifier that is ‘irreducible, traumatic, non-meaning’ to which they are ‘as a subject, subjected’” (Parker, 2005, p. 168). This irreducible kernel of non-meaning is the *Real* of subjectivity around
which all desires and the concomitant efforts to alleviate *lack* circulate, contributing to
the identity of a subject. While irreducible, nonsensical non-meanings might be detected
in a text, it is important to think about where these “non-meanings” actually reside. In
other words, although the text may be the phenomenon under scrutiny, it is actually the
reader’s (or teacher’s, or researcher’s) subjectivity that determines what is visible and
perceptible in (or in relation to) the text. Therefore, in my interactions with the writing of
another student, Riley, it was not the literal content of the interviews and critical essays
themselves that were “data,” rather, it was the affective residue that clung to the
signifiers, *the paralinguistic points of join*, that emerged in the relational spaces of my
interactions with the texts.

For example, at the time it was submitted for an assignment, Riley’s written
rationale for a criticism project troubled me. The creative essay took the form of
“television’s voice,” first addressing the reader in third person in the opening paragraph,
then abruptly changing to second person in the next and remaining paragraphs. The
paper’s “voice” is strident, almost aggressive in its address as it taunts the reader:

We both know that I am more to you than just some passing fancy. Because I
know you. I know what you want. I know your intimate desires. And I know that
you get bored with me, but that’s OK. I’m glad that you get bored with me. Use
me; it just keeps me on my toes. You know that I’m just thinking up my next
surprise for you. And you know it’s going to be good, you just pretend that you
don’t find me attractive anymore. That’s just part of our game. Keep talking trash
to me; call me a whore, I LIKE it. (2007)
The strangely, amorphous violence of voice that I intuited in my reading of Riley’s text is something intuited in my interactions with other student criticism texts over the years. What has emerged in my analysis of the affect-patterns around these texts is the possibility of my collusion (in my assignment criteria, and in my communicated and unspoken responses to the essays) with desires to subvert and resist clarity and civility of expression.

As my work with the research progressed, I began to think of critical consciousness not as a pedagogical goal, assignment outcome, or a coherent narrative, but instead as an entanglement of conscious and unconscious aspects of subjectivity within the indeterminate messiness of intersubjective relationships. Thinking back to my teaching experiences in *Criticizing Television*, I wondered if the perceptions of resistance and impasse I was currently experiencing in relation to the data of the study was similar to the resistance and impasses that I suspected students experienced and acted out in their criticism writing assignments. Based on my work with Lacanian theory, I suspected that one of the most critical, and crucial, aspects of critical consciousness was the role of the unconscious which, in being the locus of the irrational, sometimes contradictory desires of the subject, meant that critical consciousness might be felt as an impasse. An impasse of critical consciousness and the accompanying discomfort, confusion, annoyance, or frustration, could be expressed by students in a variety of ways such as resistance, dissociation, and apathy.

As Duncum (2008), Herrmann (2005) and jagodzinski (2004a) have pointed out, critical consciousness may have little to do with a student’s growth and awareness, becoming instead a strategy of playing along with a teacher’s critical pedagogy agenda to
achieve a particular grade\textsuperscript{12}. Students may also struggle with completing an assignment that, for some inexpressible reason is impossible to even begin. As a matter of fact, these struggles may be very common, but students are often not encouraged to question their own resistance to an assignment. Rarely have I had a student confess that they were unable to do an assignment. I suspect many students have felt this way, but most conceal it by turning in something, even if it is of poor quality, or submitting the assignment after the due date. Amelie was a rare case in that she admitted to her inability to do the assignment. She sent me an email a few hours before she was to present her paper in class:

I do not have a project to present today. This is the hardest thing I have had to do for school ever, I think. This is exactly why I did engineering in college. I also have had 2 midterms in the past 16 hours (second one starts in 30 minutes) and I hardly have had time to think of anything. I will try and come up with something by tomorrow and take the letter grade penalty. I just thought I’d let you know this in advance of class.

When questioned in the online survey about motivations for completing an assignment in a particular way, students indicated that following the rules of the assignment (71\%) was slightly less influential than their desire to follow their personal ideas and inspirations in writing their paper (83.9\%)\textsuperscript{13}. The higher percentage of those

\textsuperscript{12} Participants in the case study have admitted to this coping mechanism. In an E-mail interview, Robert describes college essays as “the written language of the school,” used to “complete a task for a grade.” He adds that the standard form of a critical essay can be “enough to cover up the fact that nothing happened, no learning occurred, no enjoyment was felt” (2009).

\textsuperscript{13} Result from online survey.
who believe they followed their personal desires is, on the surface, encouraging. This number may give the impression that students experienced the course as a liberatory environment where they felt free to express their ideas. However, this interpretation may fall apart when it is examined through a psychoanalytically informed perspective. For example, in what way did the unconscious subjectivities of the students, as well as my own instructor’s subjectivity, create a situation where the students and I colluded in preserving one another’s coherent egos? Within the *I of the text*, a site of transference and countertransference in the writing process, the discourse of the university allowed the students and myself to feel a sense of agency in our expressions, but at what cost is this illusion of agency maintained? Former student John, an art and journalism major, makes an observation about writing in university classes:

> Writing is often very silent, especially in the form espoused by the university. It doesn't "speak." It's generally seen as bad, I feel, to have an individual voice. Things like thesis statements – five paragraph form - supporting facts, etc., that whole form...it deadens things. You aren't "hearing" the person, you're seeing them speak on the other side of a window. It's clear but you can't really get what they are saying. (Robert, E-mail interview, 2009)

As I look back at my years of teaching the *Criticizing Television* course I realize that, like Britzman, I wanted to ask the dangerous questions; I wanted students to ask them, too. However, at the time I taught the *Criticizing Television* course, especially in the early days of teaching, I couldn’t have articulated with any specificity exactly what would comprise a dangerous question. In the context of this research, however, I can see that I seek questions that unsettle and disrupt expectations of criticism writing. I am seeking
questions that expose the “clashing investments in how stories are told and of the impossibility of telling everything” (Britzman, 2003b, p. 253).

Discussion

This case study is focused on students’ perceptions of the writing they created in the Criticizing Television course, situating these perceptions in relation to my instructor’s and researcher’s perceptions of the course and this case. Among the research questions posed in Chapter Three, I asked, What unique challenges do I encounter in my researcher’s interactions with the writings of this course and the writings generated through this case study? At the close of this data interaction chapter, I can pinpoint one of the most significant challenges encountered in my interactions with the writings of the case: The intertwined issues of affect and impasse and how they shaped my perceptions of, and responses to, the writings of the case.

I believe it is significant, that, at the time I offered the online survey to students, and during the period in which I corresponded with students in the E-mail interviews, I had not fully articulated for myself the idea of the impasse as methodology. There were nascent indications, however, that I was attempting to come to terms with, and make productive use of the difficulties I experienced in developing this study. For example I wrote frequently about the frustrations of working with the students’ writings. I wrote about my disappointment with the online survey data. More often than not, I indicated in my journal that I felt like I was in over my head and that I would not be able to bring to fruition the goals that I’d written about in my research proposal. I suspect that I was experiencing that which my own students experienced on many occasions: Feelings of being stuck, confused, ineffective, unmoored....overwhelmed—at an impasse.
In the early years of teaching the course, I had limited experience in advising students how to work within the paralyzing discomforts experienced around writing criticism. If a student struggled with expressing or developing their ideas in writing, I often advised them to do more research, more note-taking, more study of academic criticism texts—all of which are valid strategies. However, I lacked the capacity to teach at that time ways of existing within, and reflecting upon, the emotional labor of writing. Moreover, at that time I was unable to help students find their own ways of existing within the presence of sticky affective resonance which can disrupt the progress of writing—for both students and an instructor.

To summarize, within my endeavors to understand the significance of the writings of this study, a process was unfolding, a shift from seeking central meanings to enlarging my perceptions to accommodate emergent perspectives at the edges of awareness. As my perceptions evolved in moebius-strip fashion, I experienced a shift in what I assumed to be the data of the study—the essay texts, survey and interview content, and my reflexive writings about the study—to a slightly different position and meaning. For example, the more I attended to my own resistance to assigning meanings to students’ words and motivations, the more I began to see different patterns. I resisted urges to suture the texts to my own narratives, eventually learning that my readings and attempted interpretation might be mere scribblings, densely layered marks around the edges of a text I couldn’t perceive clearly in the first place. *I can’t bear the thought of removing the friction of these interactions.*

In a statement about the relationship of his artmaking and his perceptions of television, John, a painting major (author of the *Paper Television* essay discussed earlier),
expresses a desire to preserve the friction that he sees as essential to perceptions of reality. This preservation of friction may be an effort to signify that which undeniably exists in life—the unruly, inconvenient, and difficult excesses that may be denied, ignored, or subdued by critical discourse:

My artwork is developed through various processes in a layered fashion, in order to create a cluttered composition, yet composed in an appealing manner. I use images of filth, slums, and other means of harsh realities of the real, which are layered over an image related to the “American Dream.” I then use spray paint to project a notion of filth and or a relation to graffiti (the act of destroying material objects). Through the usage of the spray paint, I am also able to create an illusion of space, in terms of outer space...Through the images of the filth or harsh realities of the real, I am trying to present a reality of an invasion of space which is often overlooked within the world of false realities displayed on television.

(John, 2007, Personal Correspondence)

Conclusion

The student writing that pushed at and provoked me with its affectively-charged, or, even peripheral, approaches to the expression of critically conscious perspectives on the phenomenon of television was a disruptive experience when I taught the course. It is only though this research and the work of deferred meaning that I can visualize these disruptions as necessary peripheral spaces that the students and I created in relation to the course assignments. These spaces, where encounters between the conscious “I” of a student and that of the instructor, emerge though a relationship of proximity and distancing. This space, the indeterminate I of the text, is a means for subjects to interact
with nonsensical ideas and unruly affects that resist clear expression. This approach to a reflexive criticism writing does not reinvent the important work in reflexive critical pedagogies that has already been accomplished in art education or composition studies. Instead, this perspective proposes an ongoing and unending project of articulating and learning from the impasses that seem to disrupt students’ progress in writing critically about visual culture. The unpredictable and affectively charged work of writing criticism is a process of stumbling toward critical vulnerability—for both students and an instructor. Composition scholar Della Pollock’s (2007) perspective on critical writing offers a creative conceptualization of the writing “I” as political and “performative.” Pollock optimistically finds that writing which veers into “disorderly, aberrant,” and even “accident-prone” can be a source of creative possibility for writing subjects. She explains that a “writing I” is a dispersed subject who is changed by and through the act of articulating and expressing herself. Further,

the ego-identified or intentional self disappears into reflexivity, story, boundless otherness, other times and places, embodied knowledges, unspeakable violence, and discovery itself... In each case, moreover, the abject returns with the performed self in process and radical contingency; in the sensuous body—in all of its pleasure and terror; and in embodied difference—raced, gendered, sexed, and classed. This performative “I” thus has a politics and an ethics. Performing displacement by error, intimacy, others, it moves beyond the atomization, alienation, and reproduction of the authorial self toward new points of identification and alliance...(A) performative “I” may thus also produce ‘new political aggregates—provisional, uncomfortable, even conflictual coalitions of
bodies’. The student moving into or as yet renting space in this subjective habitus may find herself wildly confused, without ready means of textual housekeeping. And yet, to the very extent that—disorderly, aberrant, accident-prone, and uncompromising in her embrace of what might otherwise make us cringe—the reader and/or writer...makes a perfect mess of conventional scholarly forms...(and) renews our contract with possibility. (Pollock, 2007, p. 252)

Pollock’s description of a writing process which can potentially open up spaces where students (and instructors) may become “wildly confused, without ready means of textual housekeeping” (2007, p. 252) is an approach to criticism writing pedagogy that I may have pursued unconsciously in my construction of, and responses to, the course’s writing assignments. Perhaps this is an approach to writing pedagogy that resulted in my creation of assignments that had students struggling to tame “outbursts of ideas that just kept spewing on (their) computer screen,” and struggling to “navigate the pathway” between “how and why” they responded to television programs in the way that they did (Anonymous, 2009).

Given the struggles and impasses I experienced in using a psychoanalytically informed perspective in the research, I am more attuned to the pedagogical possibilities of an “I” which creates friction and affect in my readings of, and responses to, student writing. I am aware that the I of students’ criticism texts is an unstable, in-process “I” that “emerges from un/doing writing as a possible self;” and that enjoys neither the presumption of a foundational ontology nor the convenience of conventional claims to authenticity. It is (only) possibly real. It is made real through the performance of writing. Accordingly, its reality is never fixed or
stable. To the very extent that it is written, it is always already about to fly off the page into being and becoming. (Pollock, 2007, p. 247)
CHAPTER SIX

Television as Visual Culture Phenomenon:
Issues of Transmission, Reception, and Knowledge Production

Introduction

This chapter explores issues of transmission, reception, knowledge production, and subjectivity in relationship to the uses and functions of television within contemporary lifeworlds. Popular broadcast television has evolved from one-way, downward-directed transmission models into many-to-many modes of communication. As a result, and given the nature of television’s ubiquity and embeddedness in the lifeworld, alterations in television’s transmission and reception model are likely to impact cultural production of knowledge and subjectivity. The transformations of television’s broadcast model point to complexities inherent in subjects’ relationships to television, and therefore are of vital significance for this study of students’ television criticism writing.

Because the research is concerned with student criticism writing in the Criticizing Television course, the guiding concept relational space is used in this discussion to pursue issues of student/audience subjectivity and television, and, by extension, the television criticism essay.
Poststructuralist geographers credit Michel Foucault with the origin of the idea of relational space which they derive from the spatial aspects of Foucault’s theories of the Panopticon and government. Further, philosopher Bruno Latour is noted for his tracing of the ways relationships are “‘made’ through space” and the ways in which “resources of various kinds are utilized in the process of relationship building” (Murdoch, 2005, p. 27). Environmental planner Jonathan Murdoch translates Foucault’s analyses of discursive regimes into an explanation of power knowledge constructions across spaces:

Power, knowledge, and space mutually compose one another. As power relations come into being, discourses, knowledges and spaces gain shape—they co-evolve in complex ways, coiling around one another until some kind of stability emerges. Thus within these heterogeneous assemblages any separation of the discursive and the spatial becomes almost impossible to conceive: Knowledge is materialized in practice, practice is materialized in the body, and the body is immersed in modes of spatial organization that in turn ‘perform’ systems of knowledge. (2005, p. 56)

Embedded within, and constituted through the discourse of art education and the *Criticizing Television* course, relational space, as it is used in the context of this chapter and elsewhere in the research, provides a way of thinking through and talking about the sensitivities and nuances of the dynamic, contingent, and emergent nature of a subject’s conscious and unconscious identity/ies in relationship to television. Specifically, I characterize the phenomenon of television as a relational space which holds implications for subjectivity, construction of knowledge, and television criticism writing.
An Exploration Of Relationships Among Broadcast Models, Writing, and Subjectivity

The dynamics of television’s broadcast model, and the constitution of relational spaces through television’s relationships with audiences, may also be compared with the dynamics that constitute students’ writing processes within the Criticizing Television course. For instance, both the broadcast of television and the activity of television criticism writing involve the production and reception of meaning between people within particular discursive spaces. With this in mind, the television’s many-to-many broadcast paradigm may be used to consider the ways in which students’ writings about television are also configured within a particular network of subjectivities and embedded within discursive spaces of power, knowledge, and material practices.

The discussion is staged in three sections, with the overarching goal of exploring the concept of broadcast television through considerations of relational space and subjectivity. To this end,

- the Criticizing Television curriculum and its conceptualization of television and broadcast models, as embodied in the pedagogy and activities, are considered;
- second, the implications of television’s broadcast model for audiences are explored by drawing upon television and media theorists’ considerations of modernist and postmodernist broadcast paradigms;
- finally, a discussion of television, subjectivity, and relational space takes a psychoanalytic perspective on subjects’ performative ways of “doing” and “being” television through the relational space of the criticism essay.
The Concept of Broadcast Television Within the Criticizing Television Course

The Criticizing Television course curriculum presents television as a medium in process, made meaningful in culture through relationships among subjectivities, material practices, unconscious desires and resistances, and social and economic contexts. To facilitate depth and breadth of the study of television, the Criticizing Television curriculum begins with study of television’s earliest one-to-many broadcast models and considers their characteristics and effects for individuals and culture within the context of modernist systems of knowledge.

At the midpoint of the term, the curriculum transitions into study of postmodern modes of knowledge production, consumption, and perception with the consideration of television’s many-to-many systems of broadcast. A strict dichotomy of one-to-many and many-to-many is not assumed, however. For instance, while studying postmodernism and television, reconsideration of the one-to-many broadcast model previously studied offers an opportunity to reflect upon the ways in which postmodern media plunder historical symbols, disrupt linear progression, and subvert temporal certainty to create current and emergent knowledge forms. In relationship to the study of postmodern television, the discussion of subjectivity deepens, bringing postmodernist concepts of fragmentation, ironic distance, simulacra, and hyperreal into play with the notions of individual and cultural identities.

Moreover, within the study of television and postmodernism in the Criticizing Television course, we look closely at modes of television production, placing TV as text in relationship to other forms of media production to generate reflection on the roles that
subjects play in making meaning through production and reception or consumption of texts. Importantly, the concept of subject positioning or interpellation (Althusser, 1971) created through broadcast television, particularly in respect to advertising and identity, is considered with the understanding that “media choices and identities marked out by patterns of television consumption become co-ordinates which define a subject’s role” (Bignell, 2004, p. 165).

To further emphasize the issue of subject positioning through production and reception of texts, the students’ critical essays are considered to be “broadcasts” themselves, offering a way to work reflexively within the relational space of television and print culture to explore the rhetorical effects of content and form on the construction of subjectivities. Thus, television is theorized as context-sensitive mode of expression that becomes coherent and meaningful to audiences because of subject positions and shared cultural codes, as does reading and writing criticism. The exploration of similarities and differences between the production and reception of critical essays and the production and reception of television is intended to achieve several goals:

1. To help build understanding of postmodern theory concepts such as “texts,” “readings,” and “reflexivity” and how these concepts apply to postmodern television experiences as well as to the production and reception of written criticism.

2. To help build understanding of the relationship of subjectivity to the production and viewing of television and to the production and reception of criticism.
3. To help students become more sensitive to the form and purpose of their writing and the writing of others while gaining sensitivity to the forms and purposes of their, and others, television and related media uses.

4. To help students learn how language and images shape how we experience, understand, order, and express or represent reality.

To summarize, television is defined within the course as an evolving text that draws audiences into its logic through its ubiquitous forms and meanings.

**Sociocultural Context of Television as Visual Culture Phenomenon**

A visual culture phenomenon with interdisciplinary roots in journalism, mass communication, psychology, anthropology, film studies, English, and other fields, the study of television is the subject of hundreds of scholarly books and articles each year, however the study of television has never coalesced into a stable, bounded discipline (Allen, 2004). In the perspective of researchers, television as visual culture phenomenon is inherently unsettled, wide reaching, and in flux. In spite of television’s rhizomatically proliferating presence in society and its rapidly changing technologies and programming, several issues stand out, garnering consistent attention from cultural theorists over the years and in the present. Issues discussed here include: Trends in the development and evolution of researcher’s approaches to the study of television; television’s status as object of academic study; television’s historical presence and ties to American postwar culture; the ubiquity, pervasiveness, and style of the medium; and, postmodernist perspectives on television’s relationship to subjectivity, reality, and cultural values.

Writing in 1983, television theorists Horace Newcomb and Paul Hirsch express the challenge of studying the medium of television, observing that “only so rich a text
could attract a mass audience in a complex culture” (1983/2000, p. 571). Nearly twenty-five years after Newcomb & Hirsch’s observation, television is no less rich, nor culture any less complex. However, from the vantage point of the present, scholars who study television are able to identify patterns and trends in television’s progressive cultural influences as well as in researcher’s interests throughout the years. In particular, the issue of audience agency has remained a consistent research interest since the inception of television, becoming manifest in studies built on the investigations of active and passive audiences. Although a 1940s study of radio and its influence on the 1940 presidential election found considerable evidence to reject the paradigm of “powerful media and passive audiences,” the rapid adoption of television and the subsequent influx of a new generation of researchers trained in experimental social psychology in the social sciences led to effects research based on the idea that a passive viewer is acted upon by a powerful television media (Butsch, 2000, p. 281). Later, a behaviorist perspective on viewers, most prevalent in the 1960’s and 70s, was joined and partially supplanted in the 1970’s by the uses and gratifications approach which looks at the ways in which people use media. However, while uses and gratifications theoretically granted users some agency, it did not account for the cultural forces that constructed and mobilized, or oppressed and constrained, the desires, interests, and identities of viewers. A research perspective on the cultural construction of television’s role in society, and television’s relationship to audience power and resistance emerged from Cultural Studies, specifically the Birmingham school and sociologist Stuart Hall, in the 1980’s.

While researchers studied the social effects of television for the purpose of understanding its hegemonic and oppressive effects in culture, scholars in
communications, English, film studies, art, and other Humanities areas eventually came to regard television as significant literary or visual text. However, the subject of television was not without conflict in academia. Debates over television’s worthiness as an object of study can be traced back to the 1960’s when the unconventional Canadian literary scholar Marshall McLuhan brought television and its critical study into consideration within academic circles (Vande Burg, Wenner & Gronbeck, 2004). Still, the growth of television study was slow. Many academics hid their television viewing from their colleagues “for fear they would be ridiculed for spending time with this quotidian mass medium” (Vande Berg, Wenner, and Gronbeck, 2004, p. 26). Noted television scholar John Corner (2006) finds that the study of television today is still fraught with historical uncertainties, and this legacy complicates critical analysis of television. Specifically, Corner observes that, in contrast to films which are distinguished by scholars as being individual works, and deserving of sustained critical attention, many people seem unsure as to whether television is up to these same standards, especially when the analysis is organized around the goal of appreciation, as in the tradition of literary or art criticism. Further, Corner problematizes the television critic’s relationship to the object of criticism, positing that television’s ubiquitous social uses and pervasive lifeworld presence presents a challenge to the “critical stance,” which traditionally grants an aesthetic object “autonomy from the conditions in which it is produced and consumed” (2006, para. 3). While Corner’s concerns are legitimate, I believe that the critical stance and appreciation issues associated with the analysis of television position television as a particularly compelling visual culture phenomenon for study within art education, especially in relationship to subjectivity and critical consciousness.
Within visual culture, broadcast television has a ubiquitous and paradoxical presence: It’s a visual experience that often seems nearly “invisible.” Appearing in living rooms, bedrooms, kitchens, shopping malls, restaurants and bars, vehicles, and physician’s offices, or on computers and mobile devices, television is an ever-present part of America’s domestic and urban landscapes. Sociologist Richard Butsch (2000) concludes that television has come to saturate so many environments and activities because it is no longer “intrusive, the center of attention” (p. 287). Television’s understated presence has allowed it to move deeply into domestic and public spheres by performing multiple functions with great predictability and reliability: Television entertains, socializes and educates, creates community and consensus, and informs (Vande Berg, Wenner, & Gronbeck, 2004). Indeed, television seems always to have been a part of culture. And in fact, for many people, it has. Media scholars Walter Cummins & George Gordon (2006) note that since the majority of the present population were born “after TV sets entered our living rooms at the end of world War II” (p. ix), most people have never known a home or world without television. As a result, television is perceived as one of the “givens of daily existence” in America, like indoor plumbing, central heating, and self-service supermarkets” (Cummins & Gordon, 2006, p. ix).

Television’s pervasiveness and relative unobtrusiveness in the present is quite different from television’s presence and status in its early years. In particular, television viewing of the 1950s was a focus of interest and attention; it was “foreground, not environment” or background noise (Butsch, 2000, p. 288). However, as television historian Lynn Spigel (1998) reveals, the widespread adoption of television in the United States was an “enormously swift process” (para.1). According to Spigel, “in 1948, less
than two percent of the population had a TV set; by 1959 about 90 percent of U.S. households had at least one receiver and watched about five hours of television a day” (1998, para.1).

The optimism and affluence that television viewers (mostly white, middle class) enjoyed in the postwar period fed the development of advertising and new programs. As a result, television programming changed in pace with quirky consumer desires, and as the medium grew in popularity, an intertextual televisual flow ushered a ceaseless, expanding semiotic flood into homes, work, places of recreation. In the perspective of television and media theorist John Caldwell (1995/2000), the pervasiveness of television is attributed to its *televisual style*, an indefatigable drive for production and display of the innovative, the seductive, and the distinctive in a bid to discover, create, and ultimately capture the predilections and desires of consumers. Thus, the televisuality of American TV, and the relationships it forms with viewers based on its programming logic, presentational appeals, and its “cultural logic of distinction” means that “television is part of the world at large and cannot be viewed apart from business conditions” (Caldwell, 1995/2000, p. 665-666).

Cultural theorists studying television’s presence in the world at large find that television performs a special social function for many individuals. *Parasocial* function, the term denoting a viewer’s blurring of the reality or fiction of television characters or a

1 Notably, the American televisual style is not a universal model. Media scholars Justin Lewis and Sut Jhally (1998/2000) contend that, in contrast to the public service models that influence broadcasting in many other industrialized countries, “the history of radio and television in the U.S. is one of rampant commercialism. In the United States, media corporations have, since the 1930’s, been unusually successful in promoting an idea of broadcasting in economic rather than cultural terms, that is, as a business, rather than a public service” (p. 443).
television program, also applies to individuals whose television viewing experiences serve as a “partial functional replacement for social relationships” (Vande Berg, Wenner, & Gronbeck, 2004, p. 5). Because television uses recognizable social codes to create realism and verisimilitude, viewers are often able to “read” television characters “quite realistically” posit Vande Berg, Gronbeck & Wenner (2004, p. 5), who go on to relate how television actor Tim Busfield from the primetime series *thirtysomething* was slapped in the face in a grocery store by a woman who was angry that Elliot, the character Busfield played in the TV series, left his “wife.”

Media theorist Susanna Annese (2004) attributes viewers’ blurred perceptions and misrecognitions of television characters as a consequence of the way in which viewers and television programming share a tightly integrated symbolic order. That is, television’s verisimilitude is constituted by the close fit between television’s social semiotic codes and those of a viewer’s lifeworld. Moreover, according to Annese, audiences use television meanings in a relational way because in interpreting TV through the filter of their life experience and subjectivity, they are able to participate “without passive identification” (2004, p. 373). Further, by integrating discussion of television’s characters, dramatic plots, and relationships into conversations and “‘what happened then' discussions” with people in their lifeworld, viewers end up with blurred or inconsistent lines “between viewing and living.” (p. 373). As a result of the ongoing, continuous, and autopoietic relationship of television and social codes and the fact that a viewer’s

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2 Coined by scientists Francisco Varela and Humberto Maturana in 1980, the term autopoiesis means “self-making.” The theory of autopoiesis was first used to explicate how the body’s nervous system activity works as a circular, self-reflexive system, determined by its organization, a process much like a feedback
interpretive procedures are uniquely informed by their mental schemes, the visual culture phenomenon of television is deeply intertwined with issues of subjectivity and identity.

American television’s cultural logic of distinction is undeniably global. Consequently, television creates, through its programming, content, form, and patterns of distribution a distinctive sense of American reality. Of interest to contemporary theorists are the postmodern qualities that shape television’s social, philosophical, and economic realities. A postmodernist theory of reality would recognize realities as being socially constructed, contingent, and not necessarily shared among people. Given the contingencies and contextuality of postmodern epistemologies and ontologies, and the multiplicities of realities, interpretations are highly prioritized, for reality is interpreted individually, locally, and contingently.

Sociocultural theories of postmodern television offer ways of considering the stylistic and formal qualities of TV, the distribution of TV programs as part of global culture; and the ways in which individuals and groups interact with television (Bignell, 2004). Two prominent postmodern philosophers, Jean-Francois Lyotard and Jean Baudrillard bring distinctive perspectives on media realities. French philosopher, Lyotard subverts temporal, historical logic by arguing that something is modern only if it is first postmodern (Bignell, 2004), or, in other words, postmodern refers to the new, yet-to-be categorized, or incomprehensible objects, events, experiences that we cannot yet understand. However, once understood and contextualized, the formerly new and incomprehensible becomes modern. Postmodern qualities, being of limited duration, loop. According to Hayles (1999), Varela and Maturana’s key insight was in finding that “a living system’s organization causes certain products to be produced” and these very products “in turn produce the organization characteristic of that living system” (p. 136).
become more valued and desired. Therefore, Lyotard’s observations are important to television in respect to the demand and desire for cultural products perpetuated through its constantly renewing display of consumer fantasies and its global reach.

In addition to the view that conventions and codes of TV media shape our experience of reality, Baudrillard posits, specifically, that postmodern family relationships are perceived in terms of melodramatic narrative structures of soap opera and romance, and that our experiences and expectations of law and order and crime are perceived in terms of codes of TV police series (Bignell, 2004). Referring to this perceptual and historical condition as the hyperreal, Baudrillard sees television as a powerful global force that has thrown into question the idea of any reality other than those perceived through the codes of television. For instance, he “argues that the codes of media representation are so powerful and widespread that it is no longer necessary for conceptions of reality to act as the grounds on which signs rest” (Bignell, 2004, p. 174). Following from this argument, Baudrillard contends that the actual 1991 Gulf War was more media event than reality, since it was “replaced by the television pictures which claimed to represent it,” effectively smothering its reality (Bignell, 2004, p. 173). Using Baudrillard’s logic, one might speculate that because images of the war played in non-stop television war coverage—often broadcast simultaneously as they happened—the effect is a flattening of affect and an emptying of the uniqueness and complexity of the event.

Cultural theorists look to the economic aspects of postmodern television with varying views on the effects of global capitalism. For some, like Lyotard, the mixing of mass and elite cultures offers creative possibility in products, experiences, even self-
fashioning. That is, the fragmented, temporary and contingent nature of postmodern identity is celebrated for its creative, empowering potential for renewal and revision. In another, earlier, perspective, media theorist Marshall McLuhan envisioned the TV viewer as instrumental in an active, artistic experience. McLuhan’s belief that viewers could create a mosaic or collage by fitting together the various images, sounds, narratives, and music of television in unique, personalized (and even unconscious) ways, led him to conclude that viewers are not sedentary couch-potatoes, but are more like artists or poets in a creative process. Moreover, coining the term “global village,” McLuhan believed that television and other communications media would unite international flows of information and link cultures into a global community (McLuhan, 1964/2003). The playful possibilities with which some view postmodernism serve to make a very powerful position for television and the construction of meanings in culture. Notably, the creative multiplicity embraced by Lyotard and the international information flows appreciated by McLuhan are also welcomed, and perpetuated, in the contemporary, global marketplace by multinational corporations, a development that has implications for subjectivity and identity. According to Bignell (2004),

the immersion of television subjects in television culture and media culture more generally means that media choices and identities marked out by patterns of television consumption become the co-ordinates which define a person’s social role. This is clearly connected with advertising since what advertising does is to associate consumable products with livable identities. (p. 165).
Crucially, these associations of identity with consumable products can be positive for some subjects, but alienating and oppressive for others who do not share in or benefit from the ideologies shaped and reified by the identifications.

In summary, the significant sociocultural issues associated with television, as characterized by cultural theorists include, first and foremost, television’s extensive cultural and global reach, particularly its influence on the ways in which people come to view self and others.

**Perspectives on Transformations of the Television Broadcast Model**

Scholar of television studies, Jonathan Bignell (2004), points out that television was at first associated with the witnessing of live events in real time, because at the time of its invention, television recording technology did not exist. The qualities of liveness and verisimilitude were compelling for audiences, who, until the popular adoption of television, had relied upon radio for entertainment and information. Television, however, was much more than simply radio with pictures, rather it was a presence that allowed a voyeuristic glimpse into the worlds of others. Television studies scholars Cummins & Gordon (2006) explain that television’s window onto the world was well-timed for Americans coming to terms with new affluence and opportunities in the post World War II era. Cummins & Gordon (2006), like historian Lynn Spigel (2001), posit that television in the postwar years was both a symbol of achievement for families and a means for families to learn about the products, social norms, and family relationship qualities that defined this new, optimistic, and affluent American life.

Given its accessibility to myriad populations regardless of age, geography, or social class, television was perhaps, in the postwar years, the most ubiquitous source of
images in Western visual culture. In fact, universality and comprehensibility of address are key traits of American television in its early history. In the mid-twentieth century, the universality of this new technology’s reach contrasted with the limitations of the cinema. Television scholar John Ellis describes early television’s mass appeal:

Unlike cinema, which concentrated overwhelmingly on fiction, television claimed the whole world and its works as its domain. Television deals indiscriminately with high culture and cookery, science and comedy, political news and the life of animals, the meaning of life and ‘look at her frock.’ It established this reach through the simple fact that it brought images and sound into the everyday space of the home. It delivered a culturally new dimension of perception (cinema was just half a century old when television took hold) into the home, a space that was developing as the defining area of freedom and identity formation. (p. 284)

Cultural theorists attribute the rapid and widespread interest acquisition of television sets in the home to postwar America’s growing affluence, optimism, and preoccupation with family values and lifestyle (Spigel, 2001; Allen, 2004; Cummins & Gordon, 2006). Studying television’s role in home and family life from an historical perspective, television scholar Lynn Spigel (2001b) theorizes that television’s reorganization of social spaces and privatization of spectator amusements in America’s postwar suburbs led to a blurring of private and public space that had profound effects in culture. Moreover, Spigel (2001b) theorizes that early television, as “a suburban home companion,” created sanitized spaces by blurring public and private worlds, allowing a population to gaze at and experience undesirable “others” or locations within the safety of the private home.
Spigel (2001b) notes that television technology “promised more than just familial bliss and ‘wholesome’ heterosexuality, it also offered “the possibility of an intellectual neighborhood purified of social unrest and human misunderstanding” (p. 36). In former NBC president Pat Weaver’s view, television could make the “entire world” into an instantly available “small town” (Spigel, 2001b, p. 36). By collapsing diverse human experiences to fit into the metaphorical small (and sanitized) town, early one-to-many broadcast models embodied a “strange mix of democracy and cultural hegemony” (Spigel, 2001b, p. 36). Although the metaphorical small town created through early broadcasts may have represented the dreams of a utopian democratic culture, sociologist Joshua Meyrowitz’s (1985) observations indicate that this metaphorical small town was actually an advertiser’s dream. Specifically, Meyrowitz finds that as public and private spaces are blurred, and as diverse groups are exposed to relatively similar material through electronic media, the content of the programming in this “shared environment” becomes increasingly homogenized in order to reach combined audiences and the merged arenas (1985, p. 176). The one-to-many model of broadcast television, then, operates through the cultivation and repetitive reinforcement of a highly selective and limited utopian America.

From the vantage point of the present, the modernist one-to-many television broadcast paradigm appears to be a near-monolithic, deterministic social force that functioned to push downward and outward, to a mass of viewers, selective information from a centralized network. As a result of offering minimal viewing choices in a structured schedule, the early one-to-many broadcast models served to create consensus and community, a social effect often theorized in television studies as “spacebinding”
(Spigel, 2001b, Ang, 1996/1999). Following from this idea, media and communication theorist Ien Ang (1996/1999) relates the one-to-many transmission model of communications and its spacebinding effects to the modern capitalist obsession with conquering space through technological progress and development. Relatedly, Ang observes that the conquering or taming of space through broadcast transmission was also pursuit of a “control of distance and people” (Ang, 1996/1999, p. 367). Significantly, this control of space, distance, and subjectivities was not overt and explicit, but was instead effected through the medium’s form and content, and the cultural, economic, and emotional appeal that made early television so popular and compelling for individuals and groups.

Importantly, Ang’s theory of communication reveals that assumptions around a one-to-many type of communication transmission “inherently privilege the position of the sender as legitimate source and originator of meaning and action, the center from which both spatial and social integration is effectuated” (1996/1999, p. 368). Operating on the text as container principle, the “Communication is deemed successful if and when the intentions of the Sender, packaged in the Message, arrive unscathed at the Receiver, sorting the intended effects” (Ang, 1996/1999, p. 368, capital letters in original text). Perhaps not surprisingly, the sender-privileged, one-to-many model of broadcast or communication is associated with cultural imperialism. For example, modern capitalism’s mass communication systems along with its dreams of a global village (McLuhan, 1964/2003) were believed to be positive, transformative forces to improve the lives of non-Western others; “global spatial integration (was) equated with global social and cultural integration” (Ang, 1996/1999, p. 368).
In contradistinction to the one-to-many model of television broadcast, the postmodernist configuration of a many-to-many broadcast model replaces modernist, centralized, sender-dominant models of communication transmission and the space-binding effects of television with fluidity, fragmentation, decentralization, contingency, and uncertainty. Consequently, television creates, through its programming, content, form, and patterns of distribution a distinctive sense of “reality.” Of interest to contemporary theorists are the postmodern qualities that shape television’s social, philosophical, and economic realities. A postmodernist theory of reality would eschew existence of an objectively verifiable and universal reality that is mirrored in the human mind, instead recognizing that realities are socially constructed, contingent, and not necessarily shared among people. In other words, in a postmodernist’s view of reality, truth claims that apply to all people, cultures, and time periods are impossible. Given the contingencies and contextuality of postmodern epistemologies and ontologies, interpretations are highly prioritized, for reality is believed to be interpreted individually, locally, and contingently.

Further, in breaking open the modernist systems of linear, temporal reliability and the purity and singularity of form, television in the postmodern world blends into the forms and functions of diverse and varied media ecosystems. Media theorist Uwe Rauschenbach (2006) characterizes television’s evolution as a process of expansion from “pure audio-visual, time-linear services into rich media, interactive, and time-shifted” phenomena (p. 727). Given the increasing proliferation of mobile viewing devices in the present, it is no surprise that the TV set itself is only one of many possible choices for receiving broadcast media. Rauschenbach predicts that the home television set, often
supplemented by portable and mobile viewing devices in the present, may even be replaced by mobile technologies, offering users “convenient access to content whenever and wherever required” (p. 727). Moreover, Rauschenbach predicts that new ways of delivering content (will) become viable as networks converge. Digital broadcast networks which economically deliver streaming content at the same time to a virtually unlimited audience will be complemented by point-to-point data networks, enhancing the broadcast with personalized content and supporting interaction. (2006, p. 727)

As Rauschenbach indicates, television’s many-to-many broadcast model encompasses media forms and content that exceed what is available through a television set or mobile device, and moreover, media experiences are increasingly personalized by users. For example, the personal computer is increasingly used in the present as a key source of televisual experiences. Growing in popularity and visibility, the slivercast, (or narrowcast), a transmission of video to niche audiences over high speed Internet connections, offers small audiences a burgeoning selection of specialized topic programming. Slivercasting is an outlet of transmission for thousands of producers whose programming would never make it into prime time but who have very dedicated small audiences (Hansell, 2006). In addition to offering an outlet for specialized programming where many-to-many translates into many producers offering content to many different niche audiences, slivercasting and its location at, or in proximity to, Internet social networking sites like MySpace offers television-like content with the added attraction of intertextual and intercontextual social interaction.

As a result of phenomena like slivercasting or IPTV (internet protocol television)
or VoD (video on demand), or VoIP (voice over internet protocol), the modernist goal of leveling difference and creating community through centralized and homogeneous broadcasts is superceded by the concept of broadcast as creative, individualized, and customizable social network. Recently, the adolescent and young adult demographic who frequent the MySpace social networking site were able to view a MySpace exclusive series, *Prom Queen*, created by former Disney CEO, Michael Eisner. While *Prom Queen* follows the a familiar episodic structure of television’s traditional dramatic series genre, it is uniquely shaped to suit the Internet’s form with 80 episodes, each only 90 seconds long. Noting that “content is king” (*Prom Queen TV—Oh.My.God.*, 2007) and that interest in subject matter drives popularity, Eisner’s observation reveals the powerful role the viewer-subject plays in shaping personal experiences and programming content within the many-to-many broadcast paradigm.

The many-to-many television broadcast model can be theorized as an epistemology that shapes the lifeworlds of students in contemporary culture. The many-to-many broadcast model, perceived in my research as a relational space, may have profound effects for the ways in which students perceive their world. Perhaps most significant is the way in which the concept of many-to-many subverts hierarchy, creating new conditions of value in respect to relationships, information, and experience. Unlike the one-to-many downward broadcast paradigm, wherein an awareness of linear temporality and perception of stable centers of authority organize relationships among people and experiences, within a many-to-many broadcast paradigm, the notion of distanced critique is problematized as subjects see and identify themselves and others through multiple channels of perception. To illustrate this point, the creative agency and
self-determining nature of the student as producer/consumer of media content is expressed by a *Criticizing Television* student whose fragmented, stream of consciousness-style narrative evokes the ironic stance theorized by postmodernist media philosophers:

I personally have felt the effects of “Post-Modernism”, or at least the “Digital Age”. I own 16.7 days of music (including local to global artists), largely received via torrents and friends, plus multiple CD’s scattered loosely around my past. I can find obscure videos on the Internet of obscure bands and events. I own multiple DVDs, which I am able to watch on my computer without a TV. I am able to ingest so many media commodities, so many extensions of individuals in time, that I myself am commodity of their represented existences. [Microsoft Word just informed me to capitalize the word “internet”, but watch (imaginatively speaking) this: god…it doesn’t need to be capitalized.] I have a Facebook account, in which “I” am a friend of over 250 people, a vast majority of whom I don’t even communicate with. If they’d like though they can see pictures of me in party mode or what “I” am listening to at that moment, etc…It’s really efficient though because then I, which can be ironically defined, can keep important contacts in multiple cities, or within my own, while having more time to spend at home, with my computer. (Anonymous, 2007)

**Broadcast Television, Subjectivity, and Relational Space**

Cultural theorists who study the meaning and effects of broadcast television in contemporary American society frequently connect the epistemological and ontological implications of television with the issue of subjectivity. Television theorist and
philosopher Anne McCarthy (2001) offers a view of television and the subject that acknowledges the nuances and subtleties of television’s influence for individuals and society. For example, McCarthy (2001) takes issue with abstracted and idealized perspectives on television and the reduction and simplifications of television’s divergent forms and phenomena to home screens and domestic spaces. She argues that

one need only take a cab ride through Times Square, populated with more forms of the televisual apparatus than one could possibly count, to grasp the inadequacy of theoretical models that attempt to address the medium's materiality via an abstracted or idealized sense of its technological manifestation on the level of the everyday...When we take the diverse proliferation of material forms and places of television into account, the medium starts to look very different. It becomes impossible to argue that the TV set always organizes relations between, say, public and private, subjects and collectivities, participation and isolation, in identical ways across locations. Rather, television's heterogeneous materiality requires that we accept that its operations upon the subject and its use as a form of communication between individuals must change from site to site, institution to institution. (2001, p. 99)

Inherent in McCarthy’s assessment of television is a troubling of the simplification and stasis associated with one-to-many television broadcast models and a refusal of essentializing definitions of postmodernist many-to-many broadcast models. Moreover, instead of characterizing broadcast television as either one-to-many or many-to-many paradigms, McCarthy focuses on television’s operations upon subjects in material, contextual practices, acknowledging the potential for these operations to change.
from context to context or from institution to institution. While McCarthy’s emphasis on
the materiality or “thingness” (2001, p. 96) of broadcast television works to subvert
essentializing definitions of television in culture, this stance, in its focus on materiality,
may diminish the possibility of exploring the ways in which materiality is negotiated
through subjects’ experiences with television in their lifeworld contexts. Thus, although
McCarthy’s attention to television’s heterogeneous and contextual materialities provides
entry into awareness of television’s phenomenological resonances, it suggests the need to
explore the unique relational and affective spaces created through subjects’ interactions
with television.

In summary, the idea of relational space, a dynamic, emergent site wherein
unconscious and conscious registers of subjectivity in relationship with television (and
other modes of media production) constitute meanings and knowledge for subjects,
troubles a modernist understanding of a broadcast’s actions or effects upon a subject.
Extending McCarthy’s observation of the myriad forms of television across the cultural
landscape is the observation that the many-to-many broadcast model of television
configures for subjects spaces of continuous movement between and among media and
other subjects, as the student’s observations above seem to illustrate. Going further with
this idea I turn to consider the active, dynamic subjectification of student audiences
within the relational spaces of television criticism writing.

“Doing” and “Being” Television: The Performative “I” in the Television Text

While keeping in mind the impetus for this study, which is to explore students’
perceptions of and relationships to the critical writing the created in the course, I now
examine a related phenomenon: the relationship between television and viewer-subjects.
This relationship, when mapped within Lacan’s theories about subjectivity, takes on a
decidedly blurred shape, raising several questions: Where does television leave off and
audience begin? While the actual physicality of the television is clearly a material reality,
how might the power of television in culture be theorized without resorting to the
abstractions that McCarthy (2001) finds so counterproductive for an understanding of
television’s material effects in culture? Moreover, I am compelled to ask: If Criticizing
Television students do indeed experience television within many-to-many broadcast
configurations, how are these many-to-many interactions be motivated and sustained
across so many spaces and subjects? Further, when television lacks a central, stable, one-
to-many broadcast structure, how do the signifying chains of representation and
communication through media develop and change to capture and hold the interests and
(money) of viewer-participants? And, finally, considering the many-to-many broadcast
paradigm, the multiplicities of media production reception, and the multiplicities
associated with postmodern subjectivities, how does one determine where visual culture
media end and identity begins? And, is it even possible or desirable to make the
determination?

Theorist Susan Annese offers a perspective on the ways in which viewers
personalize their identities through television’s symbolic resources, an observation that
reinforces the concept of the points de capiton:

Viewers negotiate the material offered by television "in ways that make sense
within [their] social and cultural situation…They appropriate television texts that
extend symbolic resources available for the project of self. This appropriation
constantly suggests models and identities to viewers' processes of positioning; it
continuously enlarges the repertoire of positions, which contribute to molding the individual self. (p. 386)

The suturing that attaches the viewer-subject within the relational space of television phenomena can be made tangible and visible through the process and artifacts of visual culture production. By translating the flux and affective resonances of media relational spaces into the symbolic order, the flux of signifieds is temporarily halted and made visible for reflection. Within the visual culture production of composing a critical analysis of television, the affective, intuitive, or passive knowledge of the subject is “translated” into the active knowledge used in the production of writing (Buckingham, 2003), becoming a means by which subjects might locate the “I” of their text within lifeworld material practices and cultural relational spaces.

A subject’s endeavor to locate the “I” of their text within the relational space formed through the intersections of television phenomena, subjectivity, and education discourse is a critically reflexive action. Reflexivity, according to Thomas Schwandt, (2001), refers to the “fact that all accounts (in speech and writing) are essentially not just about something, but are also doing something” (p. 223, italics in original). In this way, reflexivity is ontological, for a spoken or written account is not only representative of a world, but is also affected by a subject’s being in that world (Schwandt, 2001). Additionally, reflexivity can refer to the process of critical reflection, wherein one acknowledges and critically reflects upon “biases, theoretical predispositions, preferences, and so on” (Schwandt, 2001). Visual culture critique then, requires reflexivity to move beyond an operation performed on or for an object to an operation performed with an object and self.
Conclusion

The guiding concept of relational space was used to pursue issues of student/audience subjectivity and television, and, by extension, the television criticism essay. Additionally, the broadcasting paradigms of American television were disguised in relationship to the content and aims of the Criticizing Television curriculum. The concept of relational space, originating in Foucault’s and Latour’s theories, provided a theoretical space within which the forms and functions of television’s broadcast model, and the constitution of subjectivities were considered. As this brief tour of television broadcast models and their significance for the Criticizing Television research has endeavored to convey, television’s ubiquity and embeddedness in the lifeworld, and the transformations of its transmission and reception have consequences for cultural production of knowledge and subjectivity.
CHAPTER SEVEN

The Social Construction of Writing Subjects in Art Education

Introduction

This chapter explores some of the distinctive qualities of writing as a mode of critically conscious response to visual culture phenomena in art education. The discussion attends to several areas of focus in the research:

- Questions about art criticism and critical discourse in art education
- The social construction of writing subjects through a writing focused pedagogy
- Enmeshed subjectivities in the student—instructor relationship
- Writing and other modes of visual culture production

The title of this chapter, *The social construction of writing subjects*, deliberately plays on the ambiguity of meaning of the word “subjects,” to make the point that both people as subjects and disciplinary foci as subjects are socially constructed through discourse. Both meanings of the word subject are considered here, for each holds relevance for visual culture discourse in art education. Michel Foucault (1972) conceptualizes discourse as the practices that produce the very objects and subjects of which a person can speak. Lived experiences, frameworks of personal beliefs, and cultural ideologies are part of the fabric with which a discourse is woven. While the term
ideology is often used pejoratively, philosophers Peters & Burbules (2004) point out that the ideological structures of discourse are not simply, nor are they always, “instruments of repression and control, wielded by some over others” (p. 63), but instead may be relationships that, even if asymmetrical at times, are also productive. Further, they stress that discourse is not just a political concept, but an epistemic one, thus the organizing effects of discourse are present not only within the working of institutions and authorities, but are even constitutive of ways of thinking, speaking, and writing. In this chapter, I look to the discourse of student writing as it is described in some recent sociocultural theories and as it has been used in the practice of psychoanalysis and within psychoanalytically informed pedagogies. In so doing I begin to frame a view of the conflicts, resistances, and struggles inherent in writing processes that serve the aims of a critically conscious visual culture pedagogy.

A mode of sociocultural and critical action (Heap, 1989), writing is inherently political, making it an important site of investigation and visual culture theory and practice. However, among myriad visual culture modes of production at the disposal of art educators, writing is neither a superior, nor inferior pedagogical choice. It is simply one option out of many. Writing, like artmaking or the creation of visual culture objects and experiences (Freedman, 2003b), is a mode of production, and one that carries ideological baggage (Baum-Brunner, 1997; Bazerman, 2004; Bloom, 1996; Devitt, Bawarshi, & Reiff, 2003; Selfe, 1999; Wood, 1998) as well as the stamp of personal subjectivity. However, because writing is generally used across a diverse spectrum of disciplines and in everyday acts of communication, it is often sensed as natural, an
unremarkable, neutral tool for expressing meaning (Bazerman, 2004; Thaiss & Zawacki, 2006).

Art Criticism and Visual Culture Criticism Writing

On the matter written criticism in art education, it is important to first establish in this discussion that the activity of “criticism writing” is, in art education, often understood and articulated through the definitions and models of traditional “art criticism.” A qualification and explanation of art education’s assumptions around the activity of art criticism is intended to bring attention to the subtle, but important differences that distinguish the “criticism writing” created in Criticizing Television and examined in my study and the traditional art criticism activities that dominate in the art education literature.

Art criticism writing and criticism writing such as the television criticism produced in the course, have in common an interest in appreciation and explication. However, art criticism generally encompasses a combination of activities including description, interpretation, judgment or evaluation, and theorizing. This approach tends to place greater emphasis on the object of criticism, a position underscored by art educator Terry Barrett (2003a) in the statement “good interpretations tell more about the artwork than they tell about the interpreter” (p. 198). While description, interpretation, evaluation, and theory figure into the construction of academic television criticism in general and in the course, criticism writing produced in Criticizing Television foregrounded critical reflection on subjectivity and the viewer/viewed relationship. Specifically, in writing assignments and in class discussions, the positionality of viewer in relation to the act of viewing television, or in relation to a program, was questioned and problematized within
the criticism itself, creating a reflexive model of criticism that endeavors to reveal a contingent relationship to the object of criticism.

Why complicate the criticism endeavor by introducing a problematics of subject positioning? The answer is simple to identify, yet complex in its implications: to facilitate the process of locating one’s personal investment in the work of criticism. For making space to explore the possibilities that criticism and critical consciousness are not merely activities to pick up and put away at one’s convenience, but are necessary correlates for pulling apart the strands of numbing familiarity that television culture immerses us all within. In short, because identifying circumstances of inequality isn’t a process undertaken in relation to a world “out there” it is part of how we position ourselves within our individual and communal subjectivities. Jane McGonigal’s (2003) observations of immersive aesthetics in the genre of virtual gaming where individuals using computer social network technologies engage in collaborative play techniques that can influence, and even instruct, problem-solving in real world, non-gaming situations. McGonigal’s interest lies in the issue of motivation. What is it about a particular activity that engages emotion and leads to action on both individual and collective levels? How can the process of criticism become a tool that wedges open a space for meta-awareness of the complexity of being a subject constructed of multiple, conflicting desires, some of which resist and subvert the knowledge that critical writing seeks to engage?

**Writing and Visual Culture Production: Similarities and Differences**

Written criticism responses to visual culture share with other forms of visual culture studio production an interest in the development of critical consciousness in students. Moreover, written criticism activities often share with visual culture production
the interest in discovering and expressing personal meaning. Also evident is a shared interest in the quality and precision of students’ expressions about the cultural production whether it be written responses to art (Barrett, 2000b, 2006) or visual culture studio production (Barney, 2006; Freedman, 2003a, 2003b; Taylor, 2000, 2007).

On the other hand, noteworthy differences exist between criticism writing, as it is conceptualized and experienced in the Criticizing Television course, and other forms of visual culture production created by students in art education. In brief, these differences are found in the form and procedures associated with a writing activity, and in the ubiquity and transparency of writing in education contexts. First, the critical essay, which is a focus of the dissertation research, constructs a relationship with an instructor that is often more individualized and personal than the relationships effected by group critiques of art or other visual culture production. By virtue of the individualized nature of the criticism essay writing assignment and the routines of essay assessment and feedback, a distinctive process of student— instructor interaction is effected, a phenomenon that may hold implications for goals of emancipative and democratic visual culture pedagogies. Secondly, the ubiquity, accessibility, and common usage of writing within myriad academic disciplines and personal lifeworlds differentiates writing from experiences such as artmaking studio techniques or performance that are often discontinued and/or unavailable to students at the conclusion of an art education course. The ubiquity, accessibility, and interdisciplinary presence of writing that makes it transparent and mundane, ironically gives writing its unique potential to become powerfully opaque and personally transformative when it is used as a site of critical reflexivity.
The Ubiquity of Writing

Because of its ubiquitous presence in the lifeworld and its use within a range of disciplines, writing is perhaps one of the most familiar modes of non-spoken expression in terms of common use and visibility across a diverse population. While text messaging, blogging, video production, music sampling and mixing, artmaking, and digital image technologies are integrated into many contemporary lifeworlds, not everyone can afford to participate in, or has access to, these modes of expression. Importantly, the ubiquity and transparency of writing, as well as its common usage in other disciplines means that unlike modes of cultural production such as painting or digital image design, writing is unique in that it is not generally considered to be a form of artmaking.

While art educators have developed visual culture pedagogies around tenets of cultural studies, considerations of the relationship between subjectivity and writing processes most often are taken up in sociocultural theories of writing within the discipline of composition studies. Sociocultural theories of composition approach writing as an activity that is situated and contextual, improvised locally, and mediated by tools, environments, and discourses (Prior, 2006). Relevant to my research of writing and subjectivity in the composition intensive Criticizing Television course, sociocultural theories offer an established discourse on the relational aspects of people and texts. Notably significant to me is the idea of writing as a process of social action and coauthorship between student and teacher, as explained by researcher of composition Paul Prior (2006), who theorizes that teachers in schools are always coauthors (often dominant ones) in students’ writing as students take up many roles in the authorship function (deciding to
write, setting deadlines, specifying style and topic, structuring the writing process, offering specific words and phrases). (p. 58)

To author an essay in an educational content then, is to assume a particular subject position that enables some behaviors while constraining others. Further, the qualities of the student-teacher relationship, writing assignment parameters, writing topic, and disciplinary or genre characteristics, are additional, but by no means the only factors that contribute to subject positions within the activity of writing in an educational setting. For example, subject positions are also effected by an educational discourse that, while covering over the implicit coauthorship occurring through the structure and assumptions of assignments, celebrates individualism through an institutionalized, competitive grading system (Samuels, 2006).

Also of import to the subject positions that cohere within the writing assignment are the unconscious biases and associations that an educator brings to the scene of pedagogy. Composition theorist Lad Tobin (1991) contends that the problem with admitting one’s collusion with the creation of a student’s text means facing the possibility that our role as coauthor may violate “most of our fundamental beliefs about the objectivity of the teacher, the integrity of the text, the rights of the individual author” (p. 336). Problematic, Tobin finds, is the disconnect between sociocultural theories of writing and the nature of the teacher’s influence on students’ expression. Tobin believes that we continue to oversimplify the teacher's reading or interpretative processes. Or to put it another way, while we have come to see writing as socially constructed, we have failed to understand the teacher's role in the construction of that meaning.
We need to develop a theory of reading student texts which takes into account our reading of the students themselves, of our own unconscious motivations and associations, and, finally, of the interactive and dialectical nature of the teacher-student relationship. (1991, p. 335)

**Writing and/as Critical Pedagogy**

Critical pedagogue Henry Giroux values writing as a means of developing students’ critical awareness. Addressing the topic of writing in the discipline of social studies nearly thirty years ago, Giroux saw the potential for writing’s role in critical thinking processes in a variety of disciplinary contexts. Questioning the assumptions that writing must be taught only in English departments, Giroux (1978) takes issue with the “technocratic approach” to writing which employs a formalistic system of rules, a strict emphasis on technique, and the theoretical assumption that writing is “the learning of skills that range from simple grammatical encodings to complicated syntactical constructions” (p. 292). No better than the technocratic approach to writing are the mimetic approach which emphasizes rigid adherence to writing models such as works by “reputable authors” and the romantic approach which emphasizes the individual subject in a cathartic, therapeutic, or “feel-good” experience of writing. Giroux’s indictment of technocratic, mimetic, and romantic approaches to writing is based on his view of writing as a unique mode of learning that originates in a “complex relationship among the reader, the subject, and the writer” (1978, p. 293). This complex relationship, according to Giroux (1978), is best served by a pedagogy of writing that facilitates students’ connections between their “inner speech and elaborated written speech”—connections that “involve a link between the subjective perceptions that students internalize and their
objectification of those experiences for a given audience” (p. 292). Giroux’s awareness of
the sensitive relationships among writers, text, and their audiences is directed toward
development of writing pedagogy that not only acknowledges the social nature of the
activity, but seeks to use the writing activity toward the end of critical consciousness.

Giroux’s conceptualization of the role of writing in a critical pedagogy brings
focus to the relationships among writer, text, audience, pedagogy, and classroom
contexts. He acknowledges the necessity of students’ agency in examining the “content
and structure of classroom relations” that “provide the boundaries for their own learning”
(1978, p. 300). Giroux’s approach to the construction of knowledge through writing is
both a critical and political reading of reality. In other words, criticality, like writing
itself, is a performance of presence and agency, of visibility even, that carries with it
political consequences. On the effects of a critical, political sensibility, art education
scholar James Haywood Rolling, Jr. asserts (2007):

To be critical is to be political. Criticality is an interrogation of power that affords
the insertion of subjective desire, namely, the desire to name thyself. To be
critical is to insert a new dialectic into an ongoing discourse, making apparent that
which had previously been marginalized, unheard, untouched, unseen. (p. 3)

By locating and emphasizing subjectivity within the critical act and the writing process,
Giroux and Rolling, Jr. bring attention to the close affinities between the personal
resonance and political potential of a critical expression. Both find value in critical
reflexivity that, in facilitating a subject’s interrogation of their own positions within texts
and discourses, opens possibilities of understanding of how selves and discourses are
socially constructed and contingent.
Critical reflexivity is not a monolithic concept, but is a particularized attentiveness to the conditions and phenomena of cultural production, as well as an attentiveness to one’s own (or one’s discipline’s) ability to see, conceptualize, and problematize cultural productions in particular moments. More than ten years ago, sociology scholars Harms & Dickens (1996) observed that postmodern media studies often failed to “situate theoretically their descriptions of contemporary media phenomena and practices in terms of the historical and sociopolitical-economic contexts in which they are inscribed” causing these media studies themselves to be the “symptom of the very postmodern culture they seek to analyze” (p. 210).

Writing, as vehicle for critical reflexivity, is a uniquely effective mode of expression in the production of responses to visual culture for three reasons. First, like image creation processes and images themselves, writing processes and textual artifacts are sites of authority and agency within visual culture. Going further, researchers of student writing posit that “(w)riters ‘perform’ social identities through writing” (CSTW Second Level Writing Handbook, n.d., p. 4). These performances may be as overt and visible as the visual rhetorical features of a text’s typeface and page layout (Bernhardt, 1986/2004; George, 2002; Hill, 2003/2004; Stroupe, 2000/2004; Wysocki, 2004b), or as covert and silent as a writing assignment structure designed to elicit particular forms and themes of student writing (LeCourt, 2006).

Second, writing’s familiarity to students and its common usage within other disciplinary realms, position it as an ideally accessible site of reflexive critique. For example, many students may never create a drawing, painting, sculpture, or installation artwork outside their experience in an art education course, however, they will certainly
express themselves in writing, as well as read texts many times in their day to day life. As a result of thinking through critical writing processes about visual culture phenomena, especially when the critical reflection is tied to their significant life world experiences, students might learn to cultivate habits of mind and awareness of their positionality within and against various discourses and subjectivities.

Composition scholar Robert Samuels (2004) has observed that students can and do become aware of positionality through composition assignments that actively engage reflection upon the ways in which writing shapes their own, as well as their instructor’s (or the university’s), unspoken agreements about the functions and goals of various writing forms. Samuels endeavors to convince his students that the more they “become conscious of their own learning and writing processes, the better they will be able to master the skills and knowledge presented in their various courses” (2004, p. 7). Samuels believes that in learning the “conventions and ideologies of the different disciplines and the importance of voice, audience, context, and language in every academic and cultural situation” students “will be better able to make conscious decisions regarding how they relate to academic discourses” (2004, p. 7).

Students’ awareness of the manner with which writing processes and forms create, rather than simply communicate, meaning for and among people and cultures can be facilitated through performative pedagogies. A performative, political, and critically reflexive pedagogy brings into dialogue disciplinary content, epistemology, and student lifeworld, a confluence that creates tools and processes for thinking more critically about the self and others in relationship to the topic under study. While conventional criticism often operates through the transparency of language, performative criticism is reflexive
about the (subject’s or culture’s) desires to master a text’s message. Art educator Robert Sweeney (2007), observing the impact of artist appropriation of controversial mass media images, notes that critique today presents new challenges for art educators. For instance, when mass media images are themselves appropriated as critique by artists, “what seems less relevant is a critique from a position of exteriority, removing one’s self from a situation in order to reflect upon it” (p. 49). Building on Sweeney’s observation then, writing criticism within a performative, reflexive approach, changes the disposition of the critical act because the writer’s subjectivity is understood to be grounded within the process and product of critical expressions. In other words, performative criticism contextualizes the role of the critic within the space of the artwork or within the visual culture experience, instead of operating at an institutionally sanctioned critical distance (Rogoff, 2005).

In summary, sociocultural theories of writing see writing as embedded in a variety of social relations (Heap, 1989). However, while an important beginning for a socially aware pedagogy that acknowledges the role of subjectivity, socioculturally grounded approaches to writing overlook the role played by the unconscious aspect of subjectivity. In psychoanalytic theory as in sociocultural theory, the personal is political, however in psychoanalysis the political is considered to be interlaced with the unconscious drives. Peter Elliot (2002) argues for the “political significance” of psychoanalytic theory by quoting Herbert Marcuse’s statement that “psychoanalytic categories do not have to be ‘related’ to social and political conditions—they are themselves social and political categories” (p. 176). Put in this way, the personal is not only political, it is also the locus for understanding what makes the political, political in
the first place. Put yet another way, the locus of oppressive practices may not rest solely within popular culture, but instead circulate beneath what we understand as culture—that is, within the unconscious drives and their intersubjective dynamics. To explore the possibility of a sociocultural theory of writing that considers the student’s unconscious subjectivity, its role in critical pedagogies, and its implications for the development of critical consciousness, the issue of enmeshed subjectivities and the student instructor writing pedagogy relationship are discussed in the next section.

**Enmeshed Subjectivities in the Context of the Criticism Essay**

The instructor’s role in shaping the course pedagogy and the instructor’s influence for students’ writing processes is a significant site for investigating the construction of subjectivities through writing activities. The critical essay, which is a focus of the dissertation research, constructs a relationship with an instructor that is often more individualized and personal than the relationships effected by group critiques of art or other classroom visual culture production. Additionally, the individualized relationship effected by the form, objectives, and assessment procedures of the critical essay cultivates the conditions for transference between student and instructor—a phenomenon that has powerful implications for goals of emancipative and democratic visual culture pedagogies.

An instructor’s conceptualization and presentation of the assignment, the teaching which surrounds and contributes to the assignment, students’ responses to the assignment, and the assessment of the writing assignment are all significant factors to be considered in an examination of the ways in which students write criticism about television. Specifically, and of issue here, is the nature of the pedagogical relationship
effected between instructor and student through the production and reception of the television criticism essay.

A critical essay assignment in the *Criticizing Television* course effects a distinctive discursive space within which assumptions and expectations for how to write, what to write, and to whom the writing is addressed are of consequence for how students express their ideas about the television within their lifeworlds. The issue of subjectivity and writing is of vital importance to a critically conscious pedagogy, for writing activities are a highly charged space of interaction between a subject’s unconscious registers (Bracher, 1999). Moreover, the production of written critical expressions, when submitted to an instructor for assessment and feedback, creates a dialogical, relational space that is notably different from the production and assessment activities that occur in other visual culture classroom activities. This difference is most apparent in the way in which transference is manifested in the student instructor dialogical writing relationship.

As theorized in psychoanalysis, transference refers to a subject’s unconscious belief that an authority figure, or “subject supposed to know” holds the key to interpreting the subject’s own baffling behavior. Composition theorist Robert Brooke explains that transference is present when the writing instructor is imputed with the ability to *understand* writing, to *know* what writing should look like, how it’s supposed to work, what the student’s errors “mean” and how to fix them” (1987, p. 682 *italics in original*).

While a writing assignment like a critical essay is usually produced by a student subject and received by a teacher subject, this one-to-one pedagogical relationship is anything but solipsistic. The personal, critical essay connects an individual’s subjectivity
and modes of textual production with the social world, since considerations of subjectivity are inherently considerations of culture. In fact, sociologist Derek Sayer (2004) asserts wryly that “nowhere do we turn out to be more endurably social…than in the most private and murky closets of our minds” (p. 6). Building upon Sayer’s observation, philosopher and theorist Kelly Oliver (2000) locates the roots of social oppression in an individual’s or a culture’s presuppositions of subjectivity. Oliver contends that

any social or political theory presupposes a particular notion of the subject. In fact, our actions, policies, stereotypes, fantasies and desires also presuppose notions of what it is to be a subject and to “have” subjectivity…(h)ow we conceive of ourselves as subjects and how we conceive of our subjectivity, are at the foundation of what we believe about ourselves, the world, and other people; and we act accordingly. This is why in order to begin to understand domination and oppression it is imperative to investigate who we think we are and how we imagine others. (2000, p. 182)

Visual culture pedagogies often incorporate subjectivity and reflexivity in critical analysis and artistic production (Desai & Chalmers, 2007; Freedman, 2003a, 2003b; Kiefer-Boyd, Amburgy, & Knight, 2007). For example, art educator Rebecca Plummer-Rohloff (2006) refers to her students’ critical engagement with popular visual texts as a “form of auto-ethnography (wherein) students were encouraged to reflexively realize their own story, their own subjectivity and identity in this process” (p. 68). Similarly, art educator Leanne Levy (2006), teaching a teacher education course, builds a unit around popular culture’s influence on identity. Levy’s curriculum aims to connect her students’
identities of the present with the emotional resonance and experiences of their pasts, yet significantly, Levy includes considerations of her own subjectivity and its relationship to her teaching and her students’ learning:

The unit involved going back in time to remember the emotions we associate with growing pains, the outlets we so desperately depended on, and the roles those outlets continue to play in our lives. It was based on my belief that connecting with our own past to establish empathy with our students is a necessary step to the meaning of visual culture. (2006, p. 153).

Levy’s concerns about instructor subjectivity are echoed by other art educators. Tavin (2003) suggests teachers acknowledge students’ everyday experiences with popular culture, while becoming learners themselves in the process. He also calls for teachers to expose their personal biases and subjective reactions to popular culture, claiming that “by refuting the objectivity of their own discourse, art educators can display their affective investments in popular culture and expose themselves to extensive critique and dialogue throughout their pedagogical project” (p. 200-201). In the visual culture pedagogical scene, an instructor’s exposure of their affective investments in popular culture may evoke transference and even counter-transference (an instructor believes that they are indeed capable of solving the puzzle of a student’s subjective, affective investments and desires). However, the intensity of the transference occurring within student production and assessment in the classroom community setting, during class critiques, for example, may be markedly different than the transference effected through essay writing and its assessment.
Visual Culture Production, Criticism Writing, and Genre

Written criticism responses to visual culture share with other forms of visual culture student production in art education an interest in finding personal meaning within a visual culture phenomenon as well as a commitment to the development of critical consciousness in students. Yet in many cases of art education classroom practice, greater detail and specificity is needed regarding the ways in which a particular form of response to visual culture effects perceptions of personal meaning, how a particular mode of visual culture artistic production facilitates construction of knowledge about self and others, and how this knowledge informs critical consciousness.

Disciplines, as domains of specialized knowledge, content, and activities are characterized by particular ways of knowing and doing that are anchored in and connected by epistemological belief systems. Social political and cultural concerns guide epistemologies and foci in art education’s issue-based approach (Gaudelius & Speirs, 2002). To this end, in the present, many art educators (Freedman, 2000, 2003a, 2003b; Freedman & Stuhr, 2004; Gaudelius and Speirs, 2002; Tavin & Hausman, 2004) locate visual art within the larger context of visual culture studies, however, it would be inaccurate to describe art education’s present visual culture epistemologies and curricula as unified or formulaic. Art education’s disciplinary knowledge, content, and activities are in flux. Freedman & Stuhr (2004) observe that “it is becoming more difficult to distinguish the fine arts from other aspects of visual culture because the qualitative differences among these forms have become less discrete” (p. 819). Moreover, “truth has shifted from an epistemological to an ontological issue: That is, it becomes less about what we know than who we are” (Freedman & Stuhr, 2004, p. 819).
Art education’s epistemological and ontological shifts have important implications for the discipline’s aims and activities. Referring to art education as a “sociopolitical act” (2000), Kerry Freedman outlines some significant changes associated with visual culture pedagogies in art education:

a) a broadening of the domain of art education, b) a shift in the emphasis of teaching from formalistic concerns to the construction of meaning, c) the importance of social contexts to that construction, and d) a new definition of and emphasis on critique. (2000, p. 315)

Freedman’s last point, art education’s new definition of and emphasis on critique, enlarges the focus of the field “from narrow, conventional approaches to open processes of creative and critical inquiry” (Freedman & Stuhr, 2004, p. 826), especially when placed against considerations of subjectivity in art education. Critique in art education is a distinctive disciplinary method and methodology; critique is a way of knowing and doing in art education that carries epistemological and ontological assumptions while shaping and being shaped by material practices. Critique in art education takes many forms, ranging from discussion and interpretation of art objects and experiences (Barrett, 2000, 2000b, 2003a), to assessment (Freedman, 2003a; Soep, 2005), to critical analysis of visual culture phenomena (Darts, 2004; Duncum, 2006; Sweeney, 2006, 2007). The process of critique in visual culture studies in art education is truly open and creative as well as critical, not only because “visual culture means quite different things to different art educators” (Duncum, 2006, p. ix), but because visual culture pedagogy tends to follow from diverse ideas, issues, and social theory perspectives, and often takes as its object of study the contemporary lifeworld experiences of students.
The contemporary critique of visual culture has grown from longstanding traditions of critical, social reflection in art education (Chalmers, 2005; Freedman, 1995, 2000; McFee, 1969; Tavin, 2005b) and critical, social theory strands from The Frankfurt School, Freire’s “pedagogy of the oppressed,” and later, postmodernism and poststructuralism (Freedman, 2000). Kerry Freedman avers: “Critical social theory is a form of critique and critique is a constructive force in arts communities precisely because it opens discussion that might otherwise be closed” (2000, p. 321). Critique then, as a distinctive mode of knowing and doing in art education is a mode of social reflection, dialogue, and discovery. Student visual culture artistic production through critical making and reflection is a form of contemporary critique that is shaped by and contributes significantly to, visual culture.

Student artmaking as visual culture artistic production unites artmaking and critical reflection as a process and product which “enables students to experience creative and critical connections between form, feeling, and knowing” (Freedman, 2003). Student artistic production work is often invested with affective, political, and social meanings for the maker and the audience, however Freedman (2000) is careful to clarify the purpose of visual culture artmaking: “The primary purpose of such student art is not therapeutic—it is social. It is not just about individual emotions, it is about the personalization of social issues” (p. 324). Freedman’s explanation of the purpose of artmaking as cultural production emphasizes the subtle and complex balance between critically reflective artworks made in response to visual culture.

In general, the aims of most student cultural production in response to visual culture include understanding, recognition, awareness, enlightenment, empowerment, and
re-envisioning culture through critique and deconstruction of privilege and power ideologies inherent in visual imagery. Keifer-Boyd, Amburgy & Knight (2007) offer that the study of visual culture is based on “understanding cultural practice as ideology, social power, and constructed forms of knowledge” (p. 19). The construction of knowledge through revealing and critique are key aspects of visual culture pedagogies, and become most meaningful and resonant when the objects of inquiry are the visual culture experiences of students’ lifeworlds (Duncum, 2006; Taylor, 2007). While “responsible and critical citizenship” (Tavin & Hausman, 2004, p. 49) is an inherent aspiration of many visual culture pedagogies, increased knowledge and understanding of culture(s) is in itself an important goal that can effect cultural change. Barrett (2003) notes that

(knowledge of the culture in which we live and how it functions is its own reward. It is also immensely important that we interpret the images and designed objects with which we live. Images and objects present opinions as if they were truth, reinforce attitudes, and confirm or deny beliefs and values. If the messages carried by visual culture are not interpreted, we will be unwittingly buying, wearing, promoting, and otherwise consuming opinions with which we may or may not agree.” (p. 12)

Similarly, Duncum believes that unreflective consumption of global visual culture is in itself a form of critique and an expression of agency. He (2001) asserts that

(i)n their everyday encounters with imported cultural goods people everywhere are engaged in critique, albeit at an unconscious or inarticulate level. The process of indigenization or cultural translations is evidence not only of human agency but the extraordinarily diverse ways agency can work. What teachers need to do is to
make these processes conscious and thus available to understanding and critique.”

(p. 12)

Duncum (2006) cautions, however, that in “raising issues as complex as global consumerism, as pernicious as mainstream media representations of politics, or as intractable as racism and sexism” (p. xvi) students may feel overwhelmed, cynical, or helpless. To counter helplessness and work toward empowerment, many art educators develop lessons that bring students work into public discourse beyond the classroom (Black & Smith, 2006; Darts, 2006), or engage political discourse within the realm of the classroom (Tavin & Toczydloska, 2006).

Art educators frequently do acknowledge and work with the concepts of identity and subjectivity in visual culture pedagogies. For example, Freedman and Stuhr (2004) comment on the pervasiveness of popular culture and posit that “addressing aspects of visual communication, identity formation, and cultural mediation has become a vital issue in art education” (p. 826). Acknowledging the intersubjective construction of identity in visual culture, Kevin Tavin (2003) offers that visual culture “attempts to interpret how visual experience and the visualized subject are constructed within social systems practices and subjects” (p. 209). Thusly, Tavin (2003) locates oppressive practices within popular culture, advocating critical pedagogy and visual culture studies that might ultimately lead to emancipation from hegemonic systems. Art educator Pamela Taylor (2000) notes that visual culture pedagogy, like Giroux’s concept of critical pedagogy begins with the assumption that its major aim is not to fit students into the existing society; instead, its primary purpose must be to stimulate their passions, imaginations, and intellects so that
they will be moved to challenge the social, political, and economic forces that weigh so heavily upon their lives” (p. 387)

Literature on art education’s critical pedagogy responses to visual culture clearly reveal a strong commitment to development of critical consciousness in students. However, less clear are the ways in which students perceive their engage critical consciousness. For example, in order to stimulate students’ passions, imaginations, and intellect, commitment and affect on the part of students must be engaged. With this in mind, I am compelled to ask what student resistance to this engagement might look like. Namely, does a critical essay assignment effect different responses from students than, say, more publicly visible modes of production such as artwork made in response to visual culture?

Conclusion

The genre conventions of art education provide a great deal of implicit as well as explicit organizational structure for both the activities of a discipline and the subjectivities of those who work within the discipline. A discipline’s distinctive ways of constructing and expressing knowledge are not only valuable for the structure and cohesion of a discipline (Carter, 2007), but these ways hold valuable clues to a discipline’s learning outcomes.

Developments in the lifeworld that eventually affect epistemologies can also influence, and even trouble, the organizational structures and overarching epistemologies of disciplines and writing genres. In the matter of television criticism in the Criticizing Television course, genre appears to be an issue of significance. For example, can the discipline of art education refer to written art criticism as a writing genre? Moreover,
what are the benefits or problems in labeling the activity? Going further, if art criticism is indeed considered to be a writing genre, is the type of subjectivity-focused and reflexive criticism being written about visual culture phenomena such as television a genre of its own?

According to composition scholar Michael Carter (2007), the writing that occurs within a discipline is always infused with, shaped by, and perhaps, to some extent, even constitutive of the content of a discipline. However, in spite of the close affinity between writing and disciplinary knowledge and content, Carter (2007) and others (Bazerman, 2004; Bazerman, et.al., 2005b) observe that disciplines are often unaware of the correspondence between knowing, doing, and writing which leads to the transparency of writing within disciplines. Carter explains:

(B)ecause professors typically learn to write in their disciplines not by any direct instruction, but by a process of slow acculturation through various apprenticeship discourses, they are unable to see that writing itself is specific to the discipline. Consequently, faculty in the disciplines continue to think of writing as generalizable to all disciplines and therefore distinct from disciplinary knowledge.

(Carter, 2007, p. 385)

Carter’s observations throw into high relief the issue of writing genres, or types and the work they perform within a discipline. While the topic of genre in respect to art can be found in art education discourse, discussion of writing genre is usually absent, except, perhaps, in higher education research method courses wherein arts based research practices have directed new scrutiny to the genre of social science research writing, and its arts-based alternatives. Arts based research methodologies call attention to a
phenomenon that Carter has also noted, namely that writing genres can be so closely enmeshed with a discipline’s ways of knowing and doing that it is easy to forget their function as epistemologies. For example, typical of scientific disciplines, the lab report, connects knowing and writing through the material practices of creating (doing) a lab report. The science discipline’s tacit and explicit expectations for a lab report’s function and structure point to very specific disciplinary ways of doing: being able to engage in the process of scientific inquiry, and being able to solve problems in the discipline’s subject area (Carter, 2007, p. 390).

In the discipline of art education, many art educators are well versed in the knowledge systems of art foundations, however, these knowledge and activity systems are presently in flux, necessitating that art educators become critically reflexive about their values and beliefs regarding foundational art knowledge and its manifestations in their visual culture classroom practice (Tavin, Kushins, & Elniski, 2007). The discourse of foundations, a genre of art education practice, has created particular ideas and expectations for art practices, and now visual culture pedagogy. Drawing comparisons between criticism writing in the Criticizing Television class, visual culture artistic production, and art criticism practices, I find that knowledge and activity systems in each of these genres are in flux, indicating a need for new critical awareness, clarification, and communication of each activity’s or genre’s aims and assumptions.

In summary, an investigation of criticism writing in art education is a significant step toward expanding the issue of visual culture phenomena to include textual practices. While composition and English scholars have significant experience in theorizing the production and rhetoric of texts, art educators dealing with the production and reception
of visual culture phenomena pedagogies are in an ideal position to theorize the production and consumption of texts. This attention to critical analysis of production and consumption of texts must be extended to the practices by which we produce texts within our teaching and learning experiences. In a call for critical literacies that might expose and end oppression, rhetoric and writing scholar, Jane Hindman (2003) suggests the adoption of a "discursive ethics" and “relentless self-reflection” (p. 15) to help scholars to recognize and become accountable for the ways in which their invisible commitments to particular disciplinary practices shape their positions in relationship to texts, authors and readers.
CHAPTER EIGHT

Theorizing Writing Process, Subjectivity, and Television Within the Context of the Course’s Development

Introduction

As a topic of visual culture pedagogy in art education, television is a complex yet under researched phenomenon. Interest in television as an area of research has been somewhat uneven over the years. From the time of television’s rise to popularity in the United states, through the mid-nineties, it was possible to think about television as a distinctive form of media meriting a focus of study and criticism. However, since the rise of Internet and personal computing, television has faced competition for attention. Presently, it is difficult to think about television without also thinking about its relation to the myriad other forms of image and video production and consumption technologies. Television has moved from the center to the periphery of pedagogical consciousness. Similarly, in art education, writing has remained in the peripheral zone of pedagogical foci. It is this peripheral positioning that I’ve found to be so fruitful. By lingering at the periphery, television and writing are both present, yet not focally dominant. Like the other unremarkable, familiar, even mundane phenomena that structure the events of a typical day, television and writing can seem to be invisible in plain sight. Bringing
attention to the topics of television and writing necessitates making the familiar
unfamiliar through the use of particular perspectives employed in a research inquiry. In
this case study, a psychoanalytic theory perspective guides a focus on subjectivity,
particularly its context within the development of the course. Toward this end, the
chapter pursues the following inquiries:

What is the relationship of television and subjectivity? How does the phenomenon of
television relate to the critical writing in this course? What is the role of subjectivity in
relation to the course’s development and the course’s writing assignments? With the
understanding that any picture of a phenomenon is always partial, interested, and
contextual, I develop this discussion with consideration of my experiences in teaching
this course, while placing these experiences in dialogue with Lacanian psychoanalytic
theories of subjectivity. The chapter begins with an exploration of the relationship of
television and subjectivity, creating a foundation for a discussion of the construction of
the course and its writing assignments.

**Relationship of Television and Subjectivity**

Television’s inherent relationship to subjectivity stems from its unique capacity to
bring a convincing visual presence and affective resonance to the construction of cultural
and individual identities. Television’s modes of communication, program content, and
viewing contexts are common cultural experiences that help to shape subjectivities.
Specifically, television hails or interpellates (Althusser, 1971) subjectivities through
signs, codes, and cultural myths that a subject recognizes as valid or strongly identifies
with (positively or negatively). The relationship of television and subjectivity inevitably
shapes lived experience, unarguably becomes manifested in practices and artifacts. Subjectivity refers to the characteristics of the human person who acts and is acted upon in the world, and who generates and perceives experiences within particular socio-historical contexts. Theories of postmodernism posit that subjectivity is fluid and changing; emergent in relationship to other people and inseparable from the conscious and unconscious needs, desires, and interests that shape, and are shaped by, common experiences. A Lacanian perspective on subjectivity emphasizes the dialogic, relational, and social foundation of human consciousness and experience. Moreover, in this perspective, subjectivity is also constituted through unconscious desires for and identifications with experiences or objects sensed to fill the subject’s lack. Therefore, because of a subject’s lack of ontological stability and unity within, subjectivity and identity are always external to the subject (Lacan, 1973).

Subjectivity and identity have some subtle distinctions which help to explain the power of television for audiences. Notably, subjectivity, anchored in and caused by desire is the baseline consideration of human consciousness through which identities take shape. Theorist Kaja Silverman explains the way in which a subject’s identity is an object among all other objects in the world, yet is mistaken as the true essence of a subject:

(T)he ‘subject’ and the ‘self’ are two very different things. The self or the ego is what Jean Laplanche brilliantly calls ‘an object masquerading as a subject.’ It is an object because it is one of the things we can love, one of the things in which we can invest our libido. This object is able to masquerade as a subject because it is what provides us with our sense of identity, and for most of us identity equals subjectivity. But identity is foundationally fictive; it is predicated on our
(mis)recognition of ourselves first within our mirror reflection, and then within countless other human and representational ‘imagoes.’ This fiction is impossible to sustain in any continuous way, but the subject classically clings to it anyway. Through a murderous series of incorporations and projections she attempts to close the distance between it and herself. But we are subjects not at the level of our identity, but rather at that of our desire. Desire is based upon lack – not the lack of any identifiable thing, but rather the lack of what Lacan variously calls ‘being,’ ‘presence,’ the ‘here and now.’ (p. 36)

Silverman’s description of the “murderous series of incorporations and projections” a subject uses to close the distance between unconscious lack and the notion of self, or identity, explains why subjectivity and identity are inherently social and dialogical. In a process of self-definition and identification occurring thorough dynamic connections with a multiplicity of people, images, voices, words, emotions, etc., a subject become a self, or selves, in relationship to others.

Annese (2004) and Birmingham (2000) find that the television talk show genre is an ideal site for audience identifications. Annese contends that parasocial identifications occur when “ordinary people represented on the screen serve as a kind of simulacrum for the audience on the other side of the screen and offer images of subjectivity for their viewers” (p. 374). Going further, Birmingham (2000) argues that television talk shows articulate viewers as consumers by engaging viewers’ insecurities with display of scapegoat “Others” and then relieving viewer insecurities by offering solutions through the presentation of talk show experts who dispense advice, a function that solidifies the weakness or flaws of the talk show guest while serving as an example of the sort of
identity a viewer should not desire. Additionally, commercial breaks punctuate the talk show, indeed nearly all broadcast programming, with products and promises aimed at consumers’ desires for secure identities and fulfillment of lack through products that clean, beautify, slim, and enhance toward the ideal norms of the culture.

**Situating Television and Subjectivity in the *Criticizing Television* Course**

Working with the idea that television creates subject positions that hail viewers, yet moving beyond the idea of television and subjective identification though parasocial interaction discussed earlier, I now turn to subjectivity in the classroom, focusing on affect. This consideration of affect and television is a result of noticing students’ responses in the classroom and, in some cases, subject matter and form of their writing. As a cultural text and activity that tends to draw polarized assessments of enjoyment or disparagement, television is a symbol of culture that hides a great deal of affect which cannot be reduced to the binary love/hate response. Television’s significations of excess are manifested in its televisual style, its product display, its promotion of rampant consumption, as well as its accelerating channel and program choices. However, the mind-numbing significations of excess seem to function as a distraction and a cover up for a different sort of excess: the excess of enjoyment. The affective resonance and excessive enjoyment of television is not immediately apparent. Indeed, it took me several quarters of teaching to note its presence. It appeared in disruptive slips, ruptures and odd moments that seemed to unhinge and surprise me and the students. I discuss one example here—a typical first day of class dialogue.

My awareness of television’s potential to be a site of engagement between personal, social, and academic subjectivities grew steadily with each quarter of teaching.
the course. It took several quarters of teaching before I began to notice recurring patterns of interactions between the students as a group. It seemed that television was an ideal opening for conversations. Television seemed to be, on the surface, a leveler of difference. No matter where or how a student had grown up, television had been present, in either their own homes, the homes of relatives, or in the case of students who claimed to not be interested in or exposed to television, they were aware of its presence and its effects in the lives of others. After teaching the course several times I began to suspect that television was not simply a mechanism that leveled difference, but it was a site of affective engagement.

Most striking to me in respect to the phenomenon of affective engagement, was the discussion dialogue on the first day of class. To facilitate introductions and to establish a dialogue-based atmosphere in the new class, I ask students to fill out a brief introductory survey that we share in class. In addition to the customary request for student contact information, I ask a few questions about students’ personal experiences with television. After writing their responses, the students take turns sharing their answers with the group. Always astonishing to me is the level of student engagement with one another sparked by the shared television experiences. As students tell about their personal and family experiences with television, others react openly: Enthusiastic responses when a familiar show is mentioned; empathetic nods, groans, and occasionally explosive giggles when students identify with a student’s particularly annoying, disappointing or memorable television experience. During this first class student introduction dialogue, many students reply directly to one another, conversationally with little encouragement from me, adding their own memories and experiences in response to
others’ TV stories. Most fascinating to me, however, is the engaged attentiveness when someone inevitably “confesses” their enjoyment of a typically un-hip or, by college age standards, childish program. The confession is often sheepish, as if it were a social sin to admit to one’s passion about television. This is the moment I’ve come to identify as the intersection of desire and resistance, a moment when the atmosphere of the class becomes strangely anticipatory. I’ve come to think of this strange shift in atmosphere, this intersection of desire and resistance, as a crossing over into a reality of guilty pleasures.

The palpable change in class atmosphere to a milieu of strange anticipation often feels to me like a bonding experience of sorts. The glimpse of another person’s discomfort over their secret enjoyment of what society, or an academic setting, may deem unworthy may act as a catalyst for others to feel their own secret enjoyments through an awakening of positive or negative affect. Significant is the awakening of these feelings in an academic context—what are good, appropriate reactions to “bad TV” in a education setting, particularly when education is often viewed as the antidote or opposite of base, mass pleasures such as television? Sean Watson’s (1999) research of cultural affect in relationship to police is useful here. What Watson found in his study of the affective repertoires that structure police officers’ paranoid splitting of the world into good and bad, us and them, or self and other, was that such dichotomized categories hide affective investments for subjects. Moreover, Watson argues that consideration of the investment of affect within the “ideological, cultural and institutional field” is necessary for an understanding of how subjects structure their world schema of others and self. He admits to the complexity of the matter, positing that

(i)t cannot simply be that social forms reflect pre-given structures of feeling since
it is clear that feelings can be, and often are, induced or reinforced by the articulation of particular discourses, rituals and cultural forms. It is often the case that we are brought near to tears, filled with joy, or enraged by rhetorical strategies of politicians, journalists, artists or those nearer to us. It is equally clearly not the case, however, that social and cultural forms determine affective forms in any straightforward way. It often seems that we search for an emotional outlet because we have a prior need for such an outlet. We seem to desire certain kinds of cultural phenomena (be it art, political speeches or tabloid newspapers) because they do things to us, affectively – things which we, somehow, ‘enjoy’.

(Watson, 1999, p. 228)

Similar to Watson, I have identified in my classroom the need for cultivating openings into considerations of affect and subjectivity. While students may have entered the Criticizing Television classroom that first day expecting to become television critics by taking a critic’s distanced stance toward a cultural site whose territory they assumed they knew well, I believe they left somewhat surprised and perhaps destabilized in their nascent realizations of the affective power that inheres in the collective, visual culture experience that is so often dismissed as being insignificant or mundane.

**Construction of the Criticizing Television Course**

The discipline of art education has not fully explored the implications of television as a visual culture phenomenon; attempts to bring focused consideration of television into art education’s disciplinary conversations have failed to gain sustained attention. Over thirty years ago, Barrett made a case for the pedagogical confrontation of television within art classrooms. According to Barrett, art education could play an
important role guiding students toward better informed understanding of television’s ideologies. He (1977) posited that a “careful and deliberate investigation of television in the classroom for the purpose of clarifying values…could aid and encourage learners to consciously form their own individual stances toward life” (p. 4). Similarly, over twenty years ago, art educator Rogena Degge (1985) recommended investigating the semiotic and aesthetic qualities of television to gain an understanding of “the complex imagery of television and its relationship to people’s lives” (p. 100). In addition, art educators Kerry Freedman and Karen Schuler (2003) addressed the contemporary realities of television’s influence on consumer culture and identity construction, as well as its intertextual and intercontextual relationships with other popular arts. While these resources made a clear case for the validity of television studies in art education, I found little to guide my understanding of how television studies and writing might come together in a socially conscious critical pedagogy.

As a result of finding few, current art education resources that dealt with television from a visual culture perspective, construction of the Criticizing Television course was marked by my frequent questions and doubts. Specifically, I felt uncertain about how a writing course on television criticism would fit within art education’s disciplinary milieu. I believe this uncertainty stemmed from the course’s title, Criticizing Television. Familiar with the traditional art criticism models that are currently used in art education, I endeavored to understand how the transfer of these art criticism models to a study of television might fit within the realm of academic television criticism in the present. It was at this point that I began to feel the first stirrings of concern about the choices I would make in constructing the course.
My concerns about the design of the course were driven by questions about the object of criticism and the criticism writer’s relationship to this object. Namely the contemporary television criticism I’d been researching in the process of designing the course revealed to me complicated and evocative questions about subjectivity and television. For example, unlike the art criticism I’d been accustomed to from experience with art education’s art criticism pedagogy, the contemporary television criticism was frequently, overtly engaged with subjective perspectives, either the critic’s, the audiences’ or both. For example, television studies scholar Brian Ott (2007) makes this subjective stance unmistakably clear in his reflection on television’s role as his “lover,” and its potential to be a site of his transgressive pleasure. Ott’s conceptualization of television was not grounded in considerations of formal visual qualities as art criticism might be, but instead focused on the personal and social ramifications of a viewer’s sensual and playful relationship with television texts. To Ott, television is a locus of potential jouissance experienced through channel surfing and punctum-like awarenesses of a television text’s appeal to his pleasures and resistances.

In addition to my questions about the purpose and positionality of television criticism, I soon learned that one of the most exciting but daunting aspects of studying television is the multiplicity of approaches one might pursue in the investigation. The study of television is significantly challenging because of its broad interdisciplinary reach. Additionally, television as visual culture phenomenon presents scholars with a complex array of foci and directions for its study. Theorist of television studies, Anna
McCarthy (2001), notes the inevitability of choosing a finite focus, yet voices concerns over perspectives that may simplify the complexity of television’s cultural significance:

Television looks very different, depending on whether one's level of analysis is the microlevel of the network's terminal point—the screen, a particular viewing subject or collectivity—or the standard, centralizing transmissions that appear on its face. We might choose to emphasize, or argue for, one level over the other when we invoke television in theory and in criticism, but the result is inevitably a simplification, an artificial resolution of the dialectical tensions between the discrepant scales that comprise the phenomenal form of the medium. (p. 95)

My approach to television as visual culture phenomenon is shaped by sociocultural perspectives (Newcomb & Hirsch, 1983/2000; Williams, 1974/2003; Spigel, 2001a, 2001b) which can be used to approach television as a “cultural forum” of multiple, intersecting sites of analysis (Newcomb & Hirsch, 1983/2000, p. 570). To this end, the Criticizing Television curriculum is a bricolage of image analysis methods from art education, critical pedagogy and sociocultural theory, and writing pedagogies from composition studies that consider three interrelated sites of broadcast television:

- **Program (or text)**, which refers to the site of a television program or commercial, including its formal characteristics like imagery, sound, genre, and semiotic codes or meanings.
- **Audience**, a concept which not only encompasses the study of an intended audience for a program, but also includes the actual viewers of the program, and
the social effects of television. Additionally, and importantly, the concept also encompasses the study of the invisible or excluded program audience.

- **Production**, includes the circumstances of a program’s creation, such as the creative concept, casting, and technological aspects of a television show.

Although the course title seemingly signified television and criticism as the objects of study, I endeavored to introduce other signifieds, to enlarge and disrupt what television and criticism might mean to individuals and to the class by situating television within the context of the lifeworld and by placing it in the context of other media forms. Given the intertwined relationship of television with individual and cultural subjectivities, the issue of subjectivity and subject positioning was woven throughout the course. Students came to perceive that television was not just something we watched, but also an entity that watched us through our lifestyle choices, purchasing habits and patterns of consumption.

**The Writing Assignments**

As an undergraduate level Second Writing credit, the course was designed to extend and refine students’ expository writing and analytic reading skills through formal and informal writing activities about television texts and programming. Writing was used as a tool for investigating and developing critical responses, for exploring ideas about television, culture, and social diversity, and as a means for persuasively communicating ideas to others. Importantly, writing was conceptualized as a site of learning itself.

Additionally, the course’s Social Diversity designation helped shape its focus. Considerations of social diversity in America formed the foundational inquiry of the course; it was a basic pedagogical fabric into which investigations of contemporary
television’s relationship to cultural ideas about race, ethnicity, disability, economic class, social class, gender, sexual orientation, religion, and politics were woven. Ultimately, the course was designed to help students gain, through the activities of criticism writing and readings, an understanding and appreciation of television as a social institution that reflects and influences, yet also is shaped by society’s desires, hopes, and fears.

To further facilitate the exploration of television through issues of social diversity in America, my intent was to embed sensitivity to diversity and difference within the tools students used for the expression of their ideas. My goal was to increase sensitivity to language as a mode of expression as well as a site of subjectivity. I believed the awareness of subjectivity was at the heart of how the class would study television, and my intent was to build this awareness into all writing, viewing, and discussion activities in both subtle and explicit ways.

The writing activities were designed to extend the consideration of television and subjectivity into the medium of writing with the assumption that, just as TV structures and presents texts in particular modes and forms to elicit certain responses, writing could also be created with rhetorical intentions. To this end, we looked to both television programming and writing styles to find postmodern concepts like self referentiality, irony, pastiche, and parody in an effort to learn about the ways in which writing might be staged and manipulated to communicate as persuasively as TV often does.

In summary, I worked to create a television criticism writing pedagogy that affirmed the contextual nature of learning. That is, the course was constructed with the belief that we do not learn isolated facts and theories separate from the rest of our lives—
we learn in the context of what we already know. In building exploration of the connections between individual and social worlds into the fabric of the course, the course’s writing activities were intended to meet students where they were in their lives while motivating them to identify and reflect upon their ideas within a larger social and academic context.

The Role of Television in Relation to the Writing Assignments

I viewed television in relationship to writing assignments in that both were texts that expressed ideas and subjectivities. Therefore, I sought to place subjectivity at the heart of viewing and discussion activities, bringing awareness to individual and audience subjectivities. I wanted to foreground the relationship between text and subject position, with emphasis on the conditions that shape texts and subject positions (context, discourse, desire, resistance). Finally, I hoped to disrupt the idea of sovereign, static identity by complicating what it means to read and be read by others; see and be seen by others.

I also endeavored to link writing and television conceptually by drawing these media forms together in unexpected ways. For example, we worked with the idea that the expository essay, a rectangle-shaped site of text, might bear similarities to a television screen: both are surfaces upon which signifiers interact to interpellate subjectivities. Additionally, both are potentially rhetorical in that they can be designed to persuade an audience or reader. It was my hope that in studying similarities and differences between television’s and writing’s modes of production and reception, students would understand better the variety of ways texts and audiences might connect with or resist one another. Lastly, the writing assignments were designed to build deep familiarity and skill in respect to the conventions, forms, and purpose of academic and popular television
criticism, but one assignment was devised to lead students to the edge of unfamiliarity of content and form by removing the standard, familiar structure of the expository criticism essay in an alternative criticism writing assignment.

The Role of Subjectivity in Relation to the Writing Assignments

I saw writing and subjectivity as inextricably intertwined. Writing was understood as a system of *points de capiton*—not only for the students who revealed their subjectivities, connections and suturing through their essays, but how my responses (or my non-responsiveness) to these points of signification shaped their project of knowledge construction. My aim was to help students find points of personal integration into the theories we were learning. I didn’t want writing to be looked at simply as a object to be read, a container to carry expression, or structure for a grade, but to be visualized as a presence that had particular identity effects for self and for others.

My view of the relationship of subjectivity and writing assignments derived from several key ideas. The ideas emerged over time and developed coherence and pragmatic application to my assignment construction through my ongoing studies and reflections in the areas of composition and rhetoric, psychoanalytic theory, and television studies. Specifically, I conceptualized the relationship of writing and subjectivity through the perspective that writing is

- An artifact of visual culture;
- a significant mode of expression;
- a link among multiple, dynamic subjectivities of students and teacher, students and others;
- and, a site of ethics, integrity, and intentionality.
Each of the above points supported the overarching belief that writing is a complex and performatively expression of individual and social meanings.

**Writing: An Artifact of Visual Culture**

Like image creation processes and images themselves, writing processes and textual artifacts are sites of authority and agency within visual culture, however writing, as a vital, *visual* system of representation, often operates under the critical awareness radar within examinations of visual culture’s image representations. For example, texts and writing systems are not only the means by which ideas about visual culture may be represented and communicated, but in themselves are visual entities, existing within, as well as extending, complex visual and verbal discursive relationships. The rhetorical or persuasive power of font designs and typeface arrangements, textual genre structures and conventions, and tacit beliefs about reading and writing within discourses (Kress, 2005; Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996; Wysocki, 2004a, 2004b; Westbrook, 2006) make writing a powerful visual phenomena in culture.

**Writing: A Significant Mode of Expression**

By reflecting upon the demands and assumptions associated with a particular mode of expression and how this mode shapes learning, students might recognize that learning, and learning how to learn, is not independent of a culture’s systems of logic and power—a key awareness for a social diversity course. For example, in reflecting upon the ways in which the learning that grows from analytically reading a research text differs from or is similar to learning that occurs through experiencing televisual programming flow, we might actively shape our own learning pathways in the present and in the future. One of the questions I suggest students ask is: “*who does this text think I am?*” We might
also ask, “what assumptions does this text make about the way in which I, or others, learn?”

**Writing: A Link Among Multiple, Dynamic Subjectivities**

I viewed subjectivity, in relationship to the writing assignments, as multiple, changing, and contingent in its locations and performances. Additionally, I believe that writing processes are informed by conscious and unconscious desires in both the students and the instructor. Therefore, instead of viewing the writing assignments as the production of products by students, I saw the assignments as potential, multiple dialogues between conscious and unconscious subjectivities. Researcher of writing Jon Smidt (2002) refers to this interaction of subjectivities as the meeting and engagement of *double histories*. Smidt (2002) offers that teachers and students position themselves in relationship to writing through their understanding of the rules and norms of academic writing as well as by their personal histories of writing. Smidt uses the term *discourse roles* (or *textual roles*) to refer to “discoursal presentation of selves offered by culturally patterned ways of writing as student writers try their hands at being political commentators, entertainers, philosophers, writers of fiction, or journalists” and the term *positionings* to denote the “students’ unique and always changing stances within” discourse roles and genres, and in relation to topic, form, and audience (2002, p. 424). Moreover, according to Smidt, a teacher will in turn position herself and her students according to her understanding of the rules of the institution, disciplinary traditions, beliefs about the students she deals with, and perceptions of herself as a teacher of writing. Therefore, subjectivity, as I understand it within this course and its writing assignments, is always necessarily doubled, multiplied, and in process, or as Smidt puts it
“a double history of mutual positionings and negotiations of norms and of selves between student and teacher over time” (p. 424).

Practice and/as Theory: The Evolution of a Criticism Writing Assignment

As I struggled to create a television criticism writing curriculum within the double histories of art education’s disciplinary identity as well as my own personal history, I often felt stuck and blocked. It was not until I could articulate my desire to teach writing in a way that problematized critical consciousness and addressed my resistance toward using established art criticism models, could I understand and articulate how, for me, writing was not simply a tool of expression or means toward the ends of learning. Instead, I perceived writing as a deeply affective site, coterminous with the complexities and contradictions of subjectivity. Adding the issues of television, affect, and social diversity to considerations of writing created additional complexity within the criticism writing endeavor, yet it also provided a focus for exploring self and world through the process of writing.

Furthering my pursuit of integrity in curriculum content, form, and purpose, I began to view writing, television, and subjectivity as similarly informed by discursive positionings and similarly entwined with conscious and unconscious desires. Moreover, I began to find that I was less interested in determining how the study of television and the writing of television criticism might fit with existing models of pedagogy in art education than in conceptualizing writing activities that promoted critical thinking about how subjectivities are constructed through criticism writing and in relationship to television phenomena. Therefore, I looked to create, through a critical dialogue between theories of composition instruction and theories in television studies, a pragmatic, reflexive, and
ethical approach to television criticism writing.

In the pursuit of creating assignments that exemplified a pragmatic, reflexive, and ethical approach to criticism writing, I began by examining current approaches to academic criticism writing. While many contemporary television criticism articles incorporated some form of reflexive investigation regarding the author’s interest in the topic, it was rare to find literature that addressed directly the way in which the academic forms of expository criticism writing and the writer’s and reader’s unconscious desires shaped the content of the critical inquiry. Without analysis of the ways in which a criticism text could effect particular expressions from an author and particular responses from a reader, a valuable opportunity was missed for deconstructing writing’s production of persuasive subject positions. As a result of this absence of attention to subjectivity and persuasion within criticism writing, one of the first writing tasks in the course was a metacriticism assignment. The assignment prompt asked students to summarize an academic criticism article’s topic and also provide an analysis of the article’s modes of persuasion, addressing what was effective or ineffective in the author’s arguments, and pointing out specific examples in the article that supported both the author’s assertions and the student’s critique of the author’s method. During the first half of the academic term, students developed metacriticism analyses of two articles; by the second article assignment, most had attained a well-developed sense of how criticism writing performed and reified particular subject positions. In addition, many students began to gain complex insights into the cultural desires for stabilization of signifiers and signifieds, whether this stabilization occurred through written texts or within the myriad approaches to imagery, narrative, and audiencing in television texts.
Later in the quarter, after students had mastered the metacriticism assignments, we began a focused investigation of subjectivity, criticism, and the production of critical expressions about television phenomena. In the postmodern alternative criticism assignment (Appendix G), students discovered that moving one’s critical responses from a traditional writing format into alternative frameworks of expression could direct attention to a dimension of writing that often goes unnoticed: how the form of a written expression performs meaning. Exploring the idea that form is performative of meaning was intended to cultivate an awareness that a criticism text (such as an academic critical essay) is not a neutral container that holds and transmits words, but is a strategy of expression that creates and confirms subject positions. Just as television viewing becomes coherent and meaningful to people because of subject positions and shared cultural codes, so does reading and writing criticism.

The assignment objective was to devise a creative, critical expression of TV’s effect(s) upon one’s subjectivity—an expression that could take any form except for the traditional expository essay. The criticism project was twofold, consisting of the alternative text (the criticism expression itself) and a written rationale that explained the project’s theoretical framework and aesthetic choices. The project involved three key questions:

1. How is my subjectivity positioned or constructed in relationship to television and mass media?
2. How might I critically respond to, or represent my awareness of, this subjectivity-media relationship?
3. What materials or format will best communicate my critical response?
In response to the assignment prompt, students created a diverse collection of criticism expressions. The array of student work included videos, sculptures, drawings, performances, music, and poetry. The assignment was difficult for some students in that they felt inept, unfocused, or uncertain without the predictable, familiar structure of the expository essay format to structure and communicate their ideas. Importantly, however, in removing the safety of the expository essay structure, students were free to explore just how slippery and indeterminate are the methods we use to word the world for one another.

The development of this assignment and the work produced by students over the years were not only significant for my own understanding of how and why particular forms of criticism are so powerfully convincing, it was also instrumental in shaping my sensitivity to evocations and resonance in students’ criticism expressions. As Richardson and St. Pierre (2008) have observed,

(who we are and what we can be—what we can study, how we can write about that which we study—is tied to how a knowledge system disciplines itself and its members, its methods for claiming authority over both the subject matter and its members. (p. 481)

Although Richardson and St. Pierre’s words are directed toward the consideration of disciplinary knowledge systems, their ideas are aligned with the alternative criticism assignment's intent: a consideration of the strategies and methods used to communicate and stabilize an individual's subjectivity.
Conclusion

By adopting a critical approach to the processes of writing and criticism themselves, and by analyzing the forms that the criticism takes, students may learn that, in addition to responding to a visual culture phenomenon, the format of their expression is just as significant as the content. Television programming is productive of subjectivities and writing also produces and confirms subject positions. This expansion of perspective on writing’s purposes and performances makes room for acknowledging the unwieldy, unruly evocations caused by the Real of the unconscious. Inevitably, bits of the unconscious Real will break through and disturb the smooth coherence of criticism writing discourse. Given this perspective on pedagogical discourse, a question must be asked: To what ends might an educator use these experiences of discomfort and impasse in the development of an ethical, reflexive writing pedagogy in visual culture art education? Potential responses to this question are suggested in Chapter Nine.

In summary, writing criticism is freighted with contingencies and uncertainties, thus necessitating a patient, reflexive approach to the teaching of criticism writing—a method in keeping with Lauren Berlant’s approach to pedagogy. Berlant advises that, “patience…is something to teach: it’s related to pacing, and to taking the time to acknowledge being overwhelmed by, and to become scholars of the complexity of, the distillate that appears as the satisfying object” (2007, p. 437). Like Berlant, I take

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1 While it is vital that developments in pedagogy are tangible and accessible for the improvement of practice, some of the significant developments in pedagogy aren’t tangible or measurable. That is, pedagogical change often begins in the unconscious registers of subjectivity, in the hidden curriculum of the unconscious. The flow of repressions and desires that constitute the unique thumbprint, or objet a, of individuals and cultures will shape affect, behaviors, and attitudes toward teaching and learning.
seriously the impatience, anxieties, and uncertainties inherent in the processes of symbolizing an impossible-to-express “satisfying object.” In fact, my overall approach to teaching writing in the course and my development of this case study exemplify my efforts to problematize and articulate what counts as the satisfying object of criticism writing instruction in art education.
CHAPTER NINE

(Against) Conclusion: Pedagogy of the Impossible

Introduction

The price of one’s appetite for truth is not exacted until the new truth is already known. ~A. Reiner, 2008, p. 617

The purpose of this chapter is not to impose a final summary upon the experiences of this case study; I cannot complete this dissertation by assembling a structure of tightly wrought conclusions. Instead, I wish to consider here the idea of consequences, as it relates to the work of this case study. Specifically, I am interested in exploring some of the slippery awarenesses that emerged through this case study, framing these insights as consequences that hold promise for critical writing pedagogies in art education, and imagining ways to promote psychoanalytically informed critical writing in art education’s visual culture pedagogies. Psychoanalyst Annie Reiner’s words at the beginning of this chapter, The price of one’s appetite for truth is not exacted until the new truth is already known (2008, p. 617) set the stage for this discussion of the cyclical and concomitant nature of desire, and a consideration of the consequences of my desire to learn about students’ perceptions of the criticism writing they created in the Criticizing Television.
Desiring Truth

Reiner’s observation about ‘truth’ provides a useful template for thinking about critical consciousness. As a form of enlightened, reflexive, and critical awareness, critical consciousness is frequently a prized outcome of visual culture pedagogies. However, to desire and seek truth, or in this case, critical consciousness, is to enter into a cycle of lack, desire, an impossibility of satisfaction, and, thusly, the continuation of desire. Considered within the context of Lacanian theory, the price paid for the ‘truth’ of critical consciousness is an acceptance that the desired critical consciousness (the objet a) will harbor within its promised satisfaction the seeds of an irresolvable loss. As explained in a previous chapter, desire begets more desire; there is something within the objet a—the object in desire—that defeats its satisfaction and perpetuates desire. Therefore, a desire for critical consciousness, like my desire to know how students perceived their experiences with writing, cannot be satisfied. The impossibility of knowledge and the concomitant nature of desire are issues of significance for this research and for the development of a critical writing pedagogy. I view these impossibilities not as a concession to defeat, but as a foundation for realistic and hopeful perspectives on teaching and learning toward critical consciousness. I believe that writing, as a form of inquiry (Richardson, 2003, Stout, 2007a), can be a site of both active engagement with the impasses of expression and an active engagement with the consequences of writing’s peripheral evocations.

Shoshana Felman's (1987) discussion of Jacques Lacan’s revolutionary developments in psychoanalytic process suggests that psychoanalysis, as a mode of
reading and interacting with the world, enacts, or embodies, a revolutionary interpretive stance, one which constantly puts into effect, or creates, an excess on one level which provokes constant analysis on another level. As discussed in Chapter One, Felman’s studies of Lacan are an example of an interminable reading, an interpretive reading which emphasizes re-reading. In this mode of psychoanalytic reading, an experience of insight does not mean that an illuminative frame is locked firmly in place to explain a phenomenon. Instead, one realizes that feeling certain about locating meaning most certainly indicates that one has experienced where meaning is not. In the face of such uncertainty, to what purpose shall educators direct their work? Of what use is pedagogy? The tentative answers proposed here are multiple, contingent, and (optimistically) grounded in impossibilities. These answers point toward peripheries and uncertainties of knowing, which I believe may offer a valuable perspective for the study of subjectivity and critical consciousness in art education.

Art educator Jennifer Eisenhauer’s (2009) description of (be)coming, a foundational concept for her 2008 art installation, Admission, brings insights to the question of pedagogy and purpose, in the context of uncertainties. Specifically, Eisenhauer’s Admission brings attention to the impossibilities and uncertainties inherent in (be)coming out and knowing oneself as an “I” within the cultural discourses and contingencies that shape perceptions of the subjectivities of others. Eisenhauer conceptualizes (be)coming out as a process of ongoing interactions and interpositions of subjects as multiplicities which, in coming together, result in “unpredictable and spontaneous interactions, experiences, questions, and outcomes” (Eisenhauer, 2009, in Epilogue, para. 1).
Eisenhauer’s conceptualization of (be)coming, informed by Deleuze and Guattari’s theory of the rhizome, offers a fruitful means for thinking about peripheral qualities of being an “I” and, relatedly, acts of representing oneself as an “I” within a text—whether the text is writing, an art installation, or another mode of expression. The installation Admission is a critical investigation of Eisenhauer’s own “(be)coming out as it intersects with challenging representational issues that surround living with a mental illness” (2009, Prologue, para. 3). Noting the disconnects between cultural representations of mental illness and personal perceptions of identity, Eisenhauer (2009) observes:

(being)coming out involves asserting one's identity as a person with a mental illness within a cultural context that has constructed, through ongoing repetitions, particular notions about what mental illness "looks" like. These representations do not "look" like me. (Prologue, para. 8)

Eisenhauer’s work illustrates the unpredictable and slippery nature of (be)coming, namely the impossibility of ever matching up the “I” represented in an installation (or any other text) to the “I” that one perceives as one’s self. Moreover, the issue of repetition of representation is also noted, affirming the way in which representations become reified through repeated, even cyclical, appearances in culture. In fact, it is within the contingent, relational spaces created through encounters of “I” and others that (be)comings may be reified into awarenesses of identity and reality. As an installation of found objects and images from Eisenhauer’s life world, Admission can be viewed as a critical text that (be)comes peripheral through its effects on a viewer-participant. In other words, the critical, analytical dialogues that Eisenhauer’s work cultivates through her layering and
juxtaposition of images and objects may not be the primary, central focus in a visitor’s encounter with the installation. Perhaps, the spectrum of evocations and affects experienced in relation to Eisenhauer’s expressions of (be)coming out may be a form of critical awareness that, while subtle, continent, and difficult to articulate, is crucial to the process of becoming an “I” in relation to others. This perspective of the “I” as a contingent, relational, peripheral, and (be)coming process has consequences for writing criticism in art education.

As discussed in an earlier chapter, a psychoanalytic view of the unconscious theorizes the conscious subject as one whose existence is organized around the repression of a traumatic kernel of being in order to preserve the coherence of ego and identity (Parker, 2003, 2005a; Felman, 1987, 1997; Rogers, 2006, 2007b). Relatedly, writing, as a mode of expression in the Symbolic register of subjectivity, is implicated in the process of preserving a subject’s sense of coherence. In fact, in the case of a writing assignment that adheres to a discipline’s conventions of writing, both the student writer’s identity-coherence and that of their instructor is preserved through recognitions of self and other occurring within their conscious and unconscious registers of subjectivity. Rarely are the negotiations of disciplinary writing conventions and writer identity examined in the context of assignments in art education or other disciplines. Consequently, the truth-effects of a discipline’s modes of expression are often viewed as natural and benign.

This case study research of students’ criticism writing in the Criticizing Television course questioned relationships among disciplinary writing conventions in art education, writer subjectivity, and critical consciousness. Early in Chapter One, I posed the following two questions:
How is student subjectivity positioned and constructed in relationship to their criticism writing in Criticizing Television?

In what ways does my own subjectivity, as an instructor, shape my assumptions and expectations regarding students’ subjectivities, their writing, and the definition of critical consciousness in the context of this course?

Further, I asked two more questions,

What does a writing-intensive visual culture pedagogy bring to the discipline of art education?

What unique challenges do students and teachers encounter in relation to writing assignments that deal with personal experiences of visual culture phenomena?

In general, my initial questions were directed toward understanding the positioning and construction of students’ and the instructor’s subjectivities in relation to the writings created in the course. Having spent considerable time immersed in the writings of the course, and consequently, considerable time locked in various impasses around the data, I now find these initial questions less interesting and of diminished importance when assessing the consequences of this research. These initial questions may be addressed through a consideration of the transference and countertransference effects that arise within and around the writing assignment.

Psychoanalytically informed theories of subjectivity would view the construction and positioning of subjectivities within the assignments as a result of transference and countertransference. As unconscious projections and reactions that stem from past relationships and affective resonance to shape present behavior, transference and countertransference were likely a significant factor in my avoidance response to Robert’s
E-mails. Moreover, transference and countertransference may have been a cause of my alternating ambivalence and enthusiasm about Alix’s writing. In summary, the phenomenon of transference and, relatedly, countertransference provide answers to questions about the ways in which subjects position themselves in relation to one another and knowledge. To address this phenomenon pedagogically, a psychoanalytically informed perspective on criticism writing would emphasize scrutiny toward an instructor’s responses and resistances to student’s writings. Based on my experience with the *Criticizing Television* course, and my studies of psychoanalytic theories, I take my resistances and enthusiasm about student writing more seriously. I don’t take for granted the disappointments, curiosities, and puzzlements that occur as I read and respond to student writing. Instead, I endeavor to enfold these perceptions into my responses to the writing through purposeful questioning of my reactions. Specifically, I make several observations about the ways in which I may be perceiving the student’s writing and its positioning of my subjectivity. These are perceptions of subject positioning that arise from my efforts to notice, track (through writing, drawing and other informal journaling endeavors), and articulate what surprised, intrigued, or disturbed me in the writing¹.

Further, in response to my early questions about subject positions and writing,

¹ Sunstein & Chiseri-Strater’s (2004) investigation of students’ ethnographic essays explores the manner in which students position themselves in relation to others and to information. They draw upon writer and composition theorist Donald Murray’s writing strategies and research to emphasize the necessity of asking questions of one’s writing during the writing process. I believe that this questioning is not only critical for students, but also crucial for instructors. Moreover, I wonder if an instructor’s sharing of these insights with students may help to reinforce the relational nature of being an “I”—that is, what we express in language has consequences for how others respond to us (both consciously and unconsciously), thus reinforcing the relational constitution of subjectivities.
psychoanalytic theories might also point toward the influence of a subject’s unconscious resistance to knowledge (Felman, 1987, 1997; Fink, 1997; Lacan, 1998, 2006a, 2008), a resistance that functions to preserve unity and coherence of the ego (Alcorn, 2002). While the initial two questions were useful in initiating the study, it is the latter two questions that are of greater interest to me in the present. Together, these questions offer a substantive space for working within the consequences of this case study.

The latter questions, What does a writing-intensive visual culture pedagogy bring to the discipline of art education? and What unique challenges do students and teachers encounter in relation to writing assignments that deal with personal experiences of visual culture phenomena?, are combined in the following proposition which advocates development of psychoanalytically informed writing pedagogies for art education: As a critically conscious theory and practice, a psychoanalytically informed writing pedagogy can be an ethical position of exploration and expression when working within the difficulties, resistances, and impasses that originate in affectively resonant experiences of visual culture. Sunstein & Chiseri-Strater’s work with students’ ethnographic essay assignments provides some guidance toward cultivating ethical positions of exploration and expression in the critical essay. These positions are not simply writing directives for students, or a new angle on creating assignment objectives and disciplinary learning outcomes, but are efforts to notice how critically conscious writing can become a relational space that effects subjectivities as it sparks affects within and around the peripheries of writing. Perhaps the most critical aspect of this conceptualization of critical consciousness is that it is a process; it is a (be)coming (Eisenhauer, 2009) that effects and affects both student and instructor.
Positioning: Seeking the ‘Soft Underbelly’ of Writing

. . .writers need to recognize a ‘felt sense. . .the soft underbelly of thought,’ as they explore an idea, patiently looking ahead (‘projective structuring’) and behind (‘retrospective structuring’) as they blend the information.

~Sunstein & Chiseri-Strater, 2004, p. 61

The issue of positioning oneself ethically in an inquiry is of consequence for art educators who work with students in the exploration and expression of critically informed analyses of their visual culture experiences. As a Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) consultant at the university where I taught Criticizing Television, I had the opportunity to interact with instructors of writing from different disciplinary areas. From the social sciences, to engineering, to the humanities, many instructors struggled with how best to teach the conventions of writing that were common to their particular scholarly discourse. Less overtly expressed, but still powerfully compelling, were struggles over how to strike a comfortable balance among a discipline’s conventions, a curriculum’s objectives, and one’s personal education philosophy and values. The issue of positioning oneself in relation to one’s inquiry was a topic that attracted enthusiastic debate. Frequently, the focal issue of this debate was the use of the first-person “I” in an expository essay. In the multi-disciplinary gatherings at writing seminars, art educators were among the few instructors who not only supported, but also argued for, the necessity of writing from a first-person perspective.

An art educator’s experience with constructing critical discourse from subjective perspectives is a vitally important skill that offers a distinctive perspective in creating critically conscious writing in response to visual culture. However, an issue that must be
addressed is the purpose and effects of such writing. What are the consequences of building a critical perspective from the position of “I?” Scholar of composition and rhetoric Judith Harris (2001) points out that, where writing instruction is concerned, unquestioned assumptions about what writing is supposed to accomplish lead to confusion for students and disciplines. Harris observes,

…teachers disagree about how writing should be represented to students—whether writing should be a means of personal expression, political activism, or free-form experimentation in language…departments have segregated writing courses according to perceptions about writing products (expository, technical, cultural studies, creative writing) rather than considering writing subjects—meaning the students who generate and produce writing. (2001, p. 180).

Harris’ observation that departments segregate courses by writing products and not the student subjects who populate the courses paints the situation as a binary opposition. However, the choice of student or writing product need not be so stark if one considers that all writing is essentially “voice,” and that instruction in writing, no matter what the discipline or the intended writing product, is essentially the process of witnessing and facilitating voices. Harris points out the inherent implications for agency in this view of writing as voice:

All writing is, arguably, an indeterminate process. Language proliferation requires the simultaneous interplay of cognitive and emotional actions. Teachers should help students locate a voice that is not merely a collection of language bits and pieces, but an agency…Voice is not synonymous with sound, but with the power to produce sound, without which a text would be mute. (2001, pp. 179-180).
In my experience of teaching a course which attracted students from a diversity of disciplines, I discovered that many students were not only unfamiliar with using the first-person voice in their undergraduate expository essays, some were actually uncomfortable and even resistant to doing so. Even though I spent time in class teaching about the conventions of academic criticism writing and took care in explaining the importance for students to problematize and expand upon the academic discourse by inserting their own voice, students expressed uncertainty. Without fail, I would receive several E-mails each quarter from students who needed additional reassurance that it was indeed allowable to use the word “I” in writing their critical essay. Given the variety of writing assigned in the class, ranging from formal, traditional research papers to informal reading responses, and, in later years, a non-traditional alternative format essay, I never ceased to be surprised by the discomfort expressed by students regarding the use of first-person voice. I suspect that some students may have been ill at ease with claiming responsibility not only for the substance of their arguments, but perhaps also for the affective roots from which their voices originated. In fact, the consequences of studying students’ writing in the course, while at the same time struggling with my own uncertainties about expressing my ideas about their writing, led me to insights about affects that occur unconsciously at the peripheries of conscious knowledge-seeking endeavors, silently shaping critical writing processes and products.
There is, as Sunstein & Chiseri-Strater (2004)² acknowledge, a soft underbelly of thought, or affective resonance, that not only shapes the ways in which students write, but also shapes students’ sense of the purpose of their writing. Sunstein & Chiseri-Strater suggest that writing which seeks to bridge purely personal writing and purely research writing is an *ethnographic essay*. They believe that cultivating attention to the ways in which personal writing is inevitably writing about an ‘other’ is an important step in crafting writing that does not lapse into solipsism. To this end, they note that “(w)e must offer structure, strategies, and habits of mind that allow students to explore combinations between their own thinking and the information they collect” (2004, p. 64). They also emphasize that the “collected information, the research, that data—becomes part of the ‘other’ with each topic our students write about, each time they write” (p. 64). I agree with Sunstein & Chiseri-Strater’s observation, however I believe that a psychoanalytically informed perspective on writing complicates their perspective. A psychoanalytically informed perspective would acknowledge that the ‘other’ which expands in relation to the information and experiences gathered by the writing is also coterminous with the ‘self’ in that the Real of subjectivity is an ‘other’ which is inextricably intertwined with subjectivity and writing. This ‘other’—the soft underbelly of the self—determines what a writer is able to express and also determines what a reader is able to perceive. In this case study, as well as in my teaching of student writing, I cannot see nor articulate clearly my own otherness and affects—that is, the ‘soft

² Sunstein & Chiseri-Strater draw upon the ideas of writer Sondra Perl and philosopher Eugene Gendlin to explore the delicate negotiations of self and other that occur in the non-fiction writing process (2004, p. 61).
underbelly’ which inevitably determines what I can perceive and express. My experiences of teaching and researching writing have led me to believe that I may be able to approach these perceptions peripherally. Further, I believe that the persistence of efforts to approach, perceive, and articulate these awarenesses can be, in itself, a key attribute of critically conscious writing.

**Seeing Peripherally and Telling it Slant**

On the matter of peripheries and knowledge seeking, Emily Dickinson offers a poetic perspective on how an “I” might position itself in relation to a sought-after ‘truth’. Dickinson’s poem, written in 1890, bears remarkable affinity with the theories of early psychoanalysis which Freud was developing around the same time period. Dickinson’s poem alludes to the workings of the unconscious, a realm of human existence that cannot be accessed directly, but may be detected through approaches that create spaces for oblique, peripheral, or circuitous awarenesses. Moreover, this poem might be viewed as a critically conscious perspective on the process of seeking and expressing truth, a view that might also shed some light on the challenging nature of seeking and expressing critical consciousness in an essay assignment. In short, Dickinson’s words allude to the necessary defensiveness of conscious subjectivity which cannot bear to experience ‘truth’ directly:

Tell all the Truth but tell it slant,
Success in Circuit lies,
Too bright for our infirm Delight
The Truth’s superb surprise
As Lightning to the Children eased
With explanations kind
The Truth must dazzle gradually
Or every man be blind.

(Dickinson, 1890/2010, p. 431)

Dickinson’s, Reiner’s, and Eisenhauer’s insights are united by threads which find the process of seeking, becoming, and knowing to be an experience that is slippery, perhaps difficult and uncomfortable, and importantly for this discussion, an experience that is indirect. These are experiences of inquiry that invite different ways of working within the discomforts and impasses of critical inquiries—explorations that may lead unexpectedly to surprising affects and excesses. Further, these experiences may also lead to peripheral insights which might emerge around those affects and excesses that one can’t comfortably imagine or contain.

**Peripheral Spaces and Insights**

The student writing that pushed at and provoked me with its initial, inexpressible disturbances was a disruptive experience in my teaching of writing in the course. It is only though deferred meaning that I can visualize those disruptions as necessary peripheral spaces that the students and I created in relation to the course assignments. These are spaces where encounters between the conscious “I” of a student and that of the instructor effect a tensioning relationship of proximity and distancing. It is my belief this space, the indeterminate *I of the text*, became a locus and a means for both the students and myself to interact with nonsensical ideas and unruly affects that resisted clear expression in the essay assignment structure that I offered.

If we can visualize peripheral spaces and their meaning in the education process,
then we might relate this process to the way in which psychoanalysis functions to provide and contain disruptions and impasses that shift aspects of subjectivity into the foreground of awareness, thus offering richer, more intricate perceptions of intersubjective encounters. As psychoanalyst Dennis Shulman (2005) points out, psychoanalysis works through the intentional use of disruption and discomfort. Calling this discomfort the “irreplaceable ingredient that constitutes the necessary and sufficient condition for human growth” (p. 476), Shulman’s description of the stabilizing effect of theory in psychoanalysis offers some surprising insights. Namely, his observation about the way in which theory may be used to alleviate anxiety and discomfort bears a remarkable resemblance to the stabilizing effects of curriculum methods.

Shulman’s observations about an analyst’s coping mechanisms resonate with me as I recall the impasses that marked my experience with the students’ writings and with the case study research:

When the analyst is feeling threatened, uncomfortable, and off-balance, in order to regain the psychic equilibrium required for our work, we use theory. The formulations we construct to explain the patient to ourselves, and the interpretations we offer to our patients that flow from these concepts are both overdetermined, invariably serving multiple functions and meanings, some defensive, and some adaptive. An important function of clinical theory, actually the most important adaptive function of clinical theorizing, especially during one of these periods of strain, is to offer the analyst comfort. Our psychodynamic theorizing, and the interventions that are its results... (are) in the primary service of ‘managing the countertransference’. (2005, p. 472)
In connecting Shulman’s observations about managing countertransference with my experiences of trying to understand the significance of the student writing in this case, I find that my most defensive moments, my most deeply conflicted encounters with student writing, followed particular developmental patterns. That is, when teaching the course, I encountered excess and unruliness (“in” the students’ writings or as a result of my countertransference) and attempted to neutralize the anxieties by seeking refuge in curriculum structure. Later, when working with writings of the case study and experiencing the frustrations of the impasses, I sought to create my own structure of comfort by involving myself in repetitive activities of writing, drawing, reading. In retrospect, I see these activities as a series of purification rituals aimed at removing or purifying the uncomfortable excesses of affect and evocation that could not be explained or made rational through theory. Psychoanalytic theory, particularly that of Lacan, did not offer a solution or even a structure, but pushed me to create my own way of reading and re-reading the excess. Through the accrual of repeated patterns of exploration and writing, I began to identify shapes and textures at the edges of the conscious experiences of reading and studying the writing. I believe this kind of peripheral work is what some students (unconsciously) may have attempted to do for themselves in my course when they worked outside of the typical assignment structure, wrestling on their own with issues at the peripheries of their television experiences.

**Circling Back . . .**

To summarize thus far, after pursuing the initial questions that initially propelled this study, the research progressed with the formation of three formal research questions, queries that shaped the development of the methodology and my interactions with the
1. Within the writings of this case, what can be known about subjectivity and critical consciousness?

2. How do I know what I know about subjectivities within and around the writings in this case?

3. Of what pedagogical value is the exploration of subjectivity, the unconscious, and critical consciousness within the context of students’ television criticism writing?

As I was to discover in my work with this case, subjectivity and critical consciousness are bound together so tightly, and are so intertwined with the unconscious, that I could only approach these questions obliquely, through locating traces of the unconscious at the peripheries of conscious awareness. Thus, the responses to questions one and two can be only speculations. That is, because the unconscious is not amenable to straightforward access, because it slips out of viewing and thinking range, it is impossible to stake out empirical claims to knowledge about the unconscious and its influence on critical consciousness and the writings of this case. Of course, I did not expect empirical results at the outset of this study. However, in embarking on this case study research I was unprepared for the level of ambivalence, resistance, and confusion I experienced in my work. The significant consequence of this experience which felt like a series of impasses, was to reconceptualize what I expected of the research, and in the processes, I have complicated my own views and assumptions about what it means to teach criticism writing.
In looking at the trajectory of this study, I can see that locating answers to the questions that initially motivated this research was not the most important task of the study. The significant task I faced was carrying on with the pursuit of some thing, an inexpressible, affectively charged sense of disruption—an almost-awareness that played at the edges of perception. This push to carry on and pay attention to the subtle patterns and textures that characterize my experience of the impasse is an experience that I now share overtly with students. My experience of an impasse was an encounter with knots of irresolvable difference, where the writings I sought to understand in this case study became something other, something different (and more uncomfortable) than I ever expected. As I learned, the most productive approach to living within, and learning from, this impasse is to make the efforts to trace and articulate the disruptions and nonsense that the unconscious register of subjectivity may seemingly hide in plain sight. This effort toward articulation may function to push both educators and students toward experiencing the pragmatic paradox of writing. Systematic writing processes, especially free-association writing undertaken in peripheral relation to a more formal expository writing project, may provide a space for expressing the seemingly nonsensical and peripheral thoughts that inevitably accompany (yet are dismissed before being expressed) the process of crafting clear prose. In short, there are subtle cycles of resisting and desiring knowledge and the exploration of these possibilities may enlarge the concept of critical consciousness, conceptualizing it as less of an outcome than a pedagogy of process and patience.

**Pedagogy of the Impossible**

In recent years, the discipline of art education has experienced an increasingly
visible exploration of psychoanalytic theories (Jagodzinski, 2002, 2004a, 2004c, 2005, 2008; Tavin, 2008, 2010; Tavin & Carpenter II, 2010; Walker, et. al., 2006.; Walker, 2009). The current issue of *Visual Arts Research* (Walker & Parsons, 2010) devoted to exploring the current and potential uses of Lacanian theory in art education marks a significant step toward building awareness and understanding of the unique attributes of the psychoanalytic approach to pedagogy. As many educators have discovered, translating Lacan’s ideas into pedagogy and practice is challenging. What is needed are continuing studies which not only explore the theoretical potential of Lacan’s ideas, but offer direction for practice. Addressing this need is Walker’s (2009) study of artist’s practices which draws from an exploration of artist Ann Hamilton’s work and Walker’s own experiences in developing and teaching the graduate course, *Image Makers or Meaning Makers*. The psychoanalytically informed pedagogy revolved around the exploration of two essential questions: *Why make art?* and, *Why do I make art?* Walker’s course was developed around a “sequence of artmaking experiences, alternately designed around conscious and unconscious knowledge, and interspersed with the study of contemporary artists' practices, reflective writing, and group discussions” (2009, p. 85).

Walker’s method of building the course’s inquiry around a limited set of essential questions provides a helpful heuristic for other psychoanalytically informed approaches to pedagogy. With the goal of seeking foundational support and essential questions for a psychoanalytically informed writing pedagogy, I turn to researchers Creme & McKenna’s (2010) recommendations for a reconceptualization of writing. Like Creme & McKenna, I believe it to be more useful to foreground a “writing as social practice” model, instead of emphasizing writing as a “skills-based paradigm” (Creme & McKenna, 387).
As a social practice, writing is situated within a particular context “that encompasses...social and institutional relationships, with a stress on relations of power and the writer’s identity” (Creme & McKenna, p. 153). Shifting emphasis from writing skills development to awareness and critiques of writing as social practice is not advocated without careful thought given to the objectives of the course. My use of the term “objectives” here does not refer to the learning outcomes of a curriculum, but the instructor’s objectives as they pertain to her values and convictions about what constitutes meaningful learning toward critical consciousness. Without sustained reflection on these values, there may be few opportunities to discover and explore potential disconnects between instructors’ and students’ goals. Disconnects are inevitable, but willingness to look for them is crucial if critical consciousness is meant to accomplish more than simply showing and telling one’s critical commentary on culture.

Discrepancies between personal values and disciplinary conventions are not uncommon, however, many instructors tend to dismiss these subtle (and sometimes not so subtle) signs of uneasiness about the content and delivery of a curriculum. Professor of composition studies Maureen Hourigan (1998) reveals how she discovered that her own values and the pedagogical aims were at odds with her students’ desires. In a study of her students’ perceptions of the “empowering” writing assignments used in her composition course, Hourigan was surprised to learn many of her students felt that mastery of sophisticated grammar constructions would guarantee their place in the middle class, while the real world writing (Hourigan) required, supported as it was by examples from their own lives, identified them as lower class economically, an identity they cared not to confront. (1998, p. 2)
Robert Yagelski, also a professor of composition, makes similar observations about the problems that can arise from ignoring one’s sense of disconnect between what is intuited or known affectively and the goals pursued in the course. Noting that there are rarely opportunities within professional discussions for teachers to express the struggles and uncertainties they experience in their strivings to be “sensitive, empowering teachers” (1999, p. 35), Yagelski points out that changing this culture of repression and denial may prove difficult. In agreement with bell hooks, Yagelski finds that although the structure of institutions and disciplines may call for and encourage liberatory, transformative pedagogies, it is often the case that “knowledge and information continue to be presented in the conventionally accepted manner”, all of which make pedagogical change difficult and uncomfortable” (1999, p. 35).

As if there weren’t enough evidence of the overwhelming challenges inherent in teaching, Yagelski’s student teacher shares a poignant confession of why she discontinued her career in education after only one semester: “I really want to teach, but it’s just too much” (1999, p. 35). This confession, a reminder of how impossibly unruly and excessive teaching can sometimes feel, strikes a chord in me as I recall my own experiences of feeling overwhelmed when teaching writing in the Criticizing Television course.

As a result of this case study and the opportunities it afforded me to remain immersed in the discomfort of exploring my choices and possible motivations for teaching writing as I did, I have a more expansive, yet complicated, perspective on teaching. This perspective may not solve the problems of unruly, excesses of affect, but it does at least provide the familiarity and reassurance brought by experience. Writing
within and against the tensions that arise from impossibilities of knowing and expressing experience is a perspective that I share with my students. This sharing is sometimes explicit, as in the written feedback and other responses given to students’ writing efforts; and, of course, it is also communicated as an excess or remainder of signification that I cannot hear in my own expressions. In my early years of teaching the Criticizing Television course, I was not adequately aware of how much feedback was exchanged between students and myself in the form of unconscious dialogue.

**Writing an (Im)possible Pedagogy**

This dissertation began with the question, “*How can I open myself to what I do not yet know?*” (Somerville, 2008, p. 210), and I find this question a fitting query with which to contemplate the consequences of this dissertation. As a result of my exploration of the writings in this case, I propose that the indeterminacies of knowledge and the vagaries of subjectivity, as experienced by students in writing criticism about television, and experienced by me as I attempted to assess and respond to their writing, may be the most illuminating and educative qualities of a critically conscious pedagogy.

The question, *Why teach writing practices within art education courses?* has been raised throughout this dissertation, both explicitly and implicitly. As a result of my experiences in teaching writing in the course, I believe that the processes and artifacts of writing can be significant sites of exploration for art educators and their students to undertake the important work of locating their own points of (un)intelligibility and impasse as well as learning ways of living in relation to the impasses of others. The impossibilities of writing, of wording the world for one another, are knots of conflict which keep critical consciousness in perpetual impasse, necessitating that educators
constantly problematize for themselves why they desire certain conventions or goals within students’ writing.

Education is assumed to fill gaps in knowledge, create new knowledge, or revise knowledge that already exists. My work on this case study led me to a clearer sense of the ways in which knowledge is intimately entangled with the passionate desire for ignorance. Through this research I realized an unspoken goal of my course and its writing assignments: I wanted to create opportunities for students and myself to reach impasses of thinking and expression; I wanted us to come up against our own points of unintelligibility, individually and as a class-community of writers. In my perspective, the structure of the course and the writing assignments were made clear to students. I took great care in creating detailed syllabi. I pored over student papers, often fretting over giving the feedback that would not only acknowledge what worked well in the paper, but provoked thought that could propel deeper, more complex explorations.

In teaching writing in the course, I questioned myself frequently, not only because of my lack of confidence about being a writing instructor—a subject for which I was not trained to instruct—but also because I felt deep ambivalence about perpetuating an illusory critical consciousness. I was uncomfortable with the tidy, well-argued, amply evidenced academic criticism essays that dominated the journals and textbooks. I was confident that I could teach students to construct and defend a critical perspective about television phenomena, but I was less confident about how I would deal with the affectively charged threads that held these essays together. My concern wasn’t with the explicit confessions of emotional experiences in relation to television, but those writings
which summoned something other in me—something unnamable, inexpressible, yet clearly resonant.

What I couldn’t have understood at the time I created the *Criticizing Television* course was what moved me to create the course and assignments as I did. What shaped my choices of texts, the structure of the assignments, how I responded to the students in the classroom, and how I read, assessed and graded the students’ writing? Through the process of conceptualizing and articulating this research, I’ve learned about my teaching, my students, and my own writing processes. I’ve learned that who I am as a writer, and a human being, is of consequence for my students. Each class, then, with its myriad of relationships among texts, activities, and subjects was a complex ecosystem. I learned through my writing of the research and my examination of the results I expected from the assignments is that I have a great deal of anxiety around capture. I fear capture and locking-down, or stasis for myself, and I fear imposing it upon others.

**Writing Excess, Writing Impasse**

Researcher of writing Clare MacDonald (2009) observes that (w)riting’s horizon has moved...its edges have become ragged. It has burst a little at the seams under the pressure of changing technologies of sight and sound and inscription; under the pressure of the flow of new kinds of communication that mix the spoken and the inscribed; that mediate between the stable and the unfixed. (p. 92)

McDonald’s observations about the raggedness of writing’s edges provide a useful metaphor for conceptualizing an approach to writing that resists the call to transparency and purity. Following from this image of writing, I explore a conceptualization of writing
toward critical consciousness as a process of composing unthought (im)possibilities and unruly excesses. In particular, I linger on the idea of critical consciousness as an abject form: critical (un)consciousness as impasse.

Narratives of critical consciousness and their attendant signifiers of altruism in visual culture pedagogies hide something unruly, transgressive, and complicit. As I see it, writing criticism about visual culture phenomena, particularly that to which a subject has strong attachments, can sometimes be an awakening in the middle of something abject—an excess unsettledness and confusion that can result in one’s circling around the unthought of representation, stuck at a knot of conflict created by the tensions of (be)coming something other through the creation of new chains of signification.

If educators are to facilitate learning events that promote conversations and respect within and across differences, we must begin by recognizing that most of the critical activities of visual culture pedagogies often encourage a logic of identification that defeats attempts to engage the abjected, unsymbolizable aspects of subjectivity. A logic of identification, effected through a narcissistic desire that collapses difference in an eagerness for “sameness,” cannot recognize the third term of difference: the impasse. Rational, deconstructive interpretation can lead to the staking out of subject positions which fall into binary qualities of right/wrong, good/bad, us/them.

As a method of pursuing and representing critical consciousness, and as a method of interpretive, expressive signification, writing can be an abject operation—a casting out and about among signifiers, a movement toward inevitable failures of representation, scribbings around the edges of what cannot be named in the service of holding subjectivity together. Writing is one of the most efficient means of reifying the
inefficiency of representation. Thus, writing in itself is already an excess. Perhaps
criticism writing, then, might be taught as a means of creating a third term that disrupts
the self-other dyad—a pedagogical form of the analytic third, that can be used to call
attention to, disrupt, and unsettle a subject’s (or a curriculum’s) assumptions, certainties,
and desires in relation to visual culture phenomena.

**Critical Consciousness: The Struggle Among Attachments and Losses**

Critical pedagogies which arise from, or engage with, deeply personal, conflicted,
or sensitive aspects of identity can exact uncomfortable demands of both students and
teachers. In the pursuit of socially just curricula, some pedagogy narratives may estrange
us from one another because their confessions display an intimacy for which the rhetoric
of education does not provide space to explore. While the pursuit of critical
consciousness is usually perceived as a liberatory endeavor, critical consciousness may
become yet another form of oppression if the subject position of ‘socially just citizen’ and
altruistic educator is used to pathologize and marginalize other, ‘less enlightened’
individuals. In a world flooded with images, and where critical positions on popular
culture are often difficult to separate from designer capitalism’s celebration of cultural
sensitivity, the complexity of the critical-consciousness project and its potential
entwinement with reproduction of narcissistic and oppressive social practices cannot be
overstated.

Criticism writing in art education can be a site of struggle among attachments and
losses. What one must surrender in order to fit within the subject position offered by a
particular social justice narrative is difficult to know, and impossible to know in advance
of the education event. Because of the unknown aspects of the subjective unconscious,
these struggles are often unexpected and difficult to articulate within the rational ordering of assignments and curricula. Indeed, neither students nor their teachers can predict exactly what may be of personal significance in a course, or what kinds of evocations, resonances, or disturbances might result in the context of a course or an assignment. Both students and teachers make use of the curriculum in highly individualized ways, while at the same time affecting one another through the intersubjective influence of classroom interactions and in relation to the production and assessment of coursework.

**Impasse as Critical (Un)consciousness**

Based on my interactions with the writings of this case study, I suspect that one of the most critical aspects of critical consciousness is the role of the unconscious, which, in being the locus of the irrational, sometimes contradictory desires of the subject, means that critical consciousness (as it is conceptualized through critical pedagogies) is an impossibility. As Jagodzinski (2004) and others (Duncum, 2008; Herrmann, 2005) have pointed out, critical consciousness may have little to do with a student’s enlightened awareness, but instead is a matter of “playing along” with a teacher’s agenda to achieve a particular grade, a strategy that participants in the case study have admitted to using on occasion. When we face the paradox inherent in eliciting critique within an educational context that may well constrain responses to that critique, we are in the space of an impasse. Further, the pedagogical spaces we’ve created for these exchanges often deny or distract from the absences and excesses that circulate within language, yet the unruliness of the unconscious ensures that disruptions, sensitivities, and resistances will return again and again. Thus, the task we face is to create the conditions for exploring and learning through these uneasy, relational spaces.
The resonant perception of impasse is a call to be present to, and patient with, the unnamable qualities that characterize and complicate relationships with people and texts. To this end, as an alternative to writing an analysis of television or other visual culture phenomena, what if an assignment’s goal was to explore and speculate upon that which must be suppressed and unnamed in the service of maintaining a unified, coherent sense of self? This approach would promote a form of visual culture criticism that unravels the objectives of traditional expository writing methods by sidestepping the object of inquiry (television) to explore the peripheral spaces that give shape and consistency to subjectivity.

Looking Forward and Back

There is a gap between the state of critical consciousness that teachers expect students to achieve and what teachers and students are really capable of accomplishing in the education encounter. Critical essay writing, with its excesses, impossibilities, and unruliness cannot realistically contain the excesses of intersubjectivity. How, then, might visual culture pedagogies deal with these excesses, exist within them, and not merely cover over their discordant, disruptive stories with the illusion of honest, coherent, rational expressions? My suggestions are modest, subtle, yet hopeful:

In addition to the stated learning outcomes for a course or an assignment, a curriculum might also state as its goal a piercing and puncturing of boundaries, an ethical attentiveness to the otherness of the subject, and the uncertainty and otherness that are core constituents of the “self.” It would also emphasize the excesses of subjectivity, the way in which unruly and uncomfortable affects entangle and create knots within the learning event. With such a pedagogy, a course objective might be to identify and
describe one’s felt resistances and excessive affects around an image or text. The 
education-activity would then be the work of expressing the problems inherent in trying 
to represent (through signifiers) these knotted awarenesses. The objective of such a 
pedagogy would be to create a systematic process of exploring the experiences of “being 
with”—with a problem, with complexities and questions, with difference, with ideas, 
with teacher, peers, etc. This is a process of experiencing and acknowledging the 
unbearable pressures of the impasse as it maps for us a field of action and (im)possibility, 
realizing that “it is this very impossibility that pushes us again and again forward to 
invent ever new forms to approach it. Every possibility has thus to be sustained by a 
fundamental impossibility” (Dean, 2008b, para. 1, italics added).

**Toward Excess. . . and Repetition: Articulating Critical Consciousness**

A love of excess and unruliness does not find overt support in education. 
Everywhere one turns, there are calls for limits, boundaries, restraint. Evidence-based 
outcomes. Learning objectives. Assessment plans and rubrics are part of a culture that 
finds reassurance in empirical data and predictable outcomes. To address the tensions 
among desires for clarity, orderliness, and structure and the inevitable disruptions of the 
unconscious, it may be useful to examine the suppositions and expectations that shape 
perceptions of critical consciousness.

What do we mean when we ask for "critically conscious" writing and how can we 
assess these qualities in our students' work? Critically conscious writing is a slippery idea 
and challenging to define. As a paradoxical expression that originates in a resistance to 
representation, writing can be challenging to teach and assess. However, as indefinable 
and inexpressible as critical consciousness may seem, it is possible to develop an
approach to teaching and assessment that gestures toward what one imagines or expects when asking for writing that exemplifies a critically conscious approach to an issue.

Crucial to this process is to work from the Analyst discourse position, as conceptualized by Lacan. As pointed out in a previous chapter, the Analyst is the position of the ethical questioner, the person whose role is to resist being positioned as the all-knowing subject for another subject. To explore the constructs within which one teaches, it can be useful to explore through writing or other modes of expression that constitute one’s Imaginary and Symbolic identities. To this end, an important step is to define what critical consciousness and writing mean within one’s discipline and course assignments, as well as within the context of one’s personal values.

As educators work to articulate and define what critical consciousness and writing mean in the context of their discipline, they may discover that these definitions are not completely objective or subjective, but instead are habits of mind and goals that are not only shared within a discipline, but may be celebrated or contested, depending upon whose interests are at stake. In my experience, critically conscious writing often encompasses the following characteristics: It displays curiosity; explores and challenges relevance and irrelevance of information; is nonconforming, flexible, unpredictable and spontaneous; distinguishes and challenges relationships and connections; demonstrates tolerance for ambiguity; and exemplifies and openness to multiplicities of expression within writing or other forms of representation.

**A Postscript: Consequences of the Research**

This research was undertaken not only to address a problem that originated in my own art education practice, but to initiate conversation on the issue of critical writing
педагогии в образовании искусства. Увеличивающийся интерес к неопределенности вокруг эссе критики, и оставшиеся вопросы о переживаниях студентов при анализе своих и других наслоениях и сопротивлениях по телевидению, заставили меня задуматься над моими предположениями о взаимосвязи критической осознанности и письма.

Сознавая мощное влияние, которое формирует процесс письма как неосознанно, так и осознанно, я начала искать критическое письмо в курсе как месте, где желания и сопротивления студентов перекликались с теми, которые были у преподавателя, и, в итоге, желания дисциплины.

Мне кажется, что я был неудовлетворен тем, что я не выполнил. Меня беспокоит неприятный избыток языка. В частности, я беспокоюсь о неоконченности этого проекта, о необъяснимых и необъяснимых давлениях, которые я интуитивно воспринимаю как неразрешимые избытки, остались при том, что не было выражено в пределах временных рамок этого исследования. Данные этого исследования обширны. Студентские эссе, электронная переписка, вопросы и ответы на интернет-опросы, мои заметки о преподавании и исследовании — все были доступны для анализа в этом исследовании. Однако, в контексте большого объема письма, только немного фактических данных до конца присутствовали здесь. Это может показаться странным результатом этого исследования. Однако, этот результат может быть инструктивным.

В моем текущем виде, я могу вспомнить, что в течение всего своего труда с этим исследованием я испытывал необычайно большие давления. Данные все время шли против и просачивались через логические, рациональные структуры, которые предоставляет процедуры и протоколы для формулирования мышления. Я боролся. Я застревал. Я испытывал это 'встрепенувание' настолько, что не мог получить ощущения перспективы, ни разъединения.
from, what I was attempting to interpret and explain. Is this what students feel when attempting to create a critical, evidence-based articulation of their perspective on a visual culture phenomenon, especially a phenomenon in which they are particularly invested in affective and unconscious ways? Does an experience like this result in peripheral writing—expressions that skirt sensitive topics, building up in their accumulated avoidances a pattern that may not be visible to the self in the present, but reveals something crucial, something deeply critically conscious at another time? In summary, as I survey the trajectory of the research, I observe that, not unlike my students, I have written copiously, but perhaps not enough. I have written peripherally. I ask myself, “In the context of critical writing about visual culture, and the research of visual culture writing, what is enough?” What is productive and useful writing in the process of writing toward the development of critical consciousness? These are questions that invite future research.

From my present vantage point, I can understand that this dissertation, both the process of its writing and its present form, were part of a necessary journey. As I often ask my students to do, I am reflecting upon the presences and absences within and around the texts of this case study. As I reflect, I find myself in a territory that invites further exploration, analysis and explanation. This territory is the mobious strip effect of the research: Specifically, I speculate that although I initially set out to learn about students’ perceptions of their writing in the course, I slipped (Unconsciously? Consciously?) into another set of questions and perceptions. These questions and perceptions coalesced in concerns with how I was perceiving and responding to the students’ criticism writing. I detect slippage and shifting of perspective in my intensive concern with the impasses that
shaped the methodology. I detect shifts and slippage in and around my initial concern with student subjectivity in their writing—a concern that eventually transformed into attention to the peripheries of writing and research.

As a consequence of this study, I am reminded of the unpredictable nature of writing as a form of inquiry. Writing takes us places that we might not want to read. Of course, our students experience this, but are there adequate opportunities in assignments for students to explore and articulate this phenomenon? What if criticism texts were accompanied by peripheral writings or other expressive articulations, meta-narratives, overtly related to the writing or not, that contextualize the efforts made toward critical consciousness? As I seek to find a stopping point for this dissertation, I am reminded of my response to Riley’s project (sculpture and written rationale) S.E.T³:

Riley,

This project creates a critical perspective on television (and subjectivity) that is exceptionally ambitious in both its ideas and material presence. It suggests, but doesn’t force its meanings. It invites speculation and appreciation. I can appreciate its familiarity as an object that I believe I know and understand, but I also appreciate the way it disrupts the known and calls upon my speculations. The written rationale is powerful…It’s like a textual mobious strip: It pulls a reader

³ My response to Riley was not the sort of assessment that fits within a template-style rubric. Relatedly, an issue that surfaced repeatedly in this research, and has informed my teaching practices in the present, is the complexity of instructor response to student writing. Requiring students to create critical writing that explores their subjective investments in visual culture places demands upon an instructor to also negotiate their own critical consciousness, as it emerges in relation to a student. This is a form of response and assessment that presents profound challenges to traditional rubric template approaches.
along smoothly, seamlessly, and effortlessly in a gripping narrative, but slyly and subtly turns the tables—trapping the reader in a different narrative…then, the reader slips into a conclusion that disrupts all clear direction and knowledge of where television leaves off and the reader begins…this writerly manipulation of perspective, positioning, and address is fascinating. The writing strategy creates a complexity of realities and simulated realities that implicate self, other, self as created by other, self as desiring to have and/or be other.

I see your project as a compelling statement on visuality and desire, that is, the social construction of seeing and desiring in relationship to TV. By exposing its ‘internal organs’ and by laying bare the mechanisms of its construction (constriction?) of desire, the TV as sculpture seems to declare—“well, what do you expect of me? I am no more and no less than your desire.” Your written rationale accomplishes something similar by using text as the mechanism of exposure of television’s and the subject’s desires.

A consequence of this case study is my realization of its impossible conclusion, and its imperfect articulation of my own critically conscious perspective on the students’ writing. It is the imprecision and impasses of this research that challenge and push against my desires to tie up the case’s loose and unruly strands with carefully constructed knots. Thus, I am moved to concede writing must conclude at some point; however it always begins again. Relatedly, a consequence of this study is my growing realization that the conclusions and beginnings of writing may not be as distinct nor as arbitrary as they might appear. Writing often extends continuities in many directions, and these extensions and continuities are not always occurring at a conscious level. Writing seems
to accumulate in paths and patterns, building up the shape of a subjectivity, drawing into visible forms the absences and presences that structure one’s perceptions of one’s own “I” and perceptions of the “I”s of others. Future explorations of the data of this current study will take up the issue of continuities and peripheries of writing, seeking to devise and articulate psychoanalytically informed pedagogical strategies that expand the concept of critical consciousness. This expansion conceptualizes critical consciousness through critically conscious writing. That is, writing is viewed as a form and method of sensitive, sensitizing inquiry, an affective, evocative perspective pursued in relation to visual culture phenomena, a manifestation of transference and countertransference, and, consequently, an unfinished, (im)possible inquiry.
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APPENDIX A

RESEARCH LETTER: STUDENT

Dear former Criticizing Television Student:

In association with the Art Education Department at The Ohio State University, and under the supervision of Professor Candace Stout, I am collecting materials as part of my research into television criticism writing assignments used in the undergraduate course Criticizing Television (Art Educ. 367.03). My research is concerned with students’ perceptions of their experiences of writing critically about television while they were a student in the Criticizing Television course. Specifically, I am interested in students’ perceptions of the ways in which their subjectivity was affected through writing criticism about television.

As a former student of my Criticizing Television class (2005—2009), I am hoping you will be willing to answer some questions about your experience of writing television criticism while you were enrolled in the course. The questions will be in the form of an Internet survey available to all former students from my past Criticizing Television classes. In addition, a small number of voluntary participants may be invited to share additional reflections about their television criticism writing experiences in individual E-mail correspondence interviews. Students who elect to participate in the E-mail correspondence interviews may be asked to share their past TV criticism essay assignments for this study, however, sharing past essays is completely voluntary. Further, if an E-mail interviewee does choose to share a past TV criticism essay, all identifying information will be expunged from the writing. The research survey and E-mail interviews will be conducted between July 15, 2009 and September 30, 2009.

You are under no obligation to participate in this study’s Internet survey or E-mail interview. If you do choose to participate, please know that I will make every effort to protect your confidentiality: All responses submitted to the Internet survey and the E-mail interview will be made anonymous, either by expunging identifying personal information or by using pseudonyms. You must be over 18 years of age to take part in this study—please include your date of birth on the attached consent form if you decide to participate.

I hope you will consider participating in the study. Your insights will be of great help to me in my work of designing and evaluating writing assignments in future Art Education classes and this research will be an important contribution to the study and teaching of television criticism and visual culture at Ohio State. If you have any questions about the
study, please contact me (daiello.5@osu.edu) or Professor Candace Stout, the faculty member serving as principle investigator of this research project (stout.127@osu.edu). Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Vicki Daiello
Department of Art Education
258 Hopkins Hall
128 North Oval Mall
Columbus, OH
daielo.5@osu.edu
APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT PAGE FOR INTERNET SURVEY

(This text will appear the first page of the Internet Survey)

SURVEY

The Study of Television Criticism Essays
in an Undergraduate Art Education Course at The Ohio State University

Research project led by
Dr. Candace Stout, principal investigator and Vicki Daiello, co-investigator

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey on your experience of writing television criticism while enrolled in the Criticizing Television course at Ohio State. This survey is part of my research project entitled The Study of Television Criticism Essays in an Undergraduate Art Education Course at The Ohio State University. The survey will ask you to respond to questions about your experiences of writing about television while you were a student in the Criticizing Television course. Your responses will help me to develop art education resources that support the teaching of writing in visual culture courses at Ohio State.

Participation in this Internet survey will entail responding to 22 questions. All responses will be kept confidential. Your name, identity, or Internet ISP address will not be recorded by the survey website and your name and identity will not be linked in any way to the research data. You are welcome to skip any questions you don't wish to complete. You may also save your work at any time and return to complete the survey, as long as you complete it by August 1, 2009.

Please don't hesitate to contact Dr. Candace Stout, stout.127@osu.edu, the principal investigator for this project, or Vicki Daiello, the co-investigator, daiello.5@osu.edu if you have any questions or concerns about this survey. If you are 18 years of age or older and you wish to participate, you will be asked to indicate your voluntary consent by checking both of the “I AGREE” boxes at the bottom of this form.
There are separate boxes for confirming your age and your choice to participate. Both boxes must be checked for the survey to open. By checking I AGREE and by completing this Internet survey I am giving my consent to participate in this study.

I am 18 years of age or older  [ ] I AGREE

I voluntarily choose to participate in this study  [ ] I AGREE
APPENDIX C

ONLINE SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. If you are 18 years of age or older and you wish to participate in this study, please indicate your voluntary consent by clicking the button at the bottom of this page. The button must be checked for the survey to open.

2. What quarter were you enrolled in Criticizing Television?
   - Autumn 2005
   - Spring 2006
   - Autumn 2006
   - Winter 2007
   - Spring 2007
   - Winter 2009

3. In your experience as a college student, what characteristics of writing generally seem to be most important to college instructors? Please consider all courses you’ve taken throughout your undergraduate years. Please check all that apply:
   - Clarity
   - Accuracy of content information
   - Emotional expressiveness
   - Critical thinking
   - Making an argument
   - Creativity
   - Subjectivity and/or personal life experience

4. In general, what characteristics of writing were emphasized in the *Criticizing Television* assignments? Please check all that apply:
   - Clarity
   - Accuracy of content information
   - Emotional expressiveness
   - Critical thinking
   - Making an argument
   - Creativity
   - Subjectivity and/or personal life experience

5. Was writing a critical essay about television more challenging or difficult for you than writing an essay on other academic subjects?
   - Yes
   - No
   - Somewhat

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• Can you explain, please?

6. Thinking back to the writing you did in the course, what was most challenging for you?
• Figuring out how I really felt about a TV program, or TV viewing experience
• Expressing my ideas and/or feelings about TV through a critical perspective
• Knowledge of writing procedures such as grammar, spelling, sentence structure, etc.
• Being graded on what I wrote about my experiences with TV
• Other (please specify)

7. Writing about subjectivity and television often involves writing about personal experiences. Did you ever feel uncomfortable about revealing aspects of your personal life in the assignments?
• Yes
• No
• Sometimes
• Can you explain, please?

8. Did you ever feel that you had to reveal private information about yourself or your life in your writing in order to get a good grade?
• Yes
• No
• Occasionally
• Can you explain, please?

9. Did you ever feel you had to take a stance against something you really enjoyed about TV in order to please the instructor or get a good grade?
• Yes
• No
• Sometimes
• Can you explain, please?

10. What helped you to feel confident as a writer in the Criticizing Television course? (You may select more than one answer)
• The grades I got on my writing
• Comments the instructor wrote on my papers
• My awareness of my own critical views and my ability to express them clearly
• Having the feeling that the instructor was able to understand and appreciate my viewpoints
• Discussions with fellow classmates about the writing assignments
• Other (please specify)

11. Did the instructor's emphasis on personal subjectivity and subject positions have any influence on your attitude toward the writing you did in the course?
• Yes, a positive influence
• Yes, a negative influence
• No influence at all
• Not sure
12. Many of the criticism writing assignments asked you to reflect, in some way, on what you were drawn toward or what you resisted in your TV viewing experiences. Was there anything about the writing you were asked to do in the course that you felt drawn toward or that you resisted?
   • Yes
   • No
   • Can you explain or offer an example?

13. It has been theorized that all writing is done with a particular reader or audience in mind. When writing your essays in the course, who was the primary reader/audience you had in mind?
   • A non-specific academic or professional audience
   • The instructor
   • Myself
   • A friend
   • No one in particular
   • Other (please specify)

14. As you were writing your criticism assignments, what influenced you to choose or discard particular ideas to express in your work? (You may choose more than one answer)
   • Awareness of the assignment criteria/expectations
   • My instincts about what the instructor would understand or approve of
   • My own sense of inspiration (I chose ideas that "felt right" to me and expressed them in my own style)
   • The influence of an admired writer's, critic's, or artist's ideas
   • Concern about how I might be graded on the assignment
   • Other (please specify)

15. In regard to the writing assignments in Criticizing Television, what was most important to you? Please select one statement.
   • Feeling that I had expressed my ideas in a way that accurately represented my thinking or my writing style
   • Believing I'd done my best in completing the assignment according to the assignment criteria
   • Feeling that I'd made my ideas clear and that the instructor would understand what I was trying to express.
   • Other (please specify)

16. As you may recall, you were asked think about television's influence on your subjectivity/identity by considering this question: "Who does this program (or commercial, etc.) think you are?" If you apply that question to your writing and subjectivity in the course, Who did the instructor think you were?

17. The following statements deal with self-knowledge and writing processes. Based on your experience with the TV course writing assignments, please respond to the statements by selecting YES, NO, or SOMETIMES:
   • There were certain assignments, such as the alternative criticism project, that caused me to question my understanding of the writing process.
   • There were times when writing TV criticism felt disruptive to my identity.
• In the writing process, there were times when I encountered a question or idea that pushed me to consider something about myself that I had not previously considered.
• There were times when I felt like a stranger to myself when taking a critical perspective on my life experiences with television.

18. Here are some statements about insights that may have occurred while you were in the course and after it ended. Based on your experience, please respond by selecting YES, NO, or SOMETIMES:
• There were times when my insights occurred much later than the writing assignment.
• There were times when I encountered ideas that initially and sometimes still bother me.
• My thoughts and insights occurred faster than my writing could keep up with them.
• I discovered I had feelings or ideas about TV or myself that I just couldn't express using the written word.
• I felt the need to continue writing about my paper topic or other TV-related issues after the quarter had ended.

19. The following statements are about encountering difficulties when writing about television. Based on your experience, please respond by selecting YES, NO, or SOMETIMES:
• There were times when my writing felt blocked.
• There were times when I wanted to explain something in writing but words failed me or I couldn't find the right words.
• There were times when I felt the instructor misunderstood or just didn't get what I was trying to express.
• There were times when I felt like I couldn't express my true self because I was fearful of getting a low grade.
• There were times I held back or censored what I wrote because I felt silly or self-conscious about my ideas.

20. Did your past writing experiences in the TV course have any impact (positive or negative) on how you think or express yourself in the present?
• Yes
• No
• Somewhat
• Can you explain or offer an example?

21. It seems that people can never know beforehand, neither can their teachers, exactly what will be of personal significance in a class. When you think back to the writing you did in the course, what seems significant to you personally about your experience? Can you explain, please?

22. (Optional) Anything else you'd like to say about writing in the TV course? Any comments about this survey?
APPENDIX D

LETTER TO STUDENTS (E-MAIL INTERVIEW)

July __, 2009

Dear ________________:

In association with the Art Education Department at The Ohio State University, and under the supervision of Professor Candace Stout, I am collecting materials as part of my research into television criticism writing assignments used in the undergraduate course Criticizing Television (Art Educ. 367.03). This study consists of a confidential Internet survey and E-mail interviews. My records indicate that you might have interest in participating in the E-mail interview. Students who choose to participate in the E-mail interviews may be asked to volunteer to share their past TV criticism essay assignments for this study.

I’ve attached two Word documents that contain information about how the interview will work and a Consent to Participate form. After you’ve read the attached information about the interview process, and if you decide to participate, please indicate your consent by filling in the information requested in the yellow highlighted boxes on the Consent Form. Please send your completed Consent Form to me by E-mail attachment. The E-mail interview will begin after receipt of the Consent Form and will conclude by September 30, 2009.

You are under no obligation to participate in this study’s E-mail interview or share your past essays. However, if you do choose to participate and share your work, please know that I will protect your confidentiality: all responses to the E-mail interview and all materials you may share will be made anonymous, either by expunging identifying personal information or by using pseudonyms.

You must be over 18 years of age to take part in the study—please include your date of birth on the attached consent form if you decide to participate.
If you have any questions about the E-mail interview or about the research in general, please contact me (daiello.5@osu.edu) or Professor Candace Stout (stout.127@osu.edu), the faculty member serving as principle investigator of this research project.

Thank you for your time and consideration!

Sincerely,

Vicki Daiello
Department of Art Education
258 Hopkins Hall
128 North Oval Mall
Columbus, OH
daiello.5@osu.edu
APPENDIX E

STUDENT CONSENT FORM FOR E-MAIL INTERVIEW

Protocol # 2009E0211

TITLE: The Study of Television Criticism Essays in an Undergraduate Art Education Course at The Ohio State University

PROCEDURE: E-mail Correspondence Interviews

DATE: To take place during the time period July 15 – September 30, 2009

This form and accompanying letter give you detailed information about the E-mail Interviews for the research project, The Study of Television Criticism Essays in an Undergraduate Art Education Course at The Ohio State University. Once you understand the study, if you still wish to participate, you will be asked to electronically sign and return this Informed Consent Form.

In written electronic communication that accompanies this Consent For Participation In Research form, Vicki Daiello (daiello.5@osu.edu) and Dr. Candace Stout (stout.127@osu.edu), principal investigator, have provided information about the procedures to be followed in the E-mail interview, and have indicated the expected duration of my participation. I acknowledge that I have had the opportunity to obtain additional information regarding the study and that any questions I have raised have been answered to my full satisfaction. Furthermore, I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent at any time, decline to share past essays, and discontinue participation in the study without prejudice to me.

I acknowledge that I have read and understand this consent form. I understand that by typing today’s date, my name, and my date of birth in the boxes below I am freely and voluntarily providing my informed consent to participate in this study.
<table>
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<th>Date: (Please type today’s date)</th>
<th>Signed: (Please type full name here)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Vicki Daiello</td>
<td>Participant’s Date of Birth:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>(Principal Investigator or his/her authorized representative)</em></td>
<td>Month/Day/Year</td>
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</table>

*HS-027E  Consent for Participation in Exempt Research*
APPENDIX F

INFORMATION FOR E-MAIL INTERVIEW
(TO BE INCLUDED WITH CONSENT FORM)

E-mail Interviews: Information, Procedures, and Initial Interview Questions

Introduction
This confidential E-mail interview seeks to address the overarching question: “What are students’ perceptions of their experiences of writing critically about television while they were a student in the Criticizing Television course?” Specifically, I am interested in students’ perceptions of the ways in which their subjectivity was affected through writing criticism about television. Because television is a common and ubiquitous visual culture phenomenon, and because students were asked to write academic television criticism through the lens of their personal experience, I am interested in understanding how students perceived the intersection of personal and academic worlds when writing in the course. This research will help me develop new forms of television and visual culture criticism curricula with the goal of improving undergraduates’ learning experiences in an art education writing course.

Some key questions that guide this research:
What happens to a student’s perceptions of self and others when they are asked to take a critical perspective toward television viewing activities which may have gone uncritically examined up until the experience of being in the Criticizing Television course? What is it like to be asked to turn a critical lens upon one’s family and acquaintances when writing television criticism about a program that is situated within one’s own life world? What is it like to write critically about individual and cultural television experiences when the writing is being submitted to an instructor for a grade in a college course?

Procedures: How the E-mail interview will work:
My hope is that we can create an informal dialogue through E-mail. To encourage dialogue, I’d like to follow a flexible schedule of response and reply, with the interview correspondence ending by September 1, 2009. When you send your responses to me, I’ll reply within three days to acknowledge that I’ve received your E-mail. In the informal conversational style of E-mail exchanges, I may comment on or ask for elaboration or clarification on what you wrote about the prompts. I’ll send my reply to you and you will be free to respond back or not. You may ask questions of me or comment on my responses to your prompts at any time. You are also free to cease participating in the E-
mail interview at any time.

**Assignment focus for this interview:**
I’d like to focus on the last two projects in the course, the alternative essay assignment which asked you to take an alternative to the standard critical essay in order to express your understanding of the ways in which TV shaped your subjectivity, and the final capstone paper, a research-based essay that asked you to connect your own experience of television with a larger socio-cultural context.

The E-mail interview consists of three initial questions which point to a variety of possible experiences you may have had in the course in general, and specifically when creating the alternative “essay” project and the final capstone paper. These questions are meant to begin a dialogue about your subjective experiences of expressing a critical perspective about television.

Please respond to the questions with as much or as little information as you’d like. However, you are under no obligation to respond to any of the questions. Given the nature of a conversational style of email communication, some questions may vary from the sample questions below, however all questions will address the topic of writing critical essays, directly or indirectly. If you would like to write about something that is not on the list of questions below, I would certainly welcome these additional thoughts. Your careful consideration and honest reflections are greatly appreciated and will improve the quality of the research. Please feel free to contact me at any time to ask questions or to receive clarification about any aspect of this E-mail interview correspondence, or about the study in general.

**Confidentiality:**
As mentioned in the informed consent letter, all information will be held in the strictest of confidence. All responses to the E-mail interview will be made anonymous, either by expunging identifying personal information or by using pseudonyms; in addition, all identifying information will be removed from the essays.

**E-mail Interview Sample Questions (actual interview questions may vary):**

- What was most memorable about the critical essay experience?
- In the *Criticizing Television* classes I taught from 2006—2009, I used a writing assignment that dealt with subjectivity and postmodernism. The assignment asked you to use a creative alternative to the standard essay format to express how TV influenced your subjectivity. How did you feel about being asked to express your ideas in an alternative format?
- Thinking about your experiences with the alternative essay project, how would you describe the value of alternative criticism processes for gaining an understanding of television has impacted your subjectivity?
- Among all other modes of expression, what does writing do that sets it apart from other communicative expressions? What makes it similar?
• What is your perception of self in relation to others since taking the course?
  Perception of television’s role in your (and others’) awareness of social diversity?
APPENDIX G

Alternative Criticism Writing Assignment

Alternative Criticism Project

Who we are and what we can be—what we can study, how we can write about that which we study—is tied to how a knowledge system disciplines itself and its members, its methods for claiming authority over both the subject matter and its members. (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2008, p. 481)

Introduction: Television and Alternative Criticism Texts

Television is an evolving text drawing us into its logic through its ubiquitous forms and meanings. This project invites you to step into the ongoing and evolving televisual flow to consider where you fit in relationship to contemporary television and related mass media. In this assignment you will have the opportunity to consider how television addresses you as a “subject” and respond thoughtfully and creatively with a critical expression. You’ll be able to explore how the format of a critical expression shapes both the production and reception of the criticism.

The process of coming to understand how your subjectivity relates to television, and understanding how various forms of media address, position, or represent you and others within culture is an ongoing and fluid endeavor that will evolve over your lifetime. This project is an opportunity to represent your subjective relationship to TV in your present life context through a creative television criticism expression.

This assignment offers you an alternative to the traditional essay format. In the spirit of postmodernist aesthetic and intellectual play, you are invited to create an alternative text as a critical response expression of your experience with television. An alternative text might be an object, creative writing, music, image, video, live performance, or other expression that represents your ideas about television and subjectivity.
Creating an alternative criticism text challenges notions of closure and authority often associated with written texts. An expository essay explicitly denotes closure through its formal structure that locates the end of a paper in its conclusion section or concluding paragraph. In contrast, this alternative text may resist tidy beginnings or endings, especially if yours is an interactive and ongoing expression, such as a blog. Therefore, you may find that process and project are intertwined, often visibly and perhaps at times uncomfortably, in your project. Your project may relate intertextually to other projects, ideas, and feelings both within and outside of class. As you plan and develop your project, please refer to Bignell chapter 7 on postmodernism and also draw upon ideas discussed in class.

**Subjectivity and Television:**
Subjectivity is a general term for the characteristics (including identity/personality) of the human person who acts and is acted upon in the world, and who generates and perceives experiences within particular socio-historical contexts. In postmodernism, subjectivity is understood to be fluid and changing….emergent in relationship to other people and inseparable from the conscious and unconscious needs, desires, and interests that shape, and are shaped by, common experiences.

Television hails or “interpellates” (Althusser) subjectivities through signs, codes, and cultural myths that a subject can recognize or strongly identify with. Your objective in this assignment is to think about how television hails you as a subject. What draws you to television? What repels you? Your answers might point to programming itself (content or presentation) or a viewing situation (i.e. television’s presence in your lifeworld spaces like home, vehicle, waiting rooms, etc.).

**Subjectivity, Criticism, and Writing Form:**
Moving our critical responses into alternative frameworks of expression calls attention to a dimension of writing we may not have noticed before: how the form of an expression performs meaning. Thinking about form as performance of meaning helps bring awareness that a criticism essay is not a neutral container that holds our words, but is a strategy of expression that creates and confirms subject positions. Just as television viewing becomes coherent and meaningful to us because of our subject positions and shared cultural codes, so does reading and writing criticism.

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**Project Objective, Purpose, and Guidelines**

_Your assignment objective_ is to create a critical expression of TV’s effect(s) upon your subjectivity and write a one page rationale that explains your project.

_The purpose_ of this project is to explore how the foundational concepts of writing television criticism learned this quarter might be understood differently by putting them into play within new frameworks of expression. This postmodern criticism project involves three key questions:
1. How is my subjectivity positioned or constructed in relationship to television and mass media?

2. How might I critically respond to or represent my awareness of this subject-media relationship?

3. What media or format will best communicate my critical response?

**Your postmodern criticism project is twofold, consisting of:**

1. the alternative text (the criticism expression itself) and
2. a written rationale that explains your project’s theoretical framework and aesthetic choices.

The criticism expression’s form, media, and mode of representation are up to you. The content of the expression is up to you, however both form and content must make persuasive connections with considerations of subjectivity. For example, your project might represent your experience with a particular TV program or television’s general presence in your life. You might explore how television fits within the context of your personal media production and consumption. Your project may end up being an “answer” to questions you have about self in relationship to television, or your project may be an in-process inquiry into television’s relationship to self and culture.

**Written Rationale Guidelines:**

Your project must be accompanied by a 1 page (typed, double-spaced) discussion of the supporting rationale or theoretical concepts behind the project. In the rationale, be sure to make explicit the guiding idea you are expressing in your project, and explain your project’s connection(s) with concepts of postmodernist theories and Television Studies.

Your written rationale should include explanation of and reflection about your aesthetic choices. As you work on your project, think about how your chosen medium is shaping or influencing your understanding of the guiding idea and your response to it (reflexivity). Some questions to consider: Why did I choose this form of expression? How does this form represent my ideas about television and subjectivity? What do my project’s materials, artistic processes, or expressive actions communicate about my guiding idea? What messages or meanings (implicit or explicit) might be associated with my project’s materials, artistic processes, or expressive actions?

**How to begin:**

Creating an alternative text may feel natural and comfortable for some people. Others may find it difficult or frustrating. Both responses can be useful learning experiences that tell us something about our self and our expectations of writing, language, ideas, and expressions. If you are at a loss for how to begin, it may help you to start with basics of description, interpretation, and judgment. For example, “when I watch game shows I feel….” (list descriptive words). “I interpret these feeling as….” (write as many interpretations that seem...
plausible to you). You might also interpret your feelings through the context of race, gender, sexuality, and class issues.

**Goals of Postmodern Criticism Project:**

1. To develop and strengthen your understanding of postmodernist and modernist theoretical perspectives on history and society.
2. To expand your understanding of “texts,” “readings,” and “reflexivity” how these terms apply to postmodern television experiences as well as to the production and reception of criticism.
3. To develop your understanding of the relationship of subjectivity to the production and viewing of television and to the production and reception of written criticism.
4. To enlarge the understanding of criticism’s performative possibilities.
5. To hone your sensitivity to the form and purpose of your writing and the writing of others.

**Ideas and Suggestions**

To help get you started in your thinking about potential project ideas, here are some suggestions…

- Consider personal metaphors about television or televisual experiences. Explore linguistic associations… Look at words or phrases associated with TV (i.e. “idiot box,” “screen,” “remote,” “channel,” etc) and think about what they evoke within culture or suggest to you about experiences with television.
- Question, explore, problematize binary oppositions like absence/presence, here/there, live/recorded, fact/fiction, viewer/viewed, etc.
- Look for relationships between narrative structure in a TV program and narratives in your personal life or within culture.
- Investigate postmodern television and subjectivity through questions about modernist and postmodernist conceptualizations of history and context.
- Play with signs, signifiers associated with television… consider and critique relationships between signs and signifiers, denotations and connotations.
- Play with assumptions about the function of visual, acoustic, and linguistic codes, narratives, audience-text relationships, etc.
- Think about television’s relationship to space and time (Postmodernism’s “perpetual present”).

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• Consider the concepts of intertextuality, fragmentation and their relationship to televisual images and subjectivity.

• Explore the relationships of sound, television, and subjectivity.

• Think about simulations, simulacra, and “the real,” realisms, reality, blurring of distinctions between real and simulacra.

• Consider “the gaze” and television by exploring who looks or who is seen; trace and/or document the sightlines that establish difference and other in regard to gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, disability, age, class, etc.

**General Assessment Criteria**

**Qualities of a successful project:** There is a clear and purposeful guiding idea in the criticism alternative text and in written rationale; The application of television studies theories and concepts are sophisticated and integrated into the project’s guiding idea in both criticism expression and written rationale; Aesthetic choices are strongly connected to the criticism’s guiding idea; There is strong evidence of intellectual and creative risk taking or experimentation.

**Qualities of a less successful project:** A guiding idea is present but it is unclear or unfocused in either the criticism alternative text, the rationale, or both. Connections with television studies theories and concepts are superficial or problematic. Aesthetic choices are not clearly connected with the guiding idea; Intellectual and creative risk taking and experimentation is minimal or superficial.

**Qualities of an unsatisfactory project:** Guiding idea is absent, impeding the coherence of expression in criticism alternative text, rationale, or both. The project lacks presence of television studies theory or concepts. Aesthetic choices are haphazard or unrelated to reasoning in rationale. Lacks intellectual and creative risk taking and experimentation.

*It is assumed that any written components will be free of grammar and spelling errors.*