



Immanent Interbodies: Composing Disability through Embodied Chorography

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Available online 31 May 2019

Abstract

In this article, I argue that many praxes of composition stumble into pitfalls of ableism built into the default computer technologies that classrooms employ. Writing software and hardware writ large typically conflate the particularities of embodiment with the generality of “the body” equipped to succeed by standards of normalcy. Therefore, I propose a trajectory away from idealized interfaces, and toward immanent “interbodies,” which more fully account for embodiment’s contradictory mutabilities. Such work requires strategies for composing disability to draw attention to the embodied ways that many composition practices are performed in writing processes. Composing disability, I argue, makes our writing more like our bodies by subverting the standard use of writing technologies that construct classroom discourses. These praxes contribute to embodied chorography, which calls into question ableist pedagogies. Through wide citation of diverse scholarship and description of classroom exercises utilizing videogames and related media, this article challenges the fields’ commitment to computers and composition, and questions what versions of embodiment it finds value in.

Published by Elsevier Inc.

Keywords: Disability studies; embodiment; chorography; computers and composition; videogames

Introduction

In the motivation to turn classrooms into writing spaces, makerspaces, gamespaces, etc., we should be critical of the ways they can become ableist spaces. Are we catering to an ideal, a transcendental version of what “the body” apparently should (want to) be? Asking that hard question should make us wonder where such messages of inequality come from and what messages students in our classes receive based on the pedagogies we practice. Such messages often begin in the *Computers And prefixing Composition*. Many praxes of composition stumble into pitfalls of ableism built into the default computer technologies that classrooms employ. Writing software and hardware typically conflate the particularities of embodiment with the generality of “the body” equipped to succeed by standards of normalcy. Rather than unwittingly bow to those standards, well-meaning composition scholar-teachers should be critical of them, which requires facing how our own pedagogical uses of digital media may end up reifying rather than rattling the shape of default bodies. In this article, I propose a trajectory away from idealized interfaces and toward immanent “interbodies” that more fully account for embodiment’s contradictory mutabilities. I combine disability studies, queer

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<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compcom.2019.05.006>

8755-4615/Published by Elsevier Inc.

theory, and embodied rhetorics with Gregory L. Ulmer's concept of choragraphy in a discussion of strategies for composing disability that utilize videogames and related media.

I confess upfront that I don't propose a special topics disability studies course to accomplish my aims, in contrast to the essential work being done by important scholar-teachers such as Jay Dolmage, Shannon Walters, Melanie Yergeau, and many others. Rather, with their and others' work in mind, I examine a different approach across syllabi and curricula that advocates for the importance of embodiment, disability, and different experiences through the rhetorical study of videogames and related media. Walters reminds us that the rallying cry of disability activists is “nothing about us without us” (2014, p. 7)—so I caution that I don't diminish any of the fine, more specialized topic-focused work done in the name of disability studies, nor do I ignore those with disabilities for whom such work exists. What I do instead is establish my own unique commitment to “*resist mastery*” as queer and disability studies minded praxis (Halberstam, 2011, p. 11, original emphasis). Videogames and related media provide queer potentiality for composing disability through such resistance, given their emphases on explorations, ranges of difficulties, multiple attempts, and experiential learning through failure. The texts I discuss throughout this article range from Oulipo's constrained writing techniques to text-based interactive fiction (IF) to Twine-based hypertext narratives, intentionally non-“normal” choices that challenge what assumptions we have about what embodies a “game.”

These rhetorical artifacts enable the spirit of play inherent to Ulmer's apparatus theory of *electracy* (Holmevik, 2012). Ulmer's contribution to the fields of rhetoric and composition, computers and writing, media studies, etc. theorizes our discursive epoch after literacy, electracy: dictated and defined by digital media as literacy was by print (2003, p. xii). But Ulmer's theory and its uses are not merely mixed up in medium and message; they bear bodily consequences that can be articulated by disability studies and game pedagogy. As he claimed, “what literacy is to the analytical mind, electracy is to the affective body: a prosthesis that enhances and augments a natural or organic human potential” (“Electracy and Pedagogy,” n.d.). To best understand that body, I intentionally cite Ulmer less and less as I work my way throughout this article to situate his contribution to my own pedagogical prosthesis as more framing spark than totalizing framework. By dispersing his influence within larger discussions of disability, feminist, and queer theory, I advance what Mel Chen considers “a somewhat ‘feral’ approach to disciplinarity,” which “naturally changes the identity of what might be the proper archives for one's scholarship. . . refusing to answer whether they constitute proper or complete coverage” (2012, p. 18), a goal that Jay Timothy Dolmage might approve as part of a disability studies approach, which “cannot be a normative mission” (2014, p. 11). The wide-ranging theory I cite and games-related praxes I discuss work toward feralization and non-normativity—in order to play at, with, and beyond electracy's vision of the affective body. Computers and composition, their intersections with videogames, and the pedagogies we form around them all encounter this body, one of diverse ability. I propose a classroom practice that engages immanent interbodies to question the prostheses of electracy by composing disability through embodied choragraphy.

Toward a Composition-Made Hole

Composition scholar-teachers, as Jody Shipka has advocated, often “work. . . toward the realization of a composition made whole” (2011, p. 131), but I am more concerned with a composition-made *hole*. In this section, I first unpack the terminology that I propose can highlight and inhabit that hole. I proceed provocatively out of order from end to beginning and finally arrive in the crucial middle, defining and illustrating how embodied choragraphy and immanent interbodies are customizable concepts for composing disability. I then demonstrate a classroom episode that depicts my pedagogy according to these terms and their contextual stakes. This exercise pairs Georges Perec's novel *A Void* (1995 [1969]) with a writing activity inspired by the French poetic tradition of Oulipo as one way to choragraph through our bodies.

What's the hole in question, characterized by *chora*? Allow me to fill it in. According to Ulmer, *chora* is “a hole, a primordial gap” or, in heavier terms, “*positive immanent material nothing*” (2012, p. 166, emphasis in original). “Functionally,” we could posit “hole [a]s potentiality” (2012, p. 166)—“as the space or region in which being and becoming interacted” (2005, p. 6). Where “being” aspires to ideal transcendence of *the* body, I am more interested in “becoming,” which more immanently inhabits the real specificities of embodiment. As N. Katherine Hayles explained, “the concept of the body. . . is always normative relative to some set of criteria” whereas “embodiment is contextual, enmeshed within the specifics of place, time, physiology, and culture, which together compose enactment” (1999, p. 196). The *body* and *embodiment*, as Hayles defines them, match well in Ulmer's taxonomy with *topos* and *chora*, respectively. Ulmer argues, within electracy, that “*chora* replaces *topos* (topic, element, principle) as the mode of

organization and classification” (2005, p. 120). Where *topos* resembles the body Hayles describes, *chora*, more akin to embodiment, “gathers singular ephemeral sets of heterogeneous items based on associations of accidental details” (2005, p. 120). Thus, Ulmer defines his concept of chorography as “a way of gathering dispersed information into an unstable set. . . held together by a pattern that is the trace of understanding” (1993, p. 213). *Embodied* and *chorography* go hand in hand. What chorography accounts for in composition, embodiment does for disability and “ability, which” Walters “define[s] not as a normal or unchanging bodily state but instead as a temporary, contingent, and diverse bodily state” (2014, p. 7). Embodied chorography is my proposed way to let our writing become more like our bodies.

Based on Hayles’s differentiation, however, endorsing embodiment becomes complicated by the fact that the digital media we use interact with us by the rules of the body. What Stephanie Boluk and Patrick LeMieux suggested for videogame players, we can extend to writers—technologies (and technologized pedagogies) that “respond. . . only to the changes within [a] set of discrete values” render them “standardized. Universal control assumes a universal body” (2017, pp. 35–36). Standardized equipment is idealized equipment constructing idealized bodies through idealized assumptions of embodied user capabilities. Take, for example, standard keyboards that idealize the writing body as equipped with capable fingers not prone to hypertension, muscle strain, or related problems—or graphical user interfaces, where word processing software often resides, that assume the same writing body possesses the faculties of vision necessary to navigate them. As I assign computer games for classroom application, these same criteria apply when the writing body becomes a playing body. In facing off with interfaces that invest in the ideal, I invoke its philosophical synonym: transcendent. According to Alexander Galloway,

Under classical Kantian metaphysics, the *a priori* is the realm of the transcendentals (space, time, identity, scientific truths, and so on) and the *a posteriori* is the realm of the actuals (you, me, my thoughts, my body, this place, this world). (2014, p. 17)

How bodies work (and play), by particular rules defined by particular interfaces, could arguably rise to the level of the transcendental—but it leaves many valid versions of actual embodiment behind.

In that case, I turn to the antonym of the ideal: the immanent. Immanence means “inherently within,” and often refers to the specificities of materiality. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari perhaps most notably endorsed the immanent as that “which is necessarily perceived in its own right in the course of its construction” (1987, p. 284). Writing itself—a compositional act that *becomes* perceivable as composed through its composition—is better encapsulated by the immanent, so we shouldn’t trap our writing pedagogies in the transcendent according to idealized interfaces. In other words, writing is embodied within its writing processes, so we cannot teach that writing is “just words,” or messages that convey similar impact regardless of differentiated media. Through embodied chorography, we realize our writing is an immanent process of the writing body, not just a product input into what idealized interfaces allow.

In order to further critique idealized interfaces, I turn to Ulmer’s decoding of faces: “the face is produced only when the head ceases to be a part of the body, when it ceases to be coded by the body” (2005, p. 24). To make an interface means to disavow the full spectrum of embodiment: *this* only works like *that*. Such distinction is binary in ways that produce disability “in” negative “relation to ability” (Walters, 2014, p. 7). Through *chora*, Ulmer opts for a space out of binarization by positing a way in which “the interface becomes the interbody” (2005, p. 209). While Ulmer proposes the “interbody” almost in passing, I argue it’s time to do more with this idea to help students realize through—rather than in spite of—digital media that “bodies are not things they ‘have’ but things they ‘are’ and ‘do,’ and. . . one of the things bodies do is write” (Fox, 2013, p. 267). My conception of interbodies, as adapted from Ulmer, accounts for assemblages that form between media and user, a disability studies augmented take on Bruno Latour’s “actant” (1999, p. 180). Instead of idealized interfaces that filter fuller engagement for only an institutionally normative, privileged few, immanent interbodies open up writing for a more diversely able variety of rhetors. These don’t necessarily entail new technologies but new uses of them to level the playing field for all bodies alike, united by the only embodied quality we all have: difference.

What I call *shared difference* is the feature of all students having in common the fact they all occupy differently and unique embodied positions in our cultures and classrooms. This feature is discernible in light of Stephanie Kerschbaum’s work to advance

a new rhetoric of difference through which we can cultivate awareness of new details, interpret and reinterpret those details, and contextualize them within specific moments of writing, teaching, and learning. This perspective

complements broader identification processes and offers a means for carefully enriching those identifications through attention to the lived experiences that bring differences alive in the classroom. (2014, p. 15)

The work it takes to invest in shared difference starts with dismantling the cultural assumptions that insist “we” (a normalized “we” that erases anyone not part of that normalcy) are all the same. More inclusively, we are actually all “nonequal,” according to Casey Boyle and Nathaniel Rivers (2016, p. 32). “Nonequality,” as they understand it, “would acknowledge that difference does not differ from a substrate, but difference participates alongside all other difference”—it “accepts difference without reinscribing normativity” (Boyle & Rivers, 2016, p. 32). As extension of their concept, they propose “a practice of nonequal design” that approaches accessibility from the potentiality of difference rather than the impetus to homogenize. Nonequal design is “not. . . a way to reduce our obligations for composing accessible texts; in fact, nonequal design multiplies those obligations” (2016, p. 44). Designing classroom experiences that everyone can experience, then, may necessitate a nonequal *pedagogy* that prizes shared difference.

Delving into shared difference requires nonequal practices for composing disability to problematize practical definitions of computers and writing. Therefore, I dialogue with Yergeau’s work toward *Disabling Composition* by, in turn, composing disability. If disabling composition challenges “what we think we know about composers, composing, and composition(s)” (Yergeau, 2011, p. ii), then composing disability changes how we embody those roles. Through embodied chorography, we can compose disability by making our writing more like our bodies—especially given the fact that “everyone, even those who identify as able-bodied, will likely encounter disability in their own lives” (Walters, 2014, p. 4). Composing disability is a pedagogical proposal of shared difference that “reveal[s] new ways of valuing” diverse “embodiment in relation to rhetoric” (2014, p. 2). As Bess Fox reports, Aristotle’s “famous description of the body as the prison house of the soul. . . still influences the models of authorship that govern the composition classroom” in which students understand writing as merely intellectual (2013, p. 267). She argues instead for “messy” practices to foreground the physicality rather than the discrete textuality of writing and turns to “multimedia [to] make the writing process visceral for students” (2013, p. 267, p. 269). My praxis for calibrating multimedia toward mess enacts Walters’s concept of “identification as a partial and incomplete process that does not erase differences among people but operates in the potentials of difference” (2014, p. 3). Composing disability calls for strategies of shared difference in the composition classroom embodied most in the ways they fail. My strategies utilize videogames and related media as “avant-gardist media interventions” to challenge the unquestioned relationships writers have with their writing technologies by subverting their standardized use (Alexander & Rhodes, 2014, p. 21). Such ““queer art of failure,”” borrowed from J. Jack Halberstam, is “also ideally suited as a disability studies methodology,” according to Dolmage (2014, p. 11), thus (im)perfectly suited for embodied chorography. As I discuss hereafter, able-bodied and disabled composition students alike are invited into affective evaluation of embodiment through immanent interbodies for composing disability.

I commence with constraint in the Oulipean tradition with a disability studies twist. Oulipo, or *Ouvroir de littérature potentielle* (workshop of potential literature), is a poetic movement of mostly French writers who created works using constrained writing techniques. Such a technique is a literary ancestor to the play that embodied chorography instigates through videogames. Boluk and LeMieux tell us, “The Oulipo’s experimental practice of incorporating mathematical systems with literary production, writing under constraints, and making use of recombinatory poetics is now widely regarded as a precursor to the aesthetic strategies commonly seen in digital media production” (2017, p. 174). Therefore, a playful assignment, if not an assignment that students can play, that I often pair with a classic Oulipean text is to write lipograms as inspired by Perec’s *A Void*. Perec’s novel is famous for its lipogrammatic structure, which doesn’t contain a single use of the letter “e.” The story of *A Void* generically qualifies as a horror noir parody; it tells of a group of friends searching for their missing companion, Anton Vowl. The novel’s metatextual twist makes it highly aware of its lipogrammatic structure, for as those who search for Vowl realize the secret of his disappearance; they cannot discuss how without risk of death. In reflecting on this meta-comedic aspect, students come into contact with the fact that this novel’s story is its structure and vice versa. The takeaway: there is no textual artifact that is not somehow embodied, not more or less than its particular textual embodiment—paradoxically including our embodied interactions with it, the transaction that creates an interbody.

From there, discussion sparks writerly energy into application. Perec, in his composition process, had to tape down the “e” key on the typewriter to avoid defaulting to it. I have my students do somewhat the same and have them try to write lipograms of their own. I first encourage them to work in groups to “a void” insisting upon autonomous assessment that expects certain technological or embodied standards. I then teach them how to disable the “e” key on the

computer(s) each group chooses to work with. They then write and reflect upon the difficult physicality of this different type of writing. This exercise, contextualized by attention to embodiment and disability studies, helps students tactually reflect upon their typewriting now disabled. They come to confront it as not *writing* itself (disembodied, standardized, etc.) but a messy, embodied writing process that conditions certain types of typewriting. Students, whether they're able-bodied or disabled, fumble with the challenge to think of and then write out sentences that have no use of the letter “e”—no small task given that it's the most commonly used vowel in several languages. Students end up tempted back to “e,” realize they cannot use it, and have to delete words that aren't words, such as “mbodimnt.” A *Void* here becomes a hole (*chora*), a space of potentiality for shared difference. With this assignment, I tweak Oulipean constraint as avant-garde textual practice into subversive avenue for composing disability and render laptop keyboards from interfaces into interbodies. Such subversion better engages affective evaluation than what I call “disability drag” composition.

“Disability Drag” Composition

From 2011 to 2013, Clemson University's student disability services office held what was then an annual awareness event called Walk and Roll in My Shoes. Billed as a “Blended Immersion Experience,” the event paired variably disabled students with administrators who would simulate their partner's disability for a workday. The students served as “shadows”—according to language used in promotion for the event—who guided administrators through the disability simulation from the background. Both administrators and participating students claimed to have gotten a lot out of the experience, from better understanding of the privileges they take for granted to better feeling that their voices are heard on campus, respectively.

But neither a positive net gain nor positive spin campaign exempt this event from criticism. English faculty at Clemson, led by creative writing professor and disability activist Jillian Weise, protested the pretense that Walk and Roll in My Shoes promoted. In Weise's words, “I think that a simulation event of any kind. . .raises problems,” in that “it assumes that a nondisabled participant can understand disabilities totally and completely by wearing goggles or by wearing headphones” (qtd. in [Straumsheim, 2013](#)). She specifically critiqued the event's word choice of “shadow,” by invoking literary analysis: “We need to be more visible, and “shadow” implies a nonperson, a nonentity. . . the word “shadow” is related on a literary basis to ghost, to death” (2013). Walk and Roll in My Shoes sought understanding of disability through performance of disability, more harshly a minstrelsy of disability, which decentered actual students with disabilities. The lived experiences of the disabled became costumes for the able-bodied. No amount of good intentions managed to save the legacy of the event, having no further press since 2014. Of course, the organizers of Walk and Roll in My Shoes meant well, but they created an uphill battle for themselves by dressing discourse on Clemson's campus in “disability drag.” From campus to classroom, not only do “discourses impinge on us as fleshly bodies” ([Bordo, 1997, p. 183](#)), they further inhibit as well. In this section, I define the cultural term *disability drag*, describe the classroom practice that I call *disability drag composition*, and then work to subvert that definition for better alternative pedagogies. I then demonstrate a classroom episode that depicts disability drag composition redefined, which pairs [Emily Short's interactive fiction, Galatea \(2000\)](#), and a classroom tutorial that teaches students how to use command line interfaces.

Problematic simulation events can perpetuate in classrooms through what I call “disability drag” composition. Disability drag, “or, more accurately, ‘crip face’” was coined by disability activists to call out the Hollywood “phenomenon of able-bodied performers acting in disabled roles” ([Boluk & LeMieux, 2017, p. 137](#)). Think Daniel Day Lewis in *My Left Foot* (1989), or Al Pacino in *Scent of a Woman* (1992), or Sean Penn in *I Am Sam* (2001), or worse yet, Ben Stiller in the movie-within-the-movie meant to satirize such preceding examples, *Simple Jack*, from *Tropic Thunder* (2008), and it becomes easy to note how pervasive the practice is. But disability drag is not hermetically sealed in a Hollywood bubble; it pops out and pervades elsewhere. So, what does it have to do with classrooms and how we compose within them? I define disability drag composition as the able-bodied use of assistive literacy technologies in order to catalyze critical understanding through embodied empathy. Disability drag composition is its own kind of “blended immersion experience.” Just like Clemson's disability awareness event, disability drag composition is eventful only for the able-bodied—the focal learners of such pedagogy—while disabled *others* become “shadows” and are erased. We are not in Hollywood anymore, but someone is still performing and someone is not making the cast list when disability drag composition calls the shots.

Well-meaning teachers in well-meaning classrooms often create assignments that engage in disability drag composition. Fox and Walters, for example, have suggested and/or employed pedagogical practices “guilty” of it. Fox proposes this sample assignment she calls a “critical reflection on assistive literacy technologies”:

Students can engage the same assistive technologies used by the authors of the disability narratives they read and view in class, and they can be asked to reflect on this engagement in ways likely to increase their understanding of these technology tools as writing tools (rather than just technology tools). Engaging these technologies, which are a natural part of both the disability studies and multimedia writing classroom, can help students make critical connections between multimedia and textual literacy practices, connections that may draw attention to students’ own writing/reading bodies. (2013, p. 279).

She cites Walters as her exemplar, who “required her technical writing students in a disability studies-themed class to visit the assistive technology lab, experience many of the literacy aids. . .and reflect on these experiences in a class wiki” (2013, p. 279). But what assignments like these stage is a “conflation of involuntary disabilities with voluntary impairments” that “elides the very real differences in the embodied conditions. . .that are always in operation” (Boluk and LeMieux, 2017, p. 170). Similar pedagogical exercises include the able-bodied use of assistive literacy technologies such as ergonomic keyboards, motion sensors, and “sip and puff” systems. There’s little doubt that students could learn from simulation about the variable instantiations of embodiment. Students in Walters’s classes did, and they even “found literacy software designed to help disabled students to be incredibly useful for their own writing projects” (Fox, 2013, p. 279). Likewise, some disabled students who participated in Walk and Roll in My Shoes loved the event so much they came back even after graduating from Clemson to help with it again (Straumsheim, 2013).

But the question I have to raise here is: at what cost(*uming*)? I grant a wide spectrum of well-intentioned ideas here, acknowledging how difficult it is to practice one unproblematically. And I don’t intend scathing critique of scholar-teachers before me who have engaged in versions of what I would call disability drag composition, especially Fox and Walters, whose work I appreciate and cite. All work to advance disability studies methodologies is welcome to partake in Halberstam’s queer art of failure, which resists the normative ideologies of success that other work in our field does not (2011, p. 89). Nevertheless, some failures are better than others. “Trying on” the disabilities of an othered body by writing through the assistive technologies that embodied other needs—that’s what *others* them to begin with. We can better get in touch with variable embodiments through embodied chorography that interrogates *chora* as hole, as gap between experiences, as the place where being meets becoming—although not all beings become all becomings of being. There are experiences we, able-bodied and disabled alike, will likely cannot or ever experience, and it is from that ontological rift that we should craft our pedagogies. But rather than continue to drag disability drag composition here, I propose we reapproach drag as an alternative avenue into “alternative corporealities” (McRuer, 2004, p. 43) that unites students through difference.

Disability drag, as activists employ the term, is closer to the harsher “crip face” in definition; however, we can redefine and redress disability drag by turning to feminist and queer theory. “Crip face,” even if not malicious in portrayal, is still offensive—just like its root phrases blackface, yellowface, etc. Good intentions don’t excuse. But disability drag, though ostensibly identical in definition, suggests more ambivalence by analogizing disability to gender rather than race. In that nebulous space, disability drag composition is a practice I critique to reorient rather than outright reject (though I discourage the pedagogies discussed previously). I do so by hinging upon that loaded word “drag,” perhaps most notably taken up as a phenomenon by Judith Butler. Cultural stereotypes largely equate drag with the practice of gay men performatively dressing as women in exaggerated fashion and behavior. But drag can also encompass a variety of practices across genders and performances (e.g., drag kings). Butler suggests that gender itself “is like drag, or is drag” to point out the “‘imitation’. . . at the heart of the *heterosexual* project and its gender binarisms” (1993, p. 125, emphasis in original). In her argument, gender—like drag—is performative, on a sliding scale that does not completely equate the two. What drag performs with regard to gender is subversion, send up, and destabilization. In Butler’s words, “drag is subversive to the extent that it reflects on the imitative structure by which hegemonic gender is itself produced and disputes heterosexuality’s claim on naturalness and originality” (1993, p. 125).

Likened to “hegemonic gender” and “heterosexuality,” able-bodiedness can also claim “naturalness and originality” by being both the producer and byproduct of ableist societies. Our classrooms have the opportunity to become spaces that write outside of, rather than reify, those assumptions of able-bodiedness and ableism that come disguised in what Robert McRuer considers the “disciplinary compulsion to produce disembodied, efficient writers” (2004, p. 50)—disembodied here assuming: able-bodied. I first prepare such space with a game of emphasis: not *disability* drag,

but disability *drag* composition. Drag, as we typically understand it, performs and therefore subverts assumptions of gender, ultimately creating from within an outside positionality of liminal space between genders. Disability *drag* redefined and reemphasized can likewise perform, subvert, and create a more diverse embodiment. By invoking a different kind of disability drag as performative, subversive act, my proposed pedagogies turn writing technologies into collaborative tools for composing disability to challenge the bodily barriers built into them.

We can challenge the barriers of disability in idealized interfaces by drawing upon the historically elided potential for drag inherent to immanent interbodies. Ulmer's inspiration for the interbody stems from his incisive discussion of Alan Turing's famous Turing Test. He claimed that, "The Turing test is a point of transition from literacy into electracy" (2005, pp. 180–181). But it is not the realization of electracy; there is more to be done, and best done via chorography, the electrated third option that bends the borders of the binary truth table Turing's "imitation game" was built upon. It is hard to imagine computing beyond binarization, but we humans who interface with machines can bring about interbodies through embodied chorography. In other words, how we use our media rather than let them use us can change our available choices. The rhetorical practices for change I propose become praxes for composing disability, which celebrate the "drag" in disability *drag*. Updated from gender to disability, I endorse not a simulation of disability but a subversion of ability, a performative act at the limits of "valid" embodiment. Embodied chorography creates a space for forms of drag that call into question the binary logic of "categories of experience" that turn out to be "mutually constitutive, codependent, and unstable" (Walters, 2014, p. 3).

My students learn the value of disability *drag* composition redefined as we discuss gender and disability at play in interactive fiction. Interactive fiction (IF) is technically the first genre of videogames, as it takes advantage of the command line interface that predated the now ubiquitous graphical user interface. Combining game studies with composition studies, IF with pedagogical "what if," I create with my students a CLInterbody that subverts multimedia writing as they know it by stripping them of their more tactually motivated GUI reliance. To further my meta-compositional focus highlighting embodied chorography, I assign Short's *Galatea*, a modern reimagination of the Greek myth of Pygmalion and Galatea. Players control an attendee at a museum where Galatea—unclear whether she's a sculpture come to life, an android, or something more sinister—is the only exhibit. As opposed to the more open textual "sandbox" within which many puzzle-solving IF games occur, all action in this title takes place in one room, and action is "merely" interaction and dialogue with Galatea. Depending on the directions that players take the conversation, the game may reach over seventy different endings, many which contradict the internal logics of other ones. But all of them limit Galatea to her lone exhibit room, leaving the game ripe with potential commentary for feminist consideration and for composing disability.

In the classroom, I employ this game to flip the script on what Dolmage critiques as the prevailing misconception that "bodily difference can be eradicated by technology [that's] supposed to make the body obsolete" (2014, p. 2). Against such fantasy that technology frees us from our bodies, *Galatea* presents a story of a character tied to the technology of her own body. From there, we get to consider how we are similarly nothing without our own bodies. This disability studies reading of the game pairs well with its "disabled" writing practice. The greatest potential of IF as rhetorical artifact lies within its command line-esque mechanics, generally difficult for all students from any position of shared difference. The game only understands certain prompts composed in certain ways: it understands "ask Galatea about" but not "talk to Galatea," etc. In IF, gaming is like writing, and writing is like coding, which affords me the opportunity to teach my students about command line interfaces. They then get to experience navigating computers through a command line emulator. Students increasingly have never even heard of CLI, so this practice for composing disability performs a pedagogical intervention that teaches digital writing through media archaeological investment in "how it used to be done" and still can in new and intriguing ways. With this assignment, I teach disability methodology through difficulty and interdependence rather than correct, individual use. Haptic and cognitive frustration combine into a tactile strategy of struggle that reinforces how embodied physicality and discrete textuality meet in digital media. Interface via IF meets Interbody.

The Rules of the Game(Space)

The chance to work alongside my students with and through videogames and related media, as rhetorical artifacts that invite immanent interbodies, has best succeeded in my Writing through Media courses at the University of Florida (UF). Writing through Media is a course series within UF's Department of English that cultivates multimedia writing outside of traditional essay format. Multimedia writing, according to Fox, has the *potential* to be disability studies

praxis in and of itself since it “can make the writing process visceral for students, potentially helping them understand that their messy processes are not a product of their own inadequacy but a part of writing itself” (2013, p. 269). But that potential remains unrealized if we merely add multimedia writing to the classroom without “do[ing] the radical work of transforming models of authorship” that constrain both it and “traditional” writing (2013, p. 271). Such radical transformation requires “theorizing the embodiment of composition through disability studies or another multifaceted theoretical approach” (2013, p. 267). Theorizing further relies upon applying. Therefore, I treat my classes as what [Rebekah Shultz Colby and Richard Colby](#) call a “gamespace” that progresses through “emergent pedagogy” (2008, p. 305). But utilizing a classroom as gamespace must become more than ableist space through inclusion of disability studies praxis. In this final section, I describe the ways in which I augment the gamespace of my classroom through the disability rhetoric of *metis*. I then demonstrate a classroom episode that depicts *metis* in games-related pedagogical action. This example explores Yergeau’s conception of the “neuroqueer” as *metis* through a multipart classroom exercise that has students begin by playing [Porpentine’s *With Those We Love Alive* \(2014\)](#) and end by reflecting upon it through an ALT text image description activity.

First, what a gamespace *is meant to be* merits explanation. By way of definition, Shultz Colby and Colby propose a “transformation of the writing classroom from workspace to gamespace,” which “allows writing pedagogy to be informed by computer game theory” (2008, p. 305). Highlighting emergent games as those in which “the player explores the gamespace, creating challenges which constantly change within the context of play,” their thesis is to endorse “an emergent pedagogy [in which] teachers introduce writing principles and strategies in order to open up a studio-like space for students to work through those strategies on their own” (2008, p. 305). By highlighting games as rhetorical as well as by gaming rhetoric, the gamespace “highlights play as an important part of the writing process” (2008, p. 310). In my classes, however, play is not one-player. Revisiting Walters’s point that disability studies values “interdependence over autonomy” (2014, p. 21), I craft assignments that do not necessarily require multiplayer games to multiply collaboration with and within games. Jonathan Alexander and Jacqueline Rhodes suggest that “incorporating gaming into composition courses may not only enliven writing instruction for many of our students, but also transform our approach to literacy through a strong consideration of collaboration and interaction in multimodal composing spaces” (2014, p. 129). The “approach to literacy” they refer to may be described by game studies—what Shultz Colby and Colby call “progression gaming” or a game in which “the player follows a series of challenges that appear in a fixed, linear fashion” (2008, p. 305). Applied pedagogically, progression means “one assignment or reading leads to the next with little variety or exploration” (2008, p. 305). Whether gameplay or pedagogy, literacy via progression could be described as heteronormative and ableist.

But even emergent pedagogy suffers the same fate if students are “on their own.” Rather, in the spirit of Mary Flanagan’s [*giantJoystick*], “a ten-foot-tall working version of Atari’s classic controller,” or with LeMieux’s *Octopad*, an NES controller spread across eight with one button each, I turn my classroom into the controller, which critiques “fantasy of individual mastery or one-to-one input and output. . . [to] challenge the ableist discourse structuring the ideology of the standard metagame” ([Boluk & LeMieux, 2017, p. 37–38](#)). I utilize class instruction time as well as additional screening and workshop times appended to Writing through Media courses for group and class-wide collaboration that distribute agency across all students rather than homogenize them all into one assumptively able student *qua* respondent. *Everyone* should be able to *play* in my writing classroom.

In the gamespace beyond ableist space, I argue that videogames and related media can embody the rhetorical concept of *metis*, or “cunning and adaptive intelligence” ([Dolmage, 2014, p. 5](#)). Heralded by Dolmage and Walters as a concept perfect for disability rhetoric, *metis* is a suitably embodied choragraphic one as well. Dolmage explains that “*metis* demands a focus on embodied rhetoric and, specifically, demands a view of the body and embodied thinking as being *double and divergent*” (2014, p. 5). Against heteronormative futurity and “the forward march of logic, *metis* is characterized by sideways and backward movement” (2014, p. 5). Movement backwards and sideways feels like the cadence of a dance—choreography, which Ulmer puns upon in his choragraphy. If we consider the resonance between choragraphy and Dolmage’s description of “the action of a *metis* rhetoric” as “to layer a rich variety of meanings, array the stories that are most contested, and offer double and divergent means of engaging these stories so that readers might find their own rhythm at their own pace” (2014, p. 6), then we may come to understand choragraphy as *metis*, dancing atypically and alinearly sideways and backward. From choreo- and choragraphy to computer mechanics, here *metis* practiced as “cunning and adaptive intelligence” and *metis* expressed in embodied difference meet through strategies for composing disability with videogames. Videogames as rhetorical artifacts both require such clever thinking and often materially operate through sideways and backward movement. Players move often sideways and seemingly backwards

to explore more of the game's environments or try again after previous failed attempts. Dolmage claimed that his "*metis* historiography then wants to look like an extraordinary body: double, divergent, flawed, incomplete, surprising, in need of others" (2014, p. 8). Videogames that embody *metis* end up looking similarly like that extraordinary body, and the collaborative pedagogies I craft around them emphasize its last attribute. My assignments create ways of composing disability by emphasizing immanent interbodies' "need of others" throughout the process.

In all classroom exercises, I remind students that this need, this interdependency, occurs not only within but outside of the game. There's always more to the game than the game, more alternative corporealities, more avenues of play, even beyond the screen in a game like trans woman game developer Porpentine's *With Those We Love Alive*, created for the popular hypertext editing software Twine. As a hypertext game with primary reliance upon text and reading, it is well suited to the cultural critique I aim to make part of my writing classroom: it is already discounted from "game-ness" by players with narrow views of what constitutes a game, just like disabled bodies are discounted from human validation by the able-bodied. Porpentine herself says that, "Some people don't read my stories because they're games, and some people don't play my games because they're stories" (2012). This hybridity labeled as handicap is exactly what my pedagogies work to highlight: an avant-garde "other" way of being that challenges what we expect of games, computers, or composition itself.

The ways in which my pedagogies queer "disability drag" composition indicates my investment in videogames as avant-garde media capable of important rhetorical potential. I align myself here somewhat with the legacy of avant-garde compositionists ranging from Ulmer to Shipka to Geoffrey Sirc and others. I immerse myself in disability studies methodology that values alternative readings of videogames and related media. These *metis* alternatives work sideways and backward against the motivations of heteronormative futurity that too often agitate rhetoric and composition to insist upon constantly blazing trails that burn bridges and scorch the earth. For example, if I write about embodied approaches to videogames, then the expected criticism is that I must write about advances in augmented reality gaming—but these games often assume an able-bodied user that can reach the locales their software is augmenting. I instead work to revalue game technologies we have passed over as still important to the conversations we have about bodies and embodiment, computers and composition. My goal is to fight stubbornly forward thinking through *metis*: read against the grain sideways and backwards. A way of valuing videogames and related media in line with disability rhetoric could be to consider what Yergeau muses upon in her webtext "aut(hored)ism": as she puts it, "my own rhetoric just happens to diverge from mainstream rhetorics—but, chameleon text that I am, I can mimic other textual bodies. . . I can mold my eyes and hands (which are like pages?) and modulate my voice (which mirrors writerly voice and tone?)" (2009). Her reflection upon her experience with autism bears important claims for how to value more diverse ranges of media in the classroom as text that embodies and as text embodied that can "mimic other textual bodies" (2009). Through strategies for composing disability that bring to the forefront how enmeshed messy physicality and discrete textuality are, my classroom aspires to be an anti-ableist space for valuing videogames and related media as rhetorical artifacts well equipped to double as "autistext[s]" (Yergeau, 2017, p. 20).

What happens to immanent interbodies when human skin itself is part of gaming, playing, writing surfaces? *With Those We Love Alive* blurs the lines between screen and skin. This nondiscursive rhetorical potential embodies for gamespaces the political reality of precarious identities within them that have more "skin in the game" than the privileged and able-bodied. Porpentine's game has players not only click around to advance the narrative, but also prompts them to draw symbols (of any kind based on their own associations) on their skin in response to narrative beats. Within the textual world of the game, players take on the role of an "artificer" who makes items in service of a horrible, revolting Empress. Players feel the precarity of their avatar within a toxic culture that does not want them but will not let them go, as they exhibit symptoms of depression and PTSD and need to regularly take hormones to effect their transition. From a disability studies perspective, the game portrays a melancholic version of what Yergeau calls the "neuroqueer" (2017, p. 3). As she explained it, "autism is figured as a kind of neurological queering" and autistics are "actively antisocial, defying the bounds of multiple social fabrics [and] ultimate asocial beings, forwarding self over others" (2017, p. 26). When the game prompts players to "draw sigils of new beginnings. . . of severing. . . of shame. . . of pain," etc. (Porpentine, 2014), they physically feel an abstract, asocial connection with their created character—not quite empathizing with or "storying" upon the avatar as to normalize them but drawing the lines of shared difference on their skin (Yergeau, 2017, p. 7). When the character finally escapes their toxic culture, and the game ends, the drawn sigils remain a little longer: evidence of the immanent interbodies we became with the game.

When teaching this game, I have students reframe their drawn sigils "outside" of the screen back into it. They follow the lead of Porpentine's fans on Tumblr who upload photos of their drawings onto her Tumblr page, and turn in whatever

they drew on their skin as assignment credit for a “discussion” post. But classroom engagement does not stop there, as I then turn this game’s post-textual, imagistic composition exercise into another chance for composing disability. In a further group assignment that practices *metis*’ need for others, they then write ALT text image descriptions (meant to increase accessibility for those with visual or cognitive disabilities) of another classmate’s sigils that they drew on their own skin. This exercise teaches students about another dimension of accessibility measures as it subversively poeticizes it. As the self-drawn images are hard to concretely describe, their ALT text collaborations both “translate” the original images and turn them into textual ruminations of their own. Messy physicality and discrete textuality meet on screen, on skin, and back again. One text becomes two, as the “translations” become their own texts: autistexts. Yergeau asks,

How can we. . . transform social spaces in ways that enable those distant Others to speak back? How might we reinvent discourse on rhetoricity and intentionality and in/voluntarity and abjection in ways that are critically savvy and conscious of disabled embodiment? (2017, p. 31).

I hope this assignment and others I have proposed in my article illustrate that videogames and related media can be part of a transformation, a reinvention. My games-related pedagogies prize diverse embodiment in action by working to democratize play and perhaps likely “failing” in the process, but sideways and backwards they make their way toward something more generatively queer if not successfully clear. Emphasizing play through videogames and related media as rhetorical artifacts features failure as part of the process—the messy, physical, embodied process in conflict with standardized computers and textually discrete, mechanically arrestive code. These game-related pedagogies, the immanent interbodies we become with them, constitute creative ways for composing disability through embodied choragraphy.

Conclusion

Throughout this article, I have argued that questioning computers, composition, and computers and composition is vital to more diverse understanding of disability studies against ableist pedagogies in the classroom. That is the work of composing disability. By combining Ulmer’s work to invent electracry with a more explicitly inclusive mission to include queer, disabled visions in that invention, I advance through videogames and related media the praxes of embodied choragraphy. Rhetoric and composition and related fields can benefit from taking account of what we take for granted. Who are we forgetting? Who are we leaving out intentionally? How are the interfaces we employ, value, and proselytize helping or hurting? We must ask hard questions to more forcefully make room for all valid versions of textual and corporeal bodies that deserve attention in our classroom. What I have argued for here may not answer every one of those questions—in fact it may *fail*. I have never intended to erase difference in my pedagogies, but to celebrate shared difference. If *chora* implies a hole or gap, we should all reach in from positions that always remind of insurmountable gaps. That type of contradiction is what prompts ways for composing disability. The theories I have woven together, pedagogies I have proposed, assignments I have illustrated, and games I have played—all of them argue for an investment in immanent interbodies. We should not acquiesce to what types of bodies interfaces allow, but value all bodies as valid part of newly immanent interbodies valid within and outside of our classrooms. My embodied choragraphy aims to apply disability studies as vital to the work we, however (dis)abled, do in computers and composition.

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