PICTURING COMPOSITION:
SNAPSHOT PHOTOGRAPHY AND THE WRITING CLASSROOM

By

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

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Abstract

Picturing Composition: Snapshot Photography and the Writing Classroom

by

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What happens when students in an English Composition course use their own photographs and picture-taking experiences to inform their own writing? This is the question at the heart of this dissertation. To answer the question, I studied four of my own classes at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, a commuter college, during the 2004/2005 academic year, in which students used their own personal images as a basis for writing and also took new photographs of their neighborhoods, experiences, and rituals that helped them craft essays rich in visual and textual detail.

I witnessed my classes grow into learning communities where students would share photographs and writings of their home environments. As my students photographed and wrote of their worlds, they learned to create sophisticated texts centered on their lives, their neighborhoods, and their interests. In crafting and sharing personal essays rich in visual and textual development, these commuting students learned much about their own composing process and about each other; I in turn, as a teacher and as a reader, gained a rich understanding of my students' lives far removed from the classroom.

In chapters One and Two, I offer foundational theories from composition, photography, English literature, and anthropology to help frame the study. I examine the

creation of a student-centered classroom and the pedagogy that supports the assigning of projects in a composition class that combine students' own photographs and picture-taking experiences. In chapters Three, Four, and Five, I bring the reader into the classroom with me and discuss and give examples of three picture assignments while focusing on the pedagogical theories that placed me in the critical multipositionary nexus of teacher, observer, and researcher.

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and my wife Gail, who always keeps the lights on and the music playing.

Finally, this dissertation is dedicated to my mother Carol, someone who truly knew how to smile for the camera.

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Prelude

> If I do not love the world - if I do not love life - if I do not love people - I cannot enter into dialogue.
>
> — Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*

Inspiration: Fall 1996

It begins with a student essay.

I am teaching English 101, a required composition class at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, one of eighteen campuses of the City University of New York. As a text, the class reads weekly issues of *The New Yorker*, and among the articles we are reading this particular week is Cynthia Ozick's "A Drugstore Eden," a personal narrative in which Ozick tells of her parents' pharmacy in the Pelham Bay section of the Bronx during the Great Depression. Most important to Ozick was a garden that was constructed behind the pharmacy, which served as a haven. She asks, "Have I ever been so safe, so happy, since" (1996, 66)? Her essay is steeped in memory, but the last two paragraphs of her piece bring the reader up-to-date: "Nearly all the drugstores of the old kind are gone, in Pelham Bay and elsewhere. The Park View Pharmacy lives only in a secret Eden behind my eyes. . . . My mother's garden has returned to its beginning: a wild patch, though enclosed now by brick house after brick house" (1996, 67).

Ozick's essay is intriguing to my student Pablo, and the final two paragraphs inspire him into action. In wanting to construct his own essay in response to Ozick's memoir, Pablo explained to me he planned to revisit Ozick's neighborhood to see what transformations have been wrought in the half-century between Ozick's girlhood and the writing of the memoir. Despite all the changes that have occurred in the neighborhood, he wanted to see if he could find the site of the Park View Pharmacy, circa 1996, and Ozick's long-ago Eden.

Pablo's resulting essay, "Eden's Present," traces his journey throughout Pelham Bay in search of Ozick's childhood haunts. He asks, "What has become of this garden? Even more importantly, can I find it?" In the course of his six-page paper, Pablo writes of driving to Ozick's former neighborhood and scouring the streets in search of people who may have remembered the Park View. He writes of stopping elderly people strolling down the sidewalks, showing them Ozick's article in *The New Yorker*, and asking their assistance in finding the pharmacy. One couple remembers an old pharmacy that had since been converted to a Hallmark store. Pablo states:

> St. Paul Avenue must have been the area Ms. Ozick described as 'empty lots.' Today the neighborhood of the old Park View Pharmacy is still a quiet and cheerful place for children to grow, although not far away lays the ever-present ignominious sight of homelessness and substance addiction. . . . I am sure most people in this community are not aware that the Garden of Eden once existed in this small plot of land.

Pablo writes of the details of the territorial exploration, walking the same streets and peering into the same yards that Ozick remembers with fondness in her essay:

> Although it is fenced in by a six-foot chain link fence, one can still appreciate its kind of wilderness tone. In front of the property there are two 100 foot trees, which have shed most of their leaves that crunch as you walk over them. Fifty feet or so in is where all the bushes and plants have grown covering up the view from the street.

As a reader of Pablo’s essay, I am as immersed in his world as I imagine he has been immersed in Ozick’s. Step by step, block by block, Pablo offers written proof that he was there, and by extension in reading his piece I feel as if I am there walking the neighborhood with him. Pablo has ventured into Ozick’s former Bronx neighborhood and brought his sense of composing with him on his journey. Pablo is connecting with the original author’s intention, yet what he has created in his response is current, surprising, and completely his. After reading Pablo’s text, I feel the need to do something more than slap an *A* on the paper, return it to Pablo, and simply move on with the semester. This paper needs a larger audience.

And with this an idea comes to me: what if I were to send Ozick a copy of Pablo’s work? Might she be interested to learn a student traveled to her old Bronx neighborhood to revisit the haunts that she has written about? Before our next class, I explain to Pablo my enthusiasm for his project, and I ask his permission to forward Ozick his paper. Pablo agrees, and I mail Ozick a copy of his essay in care of *The New Yorker*.

The semester advances, filled with the kind of writing activities that percolate through freshmen composition classes across the country. There are more freewrites, more groupwork, more rough drafts, more final drafts. I check my departmental mail box thinking of Ozick and the possibility of a reply, but as the weeks pass by, I begin to think we might not hear from her. The semester ends and Pablo receives an *A* in the class, but we never receive a reply from Ozick. Perhaps Pablo’s paper never got forwarded to her from the editorial offices of the magazine. Perhaps she has been out-of-town busily engaged in her next project. Or, perhaps she read his paper but is too consumed with other work to respond.

The Spring 1997 semester begins. I walk in the department office in mid-February to check my mailbox. I flip through a few interoffice memos and solicitations from textbook publishers, and there seems to be something else. It is a small handwritten postcard addressed to me in care of the English Department of John Jay College from Cynthia Ozick. And it is the kind of response any student writer or writing teacher longs for. Ozick writes:

> How touched I am by your thoughtfulness in sending on Pablo's response to my little memoir; and how moved and amazed I am by his journeying to the very spot! He found it, of course: the Hallmark store (described in an earlier memoir, "A Drugstore in Winter" in my collection entitled *Art and Ardor*); and in coming on St. Paul Avenue he came on the very house I grew up in. The Park View was transmogrified into the Hallmark store, yes, and above it my . . . dental office.
>
> Please convey to your student my admiration for his enterprise, and my delight in his generous attention. And thank you for allowing my work to enter your classroom.
>
> With every good wish,
>
> Cynthia Ozick

Pleased by her postcard, I quickly copy the note, dig up Pablo's address, and send Ozick's note to him, thinking he might be as flattered as I am.

And seven years go by.

During those seven years, in addition to teaching writing courses at John Jay, I become a Ph.D. candidate in English at the Graduate Center of City University of New

York, and I continue working as a Contributing Editor for *Popular Photography and Imaging* magazine where I select photographic images and write text for a monthly column titled “Your Best Shot.” For the column, hundreds of readers, mainly amateurs, send me pictures each month that they consider their “best shots.” Each month I look through hundreds of snapshots of families, of friends, of neighborhoods that readers submit in consideration for publication. Through my work in selecting images for the column, I become increasingly interested in snapshot photography, which many photography critics and scholars have called part of a growing field of vernacular photography, defined as the images, taken without artifice, treasured by ordinary, uncelebrated people, the kind of personal images taken by anybody and everybody, by all of us (Zuromskis 2006; Batchen 2001).

At some point during these years of looking at thousands of readers’ snapshots for “Your Best Shot”, these years of graduate study in English, and these years of teaching various college writing courses, I think of Pablo’s paper.

And something clicks.

In 1996 Pablo had found the purpose of his essay by visiting Cynthia Ozick’s former Bronx neighborhood. In his paper, Pablo wrote in great detail of his Pelham Bay pilgrimage, and his entire essay, the one that Ozick admired “for his enterprise,” was based on formulating his composition away from the desk, away from the traditional site of composing. Pablo’s visit was the central force of the essay, and the visit made his essay unique, personal, and powerful.

The question that starts to form in my head is this: what if my current students could follow in Pablo’s proverbial footsteps, but instead of just walking around a neighborhood and taking notes they take their own pictures, their own snapshots similar to the amateur photographs featured in *Popular Photography and Imaging*, and use the photos of their visits to inform their writing? From this question a larger question emerges, one that guides this dissertation: What happens when my students' own photographs and picture-taking experiences are featured in the composition classroom?

Pilot Study: Spring 2004

I am planning the study that will take place during the 2004/2005 academic year. As part of the preparation, I create a pilot study in two of my composition classes during the Spring 2004 semester where I ask my students to photograph and write about their own "Eden's:" their own neighborhoods or former neighborhoods. The assignment calls for students to photograph what they consider "My New York," to share the photographs with classmates in workshop groups in class, to develop rough drafts of essays in response to the photographs and picture-taking experience, and to turn those rough drafts into final drafts, complete with a selection of the photographs they have taken. For students who do not have access to cameras, I am able to procure one-time-use (or disposable) cameras and processing of pictures at a large discount store. In giving the assignment, I tell my students that they will not only be sharing their written texts in class, but they will also be sharing their own images. My hope is that these commuting students, representing the five boroughs of New York City and the outlying suburban communities, can learn about each other's home communities and identities outside of the classroom and can then create written texts in response to the assignment that are meaningful to them.

Students spend a week taking pictures, then return the cameras to class. The next class is a picture class; the students sit in groups of five with their recently-taken pictures in front of them, and the conversations begin. I go from group to group looking at pictures and listening to students respond to each other's images. These photographs and memories of photo taking experiences will lead to essays where students write of *their* New York City, whether of neighborhoods, schoolyards, hallways, or gardens.

Here are some snapshots of the group discussions where students first introduce their photos and ideas for writing with their groupmates.

Among the pictures that Chris has taken are shots of the hallway outside his apartment in his building in the projects. Chris is showing the group a 4x6 snapshot and talking about the hallway he remembers as a kid, putting up a little basketball hoop over an archway and playing different games with his friends. He explains that there was no park nearby so the hallway served a purpose far beyond the entranceway to an apartment.

Patty has taken pictures at her friend's grandmother's funeral. Her friend was "let out" of jail a few hours before, ten blocks from the cemetery, to attend the funeral. She explains to her group that he had been locked up for two years and that he was "shocked at what he saw," once he was released. There were so many changes in the neighborhood. She explains further that he had a time limit; he was furloughed for just a few hours and had to report back to the bus returning him to prison at a certain time. When a groupmate asks about how she could use the photos or the picture-taking experience in her essay, Patty responds that she may look at the pictures and use them as inspiration. She explains she may write a piece on the neighborhood from her friend's perspective, a resident returning after a prolonged absence, not by his own choosing.

Prison life also informs the photograph that Daphne shows to her group. She has a snapshot of her father taken on a Bronx street outside their apartment. She tells her group that this is one of the rare times her father has ventured outside. He’s been in jail for most of her life for dealing drugs. While he was dealing when she was younger, she explains, times were good: she and her sister had new “Timbs” (Timberland shoes) every three days, and they had every material thing they wanted. However, after he was arrested and jailed, everything changed. As she further discusses the picture of him, Daphne explains that her dad had recently been released, but that he still acts like he’s “inside,” sitting around the apartment all day watching television, only going outside for a minute to catch a smoke. As I watch the interaction between Daphne and her groupmates, I notice that the more Daphne talks about the picture, and the more questions her groupmates ask, the more detail she starts bringing into her verbal responses. And the group becomes more and more entranced with her stories.

Joe lives next to the old elementary school that he attended nearly a decade ago. In fact, he tells his group he parks his car on the school’s grounds every night, but that he never really “saw it” [the school] before this assignment. He explains that when he visited the school with his camera in hand he “saw” the front stoop and photographed it, and in the photo composing process the whole essay came to him. He suddenly remembers his first kiss on this very stoop when he was in third grade. He thought of the kiss, the girl, the other kids, an entire narrative he had not thought of in years.

Hongyan not only shares her photos, but shares a piece she had written with these photos in mind of the condo where she lives in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn:

> The special feeling that it gives me makes me love this building most. I love it because one of the units in this building is the first property that I have owned in America. I love it because it is the first time I began to call a place "home." I love it because it is the first time that I do not need to pay rent. I love it because it is the first time that I can send a picture to my mother and tell her, "Mom, this is my condo. I own it." I love it because it is the first time in America that I can really show something and prove something. This condo is a mark for my efforts spent in the past seven years in America, and it is also a new start that indicates my gradual realization of my American dreams.

In observing these groups, in looking at the photos the students had taken, in listening to their stories and their writing, I realize that something important is happening. The photographs the students have taken allow them to relate details of the pictures, and the images give the other members of the group, the viewers of the photograph, something tangible to which they can respond. The students' own worlds, their buildings, neighborhoods, schools, family and friends, become *acknowledged* in the classroom as important subjects worthy of discussion and writing.

My interest in students' own picture-taking and use of pictures in the writing classroom fueled this dissertation study that took place during the 2004/2005 academic year, which I refer to throughout this dissertation as "The Picturing Year." My 2004/2005 students began by bringing their own important photos into the classroom, photos of graduation, of school trips, of family get-togethers, of childhood shenanigans, and then used the images as a basis for writing. As the semester progressed, they took new photos of their neighborhoods, experiences, and rituals that helped them craft essays rich in visual and textual detail. I saw my classes grow into learning communities where students would share photographs and writings of their home worlds. As my students photographed and wrote of their worlds, they learned to create sophisticated texts centered on their lives, their neighborhoods, and their interests. In crafting and sharing personal essays rich in visual and textual development, these commuting students learned much about their own composing processes and about each other; and I in turn, as a teacher and as a reader, gained a rich understanding of my students' lives far removed from the classroom.

What began as a seed in 1996, a John Jay College student's original response to a *New Yorker* essay, has bloomed for me into a metaphorical garden. It's a garden nurtured by my own appreciation of snapshot photography and the fact that *anyone* can take pictures rich in meaning. It's a garden nurtured by years of teaching and study in composition and liberatory pedagogy, and the vital sense that our students' lives truly matter, that their voices must be heard and respected in the classroom, as shown in Chapter One. It is a garden framed in Chapter Two by ethnographic theory, which allows me to center the classroom work that occurred during the 2004/2005 academic year in the heart of the study. And the garden itself, realized in chapters Three, Four, and Five, is an educational site where students' own words and images shine. It is a garden of words and images that expands beyond the walls of the composition classroom: its tendrils stretch geographical distances, out into students' home neighborhoods of the Bronx, Queens, Brooklyn, Manhattan, Staten Island and far-reaching suburbs, where students compose with words and photographs and bring these home identities to the forefront of the classroom.

***

Though photographs are not featured in “A Drugstore Eden,” photography has long been a subject of great interest for Ozick. In an introduction to Ozick’s short story “Shots,” editor Jane M. Rabb discusses the impact that photography has had on Ozick’s writing:

> Ozick, always sensitive to the photograph’s ability to reveal things both seen and unseen . . . often uses camera images in her writing. Photographs, usually real but sometimes imaginary, appear as important symbols in many of her short stories, like the ones in “Freud’s Room,” and as evocative objects in some of her finest critical essays, like the ones about Edith Wharton as well as Virginia and Leonard Woolf. This fascination with pictures may have resulted because, as Ozick admitted, she had spent “more time drowning in old photographs in biographies than in the text” (1998, 253).

In 1996, Cynthia Ozick welcomed readers of *The New Yorker* to her personal Eden in the Bronx. In this dissertation I present what happens when students at an urban commuting college allow their own photographs and writing to jointly illustrate, inform, and celebrate their own Edens, their own important worlds and identities.

Methodology Notes

I taught two sections of English 101 during the Fall 2004 semester and two during the Spring 2005 semester. These were morning and afternoon classes that met for seventy-five minutes each, twice a week. The classes followed the same syllabus; all class members were given the same assignments. To avoid the confusion of jumping between the classes in this dissertation, I have written this text so that it reads as if all classroom activities took place within one class.

I refer to students by first names only. In cases where students have the same first name as other students, I invented pseudonyms.

Student photos of places and spaces, which were taken exclusively for the classroom assignments of *My New Yo*rk and *A Day in the Life*, illustrate chapters Four, Five, and Six. To protect the anonymity of the students and their families and friends, I did not reproduce the snapshots that they brought to class from their own collections and submitted for *Pictures on My Wall*, which I discuss in Chapter Three.

In addition, I did not edit student work. For some students, however, I corrected surface errors (including spelling, punctuation, and usage) so as not to draw undue attention to student error.

To facilitate the picture-taking aspect of the photo/writing assignments during the 2004/2005 academic year, I incurred all costs of purchasing one-time use cameras and film processing for students who did not have access to cameras.

Chapter One

Composition Becomes Visual: Connections of Practice

> The lover's photograph hidden in a married woman's wallet, the poster photograph of a rock star tacked up over an adolescent's bed, the campaign-button image of a politician's face pinned on a voter's coat, the snapshots of a cabdriver's children clipped to the visor – all such talismanic uses of photographs express a feeling both sentimental and implicitly magical: they are attempts to contact or lay claim to another reality.
>
> — Susan Sontag, *On Photography*

Photographs, Picture-Taking, and the Sites of Composition

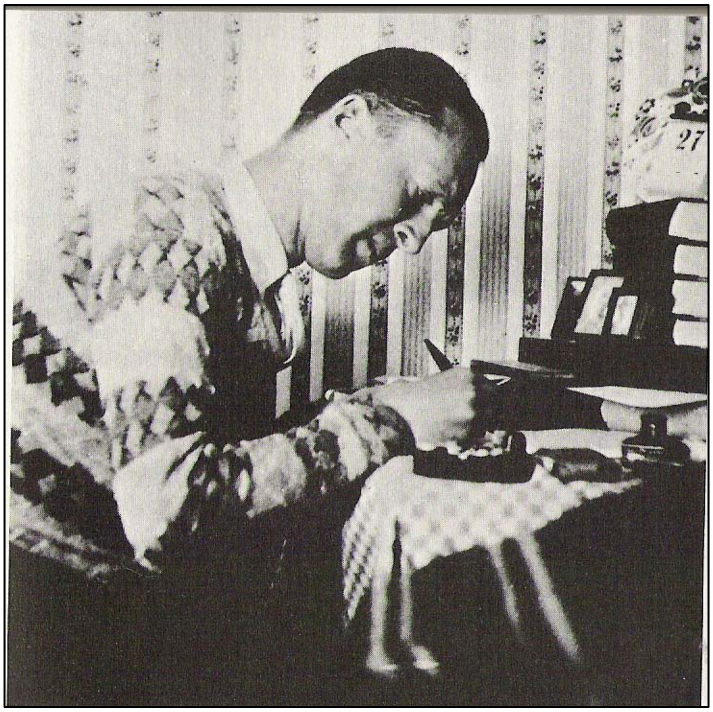

Figure 1.1. Vladimir Nabokov, "in the act of writing a novel" (257).

The image of Vladimir Nabokov (figure 1.1) hunched over a desk with pen in hand, taken in early 1929 at the Établissement Thermal at Le Boulou in the East Pyrenees, is published in his 1951 autobiography *Speak, Memory.* Twenty photographs illustrate the text, eight featuring Nabokov himself. The East Pyrenees portrait, taken by his wife, is important in that it illustrates the writer writing. The photograph itself is not central to the memoir; in fact, the only discussion of the image occurs in the lengthy caption that accompanies it (which, at 267 words, is the longest caption in the book). In the caption, Nabokov writes of the image: “My wife took, unnoticed, this picture, unposed, of me in the act of writing a novel in our hotel room” (1989, 257). Nabokov lists details in the snapshot that give the image personal significance to him over twenty years later: “A half-empty package of Gauloises cigarettes can be made out between the ink bottle and an overfull ashtray. Family photos are propped against the four volumes of Dahl’s Russian dictionary” (1989, 257). In the concluding sentence to the first paragraph of the caption, Nabokov writes, “Seldom does a casual snapshot compendiate a life so precisely” (1989, 257).

Though there are many details on his desk that Nabokov mentions in the caption, the framed family photos are of the greatest interest to me. What the effect of looking at family photos had on Nabokov in “the act of writing a novel” is not known, but one could think of Sontag and the “talismanic” qualities that important personal photographs have on the viewer. For the person viewing the familial snapshot, the pictured presence of loved ones can cause an emotional response, because, as Barthes informs us, “something has posed in front of the tiny hole and has remained there forever” (1981, 78). We can imagine Nabokov raising his eyes from the writing task, looking at the family portraits arranged inches away from him, and returning to his writing informed in some way by the familial viewing that is a “powerful, if slippery and often deceptive, instrument of cultural dialogue and cultural memory” (M. Hirsch 1997, xiii). This image of Nabokov composing serves as an iconic representation for this dissertation: a snapshot of a writer writing with personal photographs in his eyes' view.

In her book exploring early twentieth-century Kodak advertising, Nancy Martha West writes of a Kodak advertising campaign during World War I called "Let Kodak Keep the Story." The campaign tried to show that photographs could organize personal experience into narrative, and that photographs could offer a "more effective means of recording, remembering, and interpreting events than a consumer's own fallible memory" (2000, 16). The idea that personal photographs or snapshots can tell stories and trigger memories is as relevant as ever, as evident in Nabokov's comments about his East Pyrenees portrait. The personal snapshot has become the basis of most people's photographic experience, "both of taking photographs and of saturating themselves within a photographic history of their own making" (Clarke 1997, 218). In this dissertation study, I am interested to see how personal snapshots and picture-taking experiences could inspire my John Jay College students to create essays rich in word and image.

As I explain in Chapter Two, during "The Picturing Year" my students composed three textual/pictorial papers. The first assignment *Pictures on My Wall*, which I illustrate with student examples in Chapter Three, focused on personal snapshots that the students treasured; since they worked with photographs they already had, students wrote at traditional sites of composition, their desks, and like Nabokov were surrounded by their important snapshots as they composed the papers. As I illustrate with student examples in chapters Four and Five, the sites of composing expanded with the next two assignments. In *My New York* and *A Day in the Life*, students left their desks and ventured out to the streets of their neighborhoods, their parks, their workplaces, and their subways and buses to take photographs of and in these places. For these two assignments, many students found inspiration and compositional ideas for writing in the act of photographing the places that they visited; the actual writing in response to the photos and picture-taking experiences occurred at a later date when the students composed textual essays at their desks.

At their sites of writing, twenty-first-century college students may be multitasking, engaging in what Henry Jenkins refers to as “media convergence” (16): conversing via instant messages (IMs); looking at pictures and commenting on profiles and blogs on MySpace, Facebook, or Xanga (blogging and social networking sites); watching videos streamed on Google Video or YouTube, all while writing their college English papers. I imagine today’s college students taking for granted “the interplay between bodies, screens, and documents” (Fishman et al. 2005, 246) as they go back and forth from screen to screen and task to task, and I contrast this mental image with Nabokov, generations earlier, writing with family snapshots inches from his authorial gaze. Yes, technology has altered the sites of writing, but personal snapshots continue to inspire, and it is my interest in this dissertation to see how personal photographs and picture-taking experiences can be performative tools used to help inspire writing and community-building in my twenty-first-century urban commuter college classroom.

Composition and the "Increasing Copresence" of the Image

What one *does* with the visual has historically been a contentious point in composition studies. Although we are part of a culture "increasingly shaped by photographic images" (M. Hirsch 1997, 14), students generally know that in school, communication means writing (Mullin 1998, 116). Lester Faigley writes that "even after a century and a half of saturation with mass-market image technologies, the heritage of alphabetic literacy . . . still dominates within the academy and in literacy instruction" (1999, 188). In English departments, articulate communication has always implied verbal communication; the printed word has always trumped the image (see Faigley 1999; Hobson 1998; Mullin 1998; S. Williams 2001). Visual communication has been viewed as the "domain of a very small elite of specialists" or seen as a non-sophisticated (i.e. childish) stage that one should grow out of as one becomes more sophisticated (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996, 16). Rarely are students, particularly first-year college students, asked to "compose anything except verbal texts about what type of text they 'read'" (S. Williams 2001, 23). Much current classroom practice in the field is still focused solely on textual literacy and the idea that words beget words.

In the academy, the role of visuals is tenuous; however, in elementary school settings, visuals have a paramount role in pedagogy. Before children learn to recognize printed words and translate them into meaning, they recognize images and translate them into meaning. The prominence of the visual is made clear in John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* in which the first two paragraphs of are printed directly on the book's cover:

> Seeing comes before words. The child looks and recognizes before it can speak.

> But there is also another sense in which seeing comes before words. It is seeing which establishes our place in the surrounding world; we explain that world with words, but words can never undo the fact that we are surrounded by it. The relation between what we see and what we know is never settled.

Though English classes focus largely on the teaching and learning of verbal rhetoric, the visual has become an “increasing copresence” (Fortune 2005, 51) in composition studies, a conclusion reached in part from the prodigious array of composition anthologies currently available that collect essays and images for students to read and respond to including, among others, *Seeing and Writing 2* (McQuade and McQuade 2003); *Ways of Reading Words and Images* (Bartholomae and Petrosky 2003); *Picturing Texts* (Faigley et al. 2004); *Frames of Mind*: *A Rhetorical Reader with Occasions for Writing* (DiYanni and Hoy II 2004); *Writing in a Visual Age* (Odell and Katz 2005); and *ReMix: Reading and Composing Culture* (Latterell 2005). Many of these anthologies are lavish with sophisticated layouts of text and image, full color reproductions of illustrations, paintings, and photographs, with pages printed on thick, glossy paper. To co-opt a popular advertising line, these are not your father’s composition anthologies.

Looking through a selection of visual anthologies, one can respond with a mixture of awe and perplexity. Though the proliferation of these collections shows that composition is “engaged in fashioning a response to visual culture,” there remains a great deal of uncertainty about the role of the visual in writing courses (N. Reynolds 1998, 64). Charles A. Hill writes, “There is nothing even approaching a consensus about what types of visuals should be used in writing classrooms or exactly what students should be doing with them" (2004, 115). Hill suggests a pedagogy where students read the visual world around them, and then have the opportunity to learn about design in the classroom in order to create more graphically sophisticated texts. He concludes, "Ignoring graphics and visual design elements in writing classes, even in first-year composition, is quickly becoming anachronistic" (2004, 127).

The results of the Pew Internet and American Life Project (2005) on teenagers and online use underscore this point. The study finds that 57% of online teens, or about twelve million youths, create content for the internet, which includes writing blogs, creating work on a personal webpage, and sharing original content "such as artwork, photos, stories, or videos online" (2005, i). One of the findings of the study is not surprising:

> Today's online teens live in a world filled with self-authored, customized, and on-demand content, much of which is easily replicated, manipulated, and redistributable. The internet and digital publishing technologies have given them the tools to create, remix, and share content on a scale that had previously only been accessible to the professional gatekeepers of broadcast, print, and recorded media outlets. (2005, 1)

As the Pew Internet and American Life Project shows, teenagers are comfortable and confident in composing on the blank screen, creating meaning on a variety of platforms, including their own video games, web sites, and blogs. This occurs when people take the raw tools that media provides them and construct something new (Jenkins 2006, 17). This blossoming sense of creativity, fueled by technology, has not gone unnoticed by compositionists. Diana George writes that "many [students] have worked in the realm of the visual (or the virtual) as constitutive of composing texts of all sorts years before they get to their first-year composition course" (2002, 27). The convergence of visual and verbal texts happens throughout our students' lives outside the academy where content flows "across media platforms" (Jenkins 2006, 282). As George concludes, students' future work in composition classes needs to include the visual, "not as attendant to the verbal but as complex communication intricately related to the world around them" (2002, 32).

The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) has been active in responding to this changing landscape in English studies. Since the mid 1970s the NCTE has issued position statements in response to the changing nature of media and visuals in the English classroom. The early statement, "On Promoting Media Literacy," was drafted in 1975 "out of awareness among educators that understanding the new media and using them constructively and creatively actually required a new form of literacy - new critical abilities 'in *reading, listening, viewing, and thinking'* . . ." (italics mine). However, it wasn't until 1996 that the NCTE put into official language that students could *create* meaning with nonprint texts. The position statement, issued from NCTE's annual business meeting in 1996, was in response to growing concerns within the field about the often continued uneasy intersection between the visual and the textual. It reads:

> To participate in a global society, we continue to extend our ways of communicating. Viewing and visually representing (defined in the NCTE/IRA *Standards for the English Language Arts*) are a part of our growing consciousness of how people gather and share information. Teachers and students need to expand their appreciation of the power of print and nonprint texts. Teachers

> should guide students in constructing meaning through creating and viewing nonprint texts. ("On Viewing and Visually Representing as Forms of Literacy")

In reading the 1996 position statement, it is significant that the resolution calls for students to not only understand visual (nonprint) texts but to become producers of them as well. This was reinforced in the NCTE's 2003 position statement, "On Composing with Nonprint Media." The NCTE provided background to the statement, which pointed out that students are composing in nonprint media "that can include any combination of visual art, motion (video and film), graphics, text, and sound - all of which are frequently written and read in nonlinear fashion. . . . With multiple opportunities for student expression in the English language arts classroom, these nonprint media offer new realms for teachers of composition." However, a year before the 2003 policy statement, George writes that, "only rarely does that call address students as producers as well as consumers or critics of the visual" (2002, 13-14).

Though the NCTE's 1996 position statement encouraged teachers to "guide students in constructing meaning through creating and viewing nonprint texts," change has occurred slowly. Concurring with George's point, Steve Westbrook writes in a May 2006 *College English* article that, "to 'do' visual rhetoric in composition too often means *not* to work with students on authoring multimedia visual texts that combine words and images but, rather, to work on critically reading visual artifacts and demonstrating this critical reading through the evidence of a print essay" (460). The anomaly persists. Outside the classroom, our students are creating and consuming media throughout their lives, though in composition classes we are largely asking them to respond to written texts with more writing. In an age of unprecedented technological advancement, the writing we require tends to follow the current-traditional model: five paragraph, two-page responses. As James A. Berlin notes, the current-traditional paradigm has been “the most pervasive” rhetoric of the past hundred years, “making it impossible for [teachers] to conceive of the discipline in any other way” (1985, 9).

Even a cursory look at a selection of currently-available composition readers that employ visual communication shows that most of the assignments offered from these readers ask students to respond to the visual only with the textual; rarely do they ask students to come up with visual responses. Instead the assignments ask for textual essays to be written in response to featured illustrations, ads, photographs, and paintings, some obscure and some canonical. Westbrook examined ten of what he considered the most popular textbooks concerned with visual rhetoric, *Beyond Words* (Ruszkiewicz et al. 2005); *Seeing and Writing 2* (McQuade and McQuade, 2003); *Frames of Mind* (DiYanni and Hoy II, 2004); *Picturing Texts* (Faigley et al. 2004); *Practices of Looking* (Sturken and Cartwright 2001); *Ways of Reading Words and Images* (Bartholomae and Petrosky 2003); *Everything’s an Argument* (Lunsford and Ruszkiewicz 2004); *Reading Culture* (George and Trimbur 2001); *Writing in a Visual Age* (Odell and Katz 2005); and *Designing Writing* (Palmquist 2005), and found that of the 2,620 writing prompts that the authors gave, only 143, or approximately five percent, asked students to engage in their own visual production in response to the assignment (2006, 461-462). Westbrook’s conclusions are that most of these collections “position students as consumers of visual rhetoric” to the detriment of allowing them to develop their own sense of visual communication (2006, 462-463). The end result of this, Westbrook finds, is “although we may demonstrate increasing interest in ‘the visual,’ we maintain a tendency to treat visual texts as if others will always be producing them while we and our students fulfill the role of viewer and respondent" (2006, 469).

This tendency may be slowly changing with the increased awareness of what Jenkins calls a "participatory culture," where new content is created by participating media users, as opposed to a more passive notion of media viewing (2006, 3). Relating participatory culture to pedagogy, Westbrook posits that by encouraging students to respond visually, their "activities . . . position them not simply as *viewers* of culture (and its evolution) but as *participants* in the continual re-creation of this culture" (2006, 466).

According to Westbrook, we need to help our students become creators in this "re-creation," not simply consumers. Applying Jenkins' theories of convergence culture to my classroom practice, I asked my students to mix their own writing and their own images, and as I illustrate in Chapter Five, my students designed texts where selections of their own images were inserted to help illustrate their textual essays. Students should be responsible for the generation of both visual and textual information, because becoming familiar "with the full range of communicative modes . . . [is] paramount for literacy now" (Hill 2004, 230). Encouraging visual composition as well as textual creation in the composition classroom reinforces practices many students are engaged in *outside* of academia.

Foundational Teaching Ideas and the Creation of a Classroom Community

Throughout the "The Picturing Year," I gleaned new meaning from a tired cliché: a picture can inspire many, many words. My English 101 students created texts informed by and illustrated with their own chosen images, centered on their knowledge, identities, and experiences. As I explain in Chapter Two, students first created texts in response to personal snapshots for *Pictures on my Wall*, and then photographed in and around their homes and neighborhoods to inspire and inform two other assignments, *My New York* and *A Day in the Life*. In chapters Three, Four, and Five, I use examples of their work in response to these assignments in answering the following questions: What happens when composition students in an urban commuter college examine their lives and their worlds using their own photography to help inform their writing? What kind of classroom community results? What kind of texts do the students create?

It was important for me to first establish a classroom culture that would enable students to use their own photographs and picture-taking experiences to explore meaning in their written work A student-centered classroom is a foundational teaching practice in composition that goes back to the nineteenth-century and one that is central to my study. A student-centered classroom is a site where students' own knowledge and experiences are valued by all in attendance, students and instructor; a site where "the teacher doesn't assume…that he or she owns the truth. Rather the students bring their own truths, and the teacher's role is to nurture change and growth as students encounter individual differences" (Hairston 1997, 673). Theory that acknowledges and validates the experiences and knowledge that students bring into the classroom finds its antecedent in the work of John Dewey, whose importance "has long been recognized in the field of composition" (Crick 2003, 258). Sharon Crowley reports that Dewey's influence in Freshman English, introduced in a "wide scale" movement during the 1940s, fell out of favor during World War II and the post-war years that followed, but has since inspired a new generation of composition theorists beginning with the advent of process pedagogy in the 1970s (1998, 164). Dewey theorized that the world of the student is paramount and should be valued by educators. Dewey’s words, written over a hundred years ago, remain vital: “From the standpoint of the child, the great waste in the school comes from his inability to utilize the experiences he gets outside the school in any complete and free way within the school itself; while, on the other hand, he is unable to apply in daily life what he is learning in school. That is the isolation of the school – its isolation from life” ([1902] 1956, 75). With Dewey in mind, I encouraged my students to bring their out-of-school experiences into the classroom through photography as a way to create a classroom centered on student meaning-making.

Dewey, writing in the early days of the twentieth-century, showed us that education is not a one-way pipeline from student to teacher where students are told by a teacher what knowledge is, but instead is a process where students become active agents in the construction of their own knowledge. Dewey’s foundational ideas inform contemporary composition theorists such as Linda Brodkey, who explores the importance of students examining their “subjective experience and the relevance of that experience” in the classroom (1996, 80). If this doesn’t happen, she writes, the written work they produce will be “in isolation from the very conditions that justify writing and learning to write” (1996, 80). Dewey posited that the previous knowledge that students bring into school, the experiences of their lives, should be stressed in the classroom; for Dewey it was imperative that the act of learning become intertwined with the student’s own life. Quoting from Dewey’s *Democracy and Education*, Nathan Crick states that “for Dewey, education is not about just acquiring information; rather it is ‘the inclination to learn from life itself and to make the conditions of life such that all will learn in the process of living is the finest product of schooling'" (2003, 267).

Ann George writes that Dewey "pioneered experiential, student-centered learning that aims to integrate education with home and public life as well as develop the 'free and equitable intercourse' and hence the shared interests essential for communal life" (2001, 97). I cannot help but think of the promise and hope inherent in the teachings of Dewey when I see new student faces in the beginning of the semester. But that promise and hope, inspired by Dewey's teachings, are tempered by the reality of what many of my students have experienced in their previous English classes. Students in freshman composition have already gone through, at minimum, thirteen years of schooling before they sit in our desks and face us at the beginning of a new semester. And for some, those years have hardened them into complacency, or something worse. For some students, freshman composition might be a continuation of the frustrating, uninteresting English courses that have come before. Mike Rose laments on what previous educational experience has "taught" his students:

> They open their textbooks and see once again the familiar and impenetrable formulas and diagrams and terms that have stumped them for years. There is no excitement here. *No* excitement. Regardless of what the teacher says, this is not a new challenge. There is, rather, embarrassment and frustration, and, not surprisingly, some anger in being reminded once again of long-standing inadequacies. (1989, 31)

These inadequacies that Rose writes of can beget further inadequacies; if a student is always reminded of what he lacks, there is no surprise when he produces work that the instructor deems sub-standard, and the instructor responds accordingly. In giving examples of some unfortunate pedagogical practices that she sees occurring around her, Patricia A. Sullivan finds that “students are defined by what they lack,” and that this “lack” is what the academy sees and judges: “They lack the status of speaking, knowing subjects. Whatever they write, however they write it, their writing has no intrinsic value or social import” (2003, 45). Ira Shor, drawing on Dewey, sees a cause of this viewpoint that Sullivan writes of: “The liquidation of [students’] interests from academics serves to liquidate academic life from their interests” (1980, 104). Shor goes on to explain that cognitive skills “will be developed through a problematic examination of a real context, drawn from student life” (1980, 104).

In *When Students Have Power: Negotiating Authority in a Critical Pedagogy,* Shor also laments the damage that previous educators have wrought. He writes of a first-day of class at the onset of a new semester at the College of Staten Island where he teaches, and the affected presence of those students that populate the seats in the back and far corners of his classroom: “They know me before they meet me. They have met me every year before we arrived in this basement chamber. They met my prototypes and precursors in the classrooms they already attended. Before I even say a word, they expect the teacher to be a unilateral authority” (1996, 16).

Commuting students lead complex lives: they have school identities, home identities, social identities, and work identities. Their time in school is sandwiched between many other pressing responsibilities. As I illustrate throughout this dissertation, I looked to counter this isolation by creating a classroom community where these commuting students felt comfortable with each other and with me, where mutual respect and interest were established and where student work could shine. I began the first day of classes in both the fall and spring semesters with introductory exercises in which students interviewed each other and then introduced their partners to the class. These exercises helped establish a sense that the classes would be active, and that the students' lives and experiences would be at the forefront, the kind of pedagogical activities that help in "building the foundation for the course we are to teach" (Sullivan 1993, 23).

Architectural theorists Lydia H. Schneekloth and Robert G. Shibley write of *placemaking* as practices that "transform the places in which we find ourselves into places in which we live" (1995, 1). Schneekloth and Shibley's work focuses on the site itself, the people who inhabit the space, and the relationships people develop between themselves and the space as crucial components toward placemaking. In establishing a classroom community during "The Picturing Year," Schneekloth and Shibley's construct of placemaking is important: as long as participants remain committed to each other and their shared space, physical and dialogic, the relationship should work.

As I explain in Chapter Three, groupwork played a large role in placemaking, in establishing a classroom community that valued the ideas and expression of students. I wanted to create a classroom that felt like a site of "cultural generosity, where students are honored by having their own histories and cultures recognized in the classroom and the curriculum" (Bleich 1995, 48-49). Successful groupwork decenters the classroom; students teach each other and learn from each other. In *The Rustle of Language,* Barthes writes of decentered learning situations, where "horizontal transferences" take place, not from teacher to student, but between the different members (1986, 233). For Barthes, as for many in the field of composition who are practitioners of groupwork, the "teaching relation" is not the relation of "teacher to taught, but the relation of those taught to each other" (1986, 233). The space that my students and I inhabited during "The Picturing Year" was an active one; by establishing a decentered classroom community, I created a place where students learned from and listened to each other, and a place where I learned from and listened to them.

Finding Material within One's Life: Personal Experience as Evidence

The progressive education movement of the early 1960s was defined by theorists such as Ken Macrorie, Peter Elbow, Janet Emig, and James Britton who formalized critical responses to "useless and meaningless" nonpersonal writing assignments. (Connors 1997, 326). Progressive ideas blossomed from the 70s through the early 80s, and Elbow's *Writing Without Teachers* (1973) and *Writing With Power*: *Techniques for Mastering the Writing Process* (1981) were hugely influential. Acting as an enthusiastic writing coach, Elbow advised writers to take chances with their writing: "Go for it, take the plunge, jump over the edge. You won't know where you are going. You will write much that is terrible. . . . But you will get rewards. You will get lots of feedback and it will be interesting" (1981, 302). Even though the process approach, particularly its emphasis on expressivism, has been lauded by "huge numbers" of writing teachers, in recent years it has frequently been dismissed in scholarly books, articles and conference presentations (Tobin 2001, 7). The debate in composition continues forty years later between "honest, personal writing," championed by expressivists, and "writing that gets the world's work done," assigned by proponents of traditional academic discourse (Connors 1997, 327). As theories of process have given way to post-process, critics such as Gary Olson and Thomas Kent complain that process scholars “are attempting to systematize something that simply is not susceptible to systemization” (Olson 1999, 8).

As a scholar *and* a teacher, the debate about process and post-process approaches helps inform my work; I have learned not to make any infallible conclusions of my own study because writing is “radically contingent, radically situational” (Olson 1999, 9). But I find myself drawn to the writings of leading theorists of the process movement in forming a pedagogical basis of my work.

In his celebrated essay “Teach Writing as a Process Not Product,” Donald Murray discusses ten implications of teaching process that should occur in the composition classroom. The ten items are all important, but I find his second implication especially applicable to my work. Murray writes: “The student finds his own subject. It is not the job of the teacher to legislate the student’s truth. It is the responsibility of the student to explore his own world with his own language, to discover his own meaning. The teacher supports but does not direct this expedition to the student’s truth” ([1972] 1997, 5). In *Learning by Teaching*, Murray writes of the vital importance of the teacher to respect student work and student knowledge, and he writes of ways that Freshman English “can be given respect.” He suggests that, “Students pick the subjects for most papers so they can write from a position of authority, teaching the subject to the instructor as the instructor teaches them to write” (1982, 177).

This reciprocity, the exchange of knowledge from student to teacher, is an important tenet of Paulo Freire’s theories as well: “Education must begin with the solution of the teacher-student contradiction, by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers and students” (Freire [1970] 1998, 53). Freire is responding to and against the “banking concept” in education, where knowledge is given by the teacher and “deposited” into the students, where the teacher knows, acts, and talks, and the students passively listen. In Freire’s pedagogy, it is important for students “to come to feel like masters of their thinking by discussing the thinking and views of the world explicitly or implicitly manifest in their own suggestions and those of their comrades” ([1970] 1998, 105).

Expressivist pedagogy, one that privileges the students’ authentic voice and grants them ownership of their texts (see Elbow, *Writing Without Teachers*), helped frame the nature of the work that took place in my classrooms during “The Picturing Year.” As I read and responded to my students’ work, I thought of Mina Shaughnessy’s assertion that if we look beyond student error in basic student writing, even beyond “sentences that violate every grammatical sensibility” (Newkirk 1997, 10), then we as instructors can read the *humanity* that exists on the student’s page. This acknowledgment and respect of the writer behind the writing is vital; in the center of any writing experience is the *human being* that performs the writing. Sondra Perl writes of this in *Felt Sense: Writing with the Body*: “What is missing, omitted, overlooked, or forgotten in the postmodern position is the human being, the person – the one who knows and creates, the one in whom language resides” (2004, 60). “Humanization” is a repeated term in Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Freire points out that “[The humanist educator’s] efforts must be imbued with a profound trust in people and their creative power. To achieve this, they must be partners of the students in their relations with them” ([1970] 1998, 56).

In her essay "Between the Drafts," Nancy Sommers argues the importance of having students explore their own lives, their own communities, in what they write and contribute to the classroom. She states:

> Our students are not empty vessels waiting to be filled with authorial intent. Given the authority to speak their own intent as writers, given a turn in the conversation, students can claim their story as primary source material, and transform their experiences into evidence. They might, if given enough encouragement, be empowered not to serve the academy and empower it, not to write in the persona of Everystudent, but rather write essays that will change the academy. . . . (1992, 30)

Like Sommers, Karen Surman Paley asserts, "Students feel most connected with the culture of the academy when they are invited to use personal experience in their writing and when the narratives they produce are treated responsibly and valued by their teachers" (2001, 54). Responding to the necessity of respecting student writing, Sullivan asks rhetorical questions that get to the heart of a teacher valuing student work: "What might we learn about our culture, our history, about the everyday world in which we live, about our relationships, our beliefs, our fears, our desires, if we accorded student writing the same power that we accord to literature and science – their power to inform, to delight, to irritate, to vex, to instruct?" (2003, 46).

In establishing my own classes during "The Picturing Year," I found the comments/questions of Sommers, Paley, and Sullivan useful. As I discuss in chapters Three, Four, and Five, I worked to create a classroom community where my students' voices were valued, where they had the opportunity to share with words and images *their* *own* stories, and where *their* stories became the focus of the class. Student authors became empowered when their classmates responded and gave feedback to their personal images, writings and experiences. As Nabokov wrote of the world of his East Pyrenees snapshot, my students were able to share their pictorial and textual worlds with each other. Through this practice, the classroom became a place of involvement, communication, and personal validation.

Apprentice Scholars and the Intellectual Task of Seeing

The importance of perception has long been acknowledged in composition studies. In this concluding section, I discuss the concept of perception and its role in my pedagogy. Perl writes that the "basic process begins with paying attention" ([1980] 1994, 103). For Murray, "before anything else, the writing course is the practice of perception" (1982, 117). During "The Picturing Year," the three assignments, *Pictures on My Wall, My New York,* and *A Day in the Life*, discussed in Chapter Three, all began with looking; students spent time in and out of class looking at and taking snapshots, selecting the ones that could help generate the stuff of written essays. Students looked at and discussed their own images, read and discussed rough drafts of essays in small groups and in whole class settings, and gave feedback to each others' work-in-progress. Lad Tobin comments that many practitioners in composition complain that when students "have the opportunity to pick their own topics, many of them would write about nothing" (13), but, as I discuss in chapters Three, Four, and Five, I found that by including photographs and picture-taking experiences as an integral part of the assignments, students were able to choose from and work with content material that was vital to them, and through this they could organize content and create a framework from which they could create written text.

I have discussed the theoretical basis for the creation of a classroom community where students make textual meaning through photographs and picture-taking experiences. Other practitioners in the field write of the importance of a writing pedagogy centered on the lives and interests of their students: “We need to learn about culture from the stories students tell,” Thomas Newkirk argues (1997, 106). This desire of an instructor wanting to know what her students know, to learn from her students, also informs “The Novice as Expert: Writing the Freshman Year,” an essay in which Nancy Sommers and Laura Saltz foresee a change occurring in academia when faculty “treat freshmen as *apprentice scholars*, giving them real intellectual tasks that allow students to bring their interests into a course” (2004, 140; italics mine). Sommers and Saltz’s “apprentice scholars” is an important construct; students need to be writing about what they know. Though Sommers and Saltz followed more than 400 undergraduates at Harvard University and examined their writing and responses to their writing in courses across the curriculum, we can apply their findings to the work occurring throughout the academy. Sommers and Saltz found that when students have a sense of an audience reading their work, “they begin to understand that they are writing for flesh-and-blood human beings, readers who want them to bring their interests into a course, not simply teachers who are poised with red pens, ready to evaluate what they don’t know” (2004, 139). They found that faculty play a “crucial role” in the creation of assignments that allow their students the freedom to explore what is important to them (2004, 140). They discovered that when their Harvard students were able to follow their own “intellectual agendas," many of them "set off to explore their identities by selecting courses that enabled them, however covertly, to study themselves" (2004, 141).

The practice of a teacher giving writing students "real intellectual tasks," important to Sommers and Saltz, can be illustrated in Robert M. Pirsig's autobiographical novel *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*. The narrator has many guises, one of them as an English Composition instructor at Montana State University. In one passage, he discusses how a student wanted to write a 500 word essay on the United States in response to an essay assignment. Pirsig's narrator was concerned at the vagueness of the student's topic, so the student narrowed the focus to Bozeman, Montana, where their college was located. But the student remained stuck; she had nothing to say. The narrator suggested one particular street in Bozeman, but even this narrowed topic was still frustrating for the student. He finally told her to focus on the front of Bozeman's Opera House and to start with the top left brick. At the next class the student handed in a 5,000 word essay. As Pirsig writes, by standing across the street and staring at the building, the student learned to do the intellectual task of seeing, and ended up looking "freshly for herself" (1974, 187).

Just as this student in Bozeman learned to see, so too did many of my students during "The Picturing Year," discovering content through photography and picture-taking. Sommers and Saltz write of their Harvard students as apprentice scholars, and my John Jay apprentice scholars were doing similar work: discovering knowledge on their own, photographing, writing about the experiences, and reporting to a learned audience of other apprentice scholars and their professor. Murray tells us that students can find their own subjects if the teacher "emphasizes perception, allows time for free-writing, creates the possibility of publication, and puts the final responsibility of finding a subject right on the student" (1982, 132). For Murray, "the writer's subjects come from his awareness of the world, and the potential writer needs time to exercise his senses. He has to discover how to record what he sees about him, perhaps at first with camera or tape-recorder, but soon with words, those symbols of language we use to stand for life" (1982, 132).

I began this chapter with Sontag's writing of the "talismanic" ways personal photographs can be used and the image of Nabokov in the act of composing with framed photographs at his eye's view, and I discussed how personal images can inspire writing. I examined the creation of a student-centered classroom and the pedagogy that would support the assigning of projects in a composition class that would combine the students' own photographs and picture-taking experiences with their writing. During "The Picturing Year," my students would be creating texts, inspired and informed by their chosen images, which were centered on their own knowledge, identities, experiences, and interests. In the next chapter I will discuss the three picture assignments that were given, as well as focus on the pedagogical theories that placed me in the critical multipositionary nexus of teacher, observer, and researcher.

Chapter Two
Picturing and Telling the Tales

> [Snapshots] have an apparent disorder and imperfection, which is exactly their appeal and style. The picture isn't straight. It isn't done well. It isn't composed. It isn't thought out. And out of this imbalance, and out of this not knowing, and out of this real innocence toward the medium comes an enormous vitality and expression of life.
>
> — Lisette Model, *The Snap-Shot*

The Vital Snapshot: "The Impossible Science of the Unique Being"

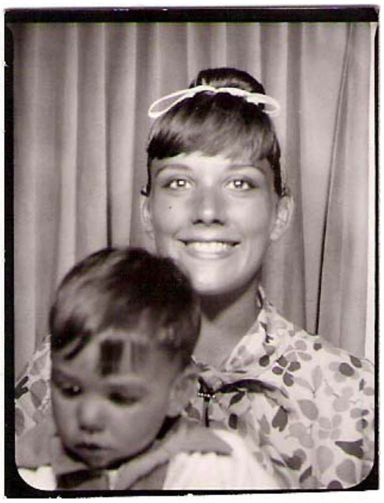

Figure 2.1. The author and his mother, Atlantic City, New Jersey, 1960.

Since their inception in the early 1920s, millions of people have had their portraits taken in photobooths. Some of these small portraits have been treasured for years after the taking; others were lost or discarded minutes after the subject left the booth. But in essence, these photobooth images were all the same. The snapshots were the same size. The same pleated fabric was used as a backdrop. The images were toned in the same sepia-like hues. One, two, three, maybe four people would cram themselves into the tiny booth, posing maybe two feet away from the camera installed in the booth’s interior siding. In a photobooth there is no photographer; the experience is completely automated. It is the subject facing a camera, which trips into operation at the insertion of coins.

Photobooths usually dispense the pictures in strips of four; I do not know what became of the other three images that were once attached to the one pictured on the previous page. Maybe they were given to my grandparents or family friends. Maybe I was squirming so much that the other shots were of my mom’s blurry arms trying to keep me still for the camera. Maybe the three other shots ended up in a trashcan and this sole remaining exposure was the only keeper. It is just a throwaway picture, meant as a cheap souvenir from a beat-up amusement park in a faded seaside resort. But then why does it mean so much to me?

In the introduction to her collection of over 700 photobooth images, Babbette Hines writes about personal meaning in the photobooth snapshots:

> Memory and imagination merge with face and transform a single moment into an entire story, and eventually, all we will remember is the moment defined and distilled in the picture. . . . It doesn’t matter if the situation represented changed dramatically the very next day . . . or that we have grown old and no longer resemble our youthful selves. In the photobooth picture, unlike any other portrait or photograph, truth and fiction easily commingle. In a photobooth we choose the moment and the way in which we represent ourselves. (2002, unpaged)

Roland Barthes writes of an essential image of his own mother, which he calls the “Winter Garden Photograph,” but he refuses to reproduce it in *Camera Lucida*. He explains: “It exists only for me. For you, it would be nothing but an indifferent picture, one of the thousand manifestations of the “ordinary;” it cannot in any way constitute the visible object of a science; it cannot establish an objectivity, in the positive sense of the term; at most it would interest your *studium*: period, clothes, photogeny; but in it, for you, no wound” (1981, 73). For Barthes, it is the essence of the personal photography that he calls its “noeme” that has “the capacity to ratify the existence of a particular moment in the past, something the snapshot often does well” (Nickel 1998, 9). There is a deep place where the understanding and meaning of our personal images reside, a guttural place, a place in some ways beyond our abilities to communicate effectively with others.

No matter how much I try to explain the essential qualities of my Atlantic City photobooth snapshot of my mother and me, to my readers it may look like many other snapshots they have seen before. Maybe they will find the subject attractive? Maybe they will like the pose of the boy or the woman? Maybe they will like the placement of the photo as an introductory device to begin the chapter? But the “wound” to which Barthes refers only affects the select few who feel the immediacy of the image, who emotionally and physically respond with quickening heartbeats, and with eyes that can’t look away. Though my readers may see a simple photobooth souvenir, for me there are powerful interpersonal communicative properties existing between my eyes, my thoughts, and the photograph. Barthes writes, “I could not express this accord except by an infinite series of adjectives, which I omit, convinced however that this photograph collected all the possible predicates from which my mother’s being was constituted” (1981, 72).

As Barthes felt with his Winter Garden Photograph, so too I feel with this Atlantic City snapshot. It is “utopically, *the impossible science of the unique being*” (1981, 71).

I look into the photobooth image of my mother and me, and I romanticize the picture-taking scene. It is a lifetime ago. I am nearly one and my mother, Carol, is twenty.

Time's arrow is aimed.

She is trying to hold the boy in her lap, but his attention is not there. She knows the boy is squirming to get down, to move his legs, but she keeps him on her lap and beams for the camera just the same. It is her moment. The photobooth's curtain shuts. There is a rush to get seated, to figure out a pose, to keep the boy balanced on her lap. The fabric in the background sways. She poses and tries to get the boy to pose. *Flash. Click.* The boy is startled. He looks up. She gets them both ready for the next shot. *Flash. Click.* The boy wants out of here, but she coos to him, *Just wait honey, smile at the camera*. *Flash. Click.* He's really getting restless, but she placates him, *Just one more sweetie, just one more, for mommy*.

Time's arrow shoots.

Flash. Click. The pictures are taken so quickly, and then it is over. She lifts the small boy so she herself can get off the stool, parts the curtain, then steps outside back into the honky-tonk night of the Million Dollar Pier amusement park in Atlantic City, New Jersey.

Time's arrow hits.

Many years later when I come across the photo again: *the wound*.

My mother died in 1998, but she is radiantly alive in that long-gone moment and will always be. It is a moment I have no memory of, but I was there; she was there. Nancy Martha West's main argument in her book about the marketing of Kodak cameras, the marketing campaign that revolutionized how consumers took and viewed snapshots, is that Kodak taught both photographers and viewers, “to operate their experiences and memories as objects of nostalgia” (2000, 1). “Precisely by slicing out this moment and freezing it,” argues Sontag, “all photographs testify to time’s relentless melt” (1989, 15). My photobooth image is more than a simple snapshot; for me it is nostalgia incarnate.

Maybe my two sisters would react in a similar way to the image, but born later, they weren’t yet part of the family when this photo was taken. bell hooks responds to a snapshot of her father, a picture that she and her sisters read very differently: “Our ‘reading’ and experience of this image is shaped by our relationship with him, with the world of childhood and the images that make our lives what they are now” (1995, 56). We all respond uniquely to our variegated personal snapshots.

For Barthes the “wound” of a personal snapshot exists because these images work outside of time to jerk us back to a former reality, an alternate one. Figure 2.1 is a photobooth snapshot of my young mother with her one child. But the emotional frame of the image doesn’t end with the borders of the image because there is a history alive in the telling, even in so sterile, so commonplace a setting as a photobooth. Yes, it is a picture of a young mother and her only child, but a few months later she would give birth to her second, then a few years after that her third. Eventually a marriage would crumble and lives would be rebuilt. It brings back other distinct family stories and memories for me, and it begets memories of more experiences, more photographs.

“Out of such winks at experience, we make lyric, narrative, sermon, and prophecy: about our passions, our experiences, our failures, our illusions. . . . Such pictures trigger communion between us and our emotions. They look into us, as much as we look into them” (J. Hirsch 1981, 117). In looking at my photobooth snapshot, I see my mother and me pictured in an setting that I have no memory of, yet pictured in a way that is familiar. I see my father, absent in the photobooth image, but probably lurking nearby waiting for our photo session to end. I see my grandparents all radiantly alive. I see my not-as-of-yet-born sisters becoming part of the family. I see my young self emerging from the infant pictured. School. Friends. Grandparents dying. Parents divorcing. Parents remarrying. Families and step-families. Graduation. My sisters and I marrying and creating families of our own. The death of my mother.

The simple picture pierces my consciousness. It is a life lived, a life celebrated, and a life grieved. I am suffused by joy, and I am transcended by wound.

From Snapshots to Pedagogy: On Becoming a Teacher-Researcher

Barthes' theory of the intensely subjective nature of personal photographs lead me to ask questions about my John Jay students using their own personal snapshots and picture-taking experiences in our writing classes during "The Picturing Year." Will my students be moved to think and to write by looking at their vital images as I have been moved by mine? By looking at their photographs, will subject matter become clearer to them? Will the act of photographing itself help them in creating written content?

To answer these and other questions that fuel this dissertation, I placed myself as a teacher-researcher in my classrooms, a practice that Wendy Bishop argues may be the primary method "for understanding the complex literacy cultures and communities that occur in schools . . . " (1999, 13). As I have discussed, important personal images are able to pierce our consciousness. As an educator, I wanted to see if my students' personal images and picture-taking experiences could help them generate important writing.

The role of the researcher can never be invisible in qualitative research. I began this chapter with a personal snapshot and discussed its significance because my interest with personal snapshots is a vital part of my pedagogy. I introduced this chapter in this way because, as Janet Alsup explains, it is expected that the researcher "share something of her expectations, personal history, reasons for initiating the study, or personal interactions with participants for the text and analyses that result to be valued and found credible" (2004, 221).

I am both part of this study and a researcher of it, and as I discuss in this chapter, the two identities combine, which has enabled me to provide a "thick description" (Geertz 1973) of the culture of my composition classes and students during the 2004/2005 academic year. In this dissertation, I take the anthropological stance in positioning myself within the culture, in this case the classrooms I am studying, but I remain aware of my own *presence* in this study.

Peter Elbow writes, "Better teaching behavior comes primarily from exploring one's *own* teaching from an experiential and phenomenological point of view: 'What did I actually do? What was I actually experiencing when I did it?'" (1986, 69). Exploring one's own teaching is at the pedagogical heart of this dissertation; in the chapters that follow, I tell the stories of what happened in my classroom, "in the empirical realm of everyday lived experience" (Van Manen 1990, ix), sharing the students' work and their stories, and examining how these stories impacted my teaching and helped change me.

In learning to tell the tale, I used research models based on ethnographic and teacher-research theory. Arthur P. Bochner and Carolyn Ellis argue that “ethnography tries to deepen and enlarge our sense of a human community” (1996, 18), while Richard Fulkerson finds that “our most empirical journal, *Research in the Teaching of English*, now almost exclusively publishes ethnographic studies” (2005, 662). In supporting ethnographic inquiry in composition, ethnography “gives researchers and students more direct access to the material interactions of social groups, a material access that has methodical and pedagogical implications for the study and teaching of writing” (Reiff 2004, 36).

Since my hope in this study is to “deepen and enlarge” my own understanding of *my own* classroom communities and to report on and share this understanding with the reader, my study falls under the rubric of autoethnography. An autoethnographic text is “highly personalized, revealing . . . in which authors tell stories about their own lived experiences, relating the personal to the cultural” (L. Richardson 2000, 931).

Susan S. Hanson writes that as composition pedagogy, “critical auto/ethnography enables [the researchers] to do systematic fieldwork and data production about subjects other than themselves, but without concealing what they learn about themselves in the process” (2004, 184). In this dissertation, I note how my students are learning and exploring their own sense of composition as the semester progresses, and I respond to my own growth as an educator at the same time (Hanson 2004, 184).

Bishop points to 1985 as the year of a “sea change” in composition research, with more researchers “gravitating toward ethnographic methods and the more naturalistic methods of teacher research” (1999, 12). She writes of the traditional anthropologist entering the field and trying to “learn” about a foreign culture by the powers of observation and note-taking, and she draws parallels with current ethnographic research in composition. The “naturalistic methods” that Bishop writes of include the *ethnographic researchers* who study other teachers’ classrooms, and the *teacher-researchers*, who study their own. Bishop argues that she is “inclined toward ethnographic writing research and critical narratives as a primary way of reporting writing research” (1999, 15).

Being a part of the community that I researched is vital in this dissertation, as it has been in many ethnographic studies. In *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, a classic ethnographic text that explores the lives of three rural-poor families during the heart of the Great Depression, both writer James Agee and photographer Walker Evans lived with the three families they depicted. Agee’s narrative stance is steeped in detailed observation and almost torturous personal reflection, all borne from the experience of living amongst his subjects. Geertz also writes of the importance of not just living with but being accepted into the society in which he was studying. In his essay “Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight,” he writes that his act of fleeing a cockfight during a police raid, and then acting mum to the authorities, was paramount for the Balinese accepting him and his wife into their world: “But above all, everyone was extremely pleased and even more surprised that we had not simply ‘pulled out our papers’ . . . and asserted our Distinguished Visitor status, but had instead demonstrated our solidarity with what were now our covillagers” (1973, 416). Geertz writes about “that mysterious necessity of anthropological field work, rapport . . . ” (1973, 416) and states, “societies, like lives, contain their own interpretations. One has only to learn how to gain access to them" (1973, 453).

Geertz's theory of "rapport" is important in my own work. As discussed in the previous chapter, the respect and interest I have for my students' worlds and for their stories are important aspects of my pedagogy. The anthropologist Max Van Manen cites psychologist Ludwig Binswanger in stating that "we can only understand something or someone for whom we care" (1990, 6). Throughout the semester, I wanted my students to realize that their voices mattered, that their stories were important, that they had the opportunities to become "active subjects" in the classroom, "doing not what they are told, but learning to decide for themselves what to do to recognize, understand, and change their own environments" (1990, 13). Van Manen writes of a "pedagogic Good" that guides his actions, helping him to consider "the uniqueness of the person in this particular situation" (1990, 6). By establishing this rapport and sense of trust with my students, I placed myself in the privileged position of being an active part of the landscape I studied.

Though the authorial "I" is present in the writing of this dissertation, my focus is trained on my students and the events that occurred in (and out of) the classroom in response to the picture-gathering and picture-taking assignments I discuss throughout. It is the actual texts that my students created during the semester, the discoveries that they made in the creation of these texts, and the presentation of these texts to workshop groups and the class as a whole that has made my learning possible.

The Setting: Place Does Matter

The first day of the Fall 2004 semester was a steamy Monday morning at the end of August, a week before Labor Day. The news the night before school began was of the Republican National Convention taking place at Madison Square Garden, 25 blocks south of John Jay's campus. As I walked out of the Columbus Circle subway station, the police presence was much more palpable than it would have been on a "normal" back-to-school day. The Provost had sent a memo to the faculty the week before acknowledging the convention and stating that it might interfere with back-to-school routines. John Jay has a historical mission in educating police officers and other in-service personnel, and as I walked from the subway to John Jay's two-building campus two blocks west, I wondered if any of my current students would be police officers. Maybe some wouldn't be in class this week because of extra job responsibilities?

Columbus Circle, outside the subway on Central Park West, was jammed with an assemblage of commuters, students, cops, deliverymen, tourists, and residents congregating on a wide sidewalk in the northern reaches of midtown Manhattan. As a pack we impatiently waited to cross the congested street, stepping from the curb to seemingly challenge the cabs, delivery trucks, and passenger cars to make way for us. The crowd crossing the street began to disperse; I walked past the immense Time/Warner building, now open for a year on the site of the old New York Coliseum. On 60th Street between 8th and 9th Avenues, I passed newly installed designer stores with expensive leases, a chic international hotel, and in the face of newly constructed and refurbished opulence, some worn storefronts whose stubborn presence gave me a sense of by-gone days in a world of rapid Manhattan real-estate change. It was another block westward to the heart of my John Jay, the North Hall building, which houses the English Department and most of the rooms where English classes are held.

Though only a few blocks from the upscale renovation of Columbus Circle, North Hall, one of the two buildings that make up John Jay’s campus, can be a dispiriting place. It was originally the Miles Shoe Building, a factory where shoes were made in the first half of the twentieth century, before John Jay acquired, then refurbished, the building in 1973. In his book, *Educating for Justice: A History of John Jay College of Criminal Justice*, Gerald Markowitz states that from the onset, “the Miles building suffered problems with heating and air conditioning, problems it continues to suffer” (2004, 58). The ventilation throughout many of the offices and classrooms is noisy, the classrooms can be excessively hot, and many of the offices and classrooms are windowless. “I found the classrooms went from depressing to grim,” stated faculty member Barbara Price when she came to teach at John Jay in 1978 after being struck by the “dreary physical surroundings” of North Hall (Markowitz 2004, 109).

One would still use the same terms in describing the classrooms of North Hall twenty-five years later, and during my past years teaching at John Jay most of the classes that I have taught took place in the joyless, interior rooms of North Hall. Nedra Reynolds, commenting about the effect/affect of classroom space on the learner, writes of Jane Marcus discussing classroom conditions in City College where, “if your walls weren’t covered with graffiti and you had a chair, you were lucky.” Reynolds also writes of Jonathan Kozol’s *Savage Inequalities* which “details the educational injustices done to students in cold, damp, dark classrooms . . .” (1998, 20). Shor describes the classroom where he led a course in Utopia at the College of Staten Island, another CUNY campus, as one of “drab architecture and design – cold, colorless, unadorned, uninviting, nameless, uninspiring – [which] communicated an environmental message of low status and minimal expectations” (1996. 4). The typical classroom in North Hall of John Jay College is not dissimilar to Shor’s description, which he contrasts to the “pampered grounds, distinctive gates, and architectural adornments of elite campuses” (1996, 4).

Though North Hall houses the English Department and is where many of the English classes are taught, the structure which defines the urban campus of John Jay is the “T” Building, a thoroughly redesigned and renovated building originally constructed in 1903 as the DeWitt Clinton High School[1], which stretches from 58th to 59th Street on the west side of 10th Avenue, diagonally across the street from North Hall. The T Building is a clean, well-lit, and well-ventilated building, which stands in stark contrast to North Hall. Opened in 1988, the T Building immediately boosted student morale with its newly constructed college offices and classrooms, library, theater, two gymnasiums, racquetball courts, pool, and fitness center. As Carol Tricomi, Dean of Students from 1983 to 1990 acknowledged, “When students first approached the building, their jaws would drop open, and they would said [sic], ‘Wow! This is our college!’” (Markowitz 2004, 109).

Since 1988 classes at John Jay have been either in North Hall or in the T Building. However, during the summer of 2004, John Jay leased two floors of a newly constructed apartment building located at 56th Street and 10th Avenue, three blocks downtown from North Hall. The Westport Building gave the school twenty additional classrooms, all of them brand new and outfitted with new chairs, desks, chalkboards, and computer workstations. The two floors John Jay acquired were earmarked for freshmen classes. Dr. Pat Sinatra, Dean of Freshmen Services, knew that the newly constructed environment would be good for incoming students and for returning faculty, especially compared with the conditions in North Hall: “Westport is a nice facility for incoming students to get started, and it is my hope that faculty will use the technology built in to each classroom to teach differently” (Sinatra 2005). Though the lease to John Jay is not a permanent one, John Jay plans to build its own new building at some point in the future to replace North Hall, a positive solution to the overcrowded urban campus that would relieve many students and teachers from taking or conducting classes in North Hall.

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[1] DeWitt Clinton High School relocated to the Bronx in 1928.

My room assignment for the Fall 2004 semester? On this first day of classes, I found out when I checked my departmental mailbox that I was to be teaching in the Westport Building. As I walked down 10th Avenue to 56th Street and entered the newly constructed Westport Building, my response echoed what Tricomi heard sixteen years previously: “Wow! This is our college!”

I entered Westport, walked through the turnstile by the security desk, then climbed the stairs to the first floor where the classrooms are housed. Nedra Reynolds writes that, “Place does matter; surroundings do have an effect on learning or attitudes towards learning, and material spaces have a political edge. In short, *where* writing instruction takes place has everything to do with *how*” (1998, 20). As I looked around me, I sensed within myself a mixture of awe and disbelief; I had entered a new world. I walked down bright newly appointed hallways. I looked to my left and saw rich-looking upholstered chairs positioned to replicate a lounge in an alcove with a few vending machines. Affixed to different places on the walls were flat screen monitors presenting cable news with scrolling subtitles. I felt as if I was in some kind of airport terminal. I walked down through the corridors and peeked into classrooms; some, in fact many, had big floor-to-ceiling windows facing either 10th Avenue or West 56th Street. I was thrilled with the cleanliness, the shining newness, the possibilities that such a positive space holds for learning. Alas, I discovered that both my classrooms were windowless; however, like the windowed classrooms, my rooms were spotless. The walls were freshly constructed and painted, the desks were new, and the blackboards had yet to see chalk. And they were "smart" classrooms. The rooms were equipped with what I learned every classroom in Westport had: a computer workstation connected to an overhead projector, with a pull-down screen housed in the front of the classroom.

Until the first day of classes, I had not known I would be teaching in this new building, and I had not known I would have this new technology available. My classrooms in North Hall had been rudimentary: old student desks, a large table at the front of the classroom where a well-worn chair awaited the teacher. The only hints of twentieth century technology were the battery-powered clocks on the wall, the florescent lights, and the loud ventilation fans that droned above, installed in the water-stained drop ceiling. In Westport, where I taught all the classes during "The Picturing Year," the smart classroom was a thrilling discovery, one that would affect my classroom work as the school year progressed.

John Jay Students: An "Intermingling of People"

Ken Moran, Professor of Law and Police Science at John Jay reflects on a classroom experience that took place in a Constitutional Law class in 1972:

> A student began to complain about the abuses that a police officer had visited upon him when he was arrested. About half way through his comment, an officer in the back of the class said, "That's bullshit! I'm the guy who arrested you, and let me tell you what really happened." And then we had an exciting discussion concerning what probable cause is all about, what it looks like from a police officer's standpoint, and how it looks very different from the standpoint of the accused. It sort of epitomizes what the college is about. It's that intermingling of people from different backgrounds and different perspectives, and it is these that enrich the college experience for students and faculty. (Markowitz 2004, 49)

The "intermingling" that Moran speaks of is paramount in what I observed and experienced in my composition classes during "The Picturing Year." When John Jay opened in 1965, its students were all in-service personnel, but beginning with the next year, a small number of high school graduates were admitted (Markowitz 2). Since then the student body of John Jay has expanded greatly and the amount of in-service personnel has declined[2]. By the Fall 2005 semester, John Jay would have a total enrollment of over 14,000 students, 60.6% female and 39.4% male. It is a multi-ethnic student body at John Jay: in 2005, 34.2% of the students labeled themselves as Hispanic, 24.1% as African

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[2] Of the 107 students in my class during "The Picturing Year," only one, Carlton, was a police officer (and he had recently retired after twenty-five years on the force). However, many students enter the college with a career in law enforcement in mind.

American, 22.9% as white, and 18.9% as Asian/Pacific Island, American Native, Unknown, or Other. (“Then and Now: John Jay’s Changing Body” 2005, 2).

Every student who enters John Jay has to take required courses, and one of them is English 101, a three-credit writing course, the first in a two-course writing sequence necessary to fulfill their writing requirement. Students are placed in English 101:

- upon admission, if they have received a 480 on their SAT verbal, or a 75 or better on their English Regents;
- upon admission, if they pass the CUNY ACT writing exam with a score of seven or better;
- if they have passed English 100, a developmental writing class at John Jay;
- if they have failed English 101 previously.

While most incoming freshman taking English 101 during the fall semester are taking the course during their first semester of college, many students taking English 101 in the spring term have either taken a remedial writing course in the fall (and passed) to gain admittance to the spring course or have transferred from another college. Through this wide funnel of possibilities and writing class experiences enter the English 101 students sitting in the desks on the opening days of classes.

I taught two English 101 classes during the Fall 2004 semester. These classes met twice a week on Mondays and Wednesdays, one from 11:05 – 12:20 and the other from 1:55 – 3:10. During the Spring 2005 semester my two English 101 classes also met twice a week on Tuesdays and Thursdays, one from 11:05 – 12:20, and the other from 12:30 – 1:45. From my observations, the majority of students in my classes during “The Picturing

Year" seemed to be in the seventeen to nineteen year age range, typical for beginning college students, but a few were significantly older, which I indicate when I discuss their work in the chapters that follow.

On the first day of class, I distributed blank note cards for students to fill out basic contact information. During the 2004/2005 academic year, I had 107 students on the starting roster in my four English 101 classes; fifty-three in the two classes that met in the Fall 2004 semester, fifty four in the two classes that met in the Spring 2005 semester. I learned that these students came from all over the metropolitan area. Of these 107 students, twenty-five came to school from Brooklyn; twenty-two from Queens; twenty from the Bronx; eighteen from Manhattan; eight from Staten Island; seven from suburban Long Island, New York; five from suburban New Jersey; three from suburban Westchester County, New York; and one from Putnam County, New York.

The students were from all over the metropolitan area, and they all came with different writing experiences preceding English 101. Of these 107 students**,** forty-one were taking English 101 for the first time as their first writing course at John Jay. Thirty-six had taken and passed previous developmental writing classes at John Jay (either English 100 or one of the intersession workshops for those who did not pass the writing entrance exam given for placement purposes). Eleven had taken English 101 previously and either had failed or withdrawn. One student had taken his writing courses out-of-sequence and was now taking English 101 after he had completed English 102 the previous semester. One student had newly transferred to John Jay; the registrar had given him credit for English 102 and college-level literature electives that he had taken in his former college, but not for English 101. Seventeen students did not clearly indicate a previous course. The skeletal statistical information of faceless names on note cards, the information of where these names lived, and why these names were placed in the class, would be fleshed out as the fall and spring semester gained momentum.

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In their eighth grade year, students in New York City's middle schools apply to different high schools. Some end up in "neighborhood" high schools, but many travel far from their home communities to the outer reaches of their boroughs, even to distant boroughs, to begin ninth grade. Because of this long-distance traveling, friendships formed and forged during elementary and middle school become strained by distance as city kids scatter to far-flung high schools. I thought of this fact as I observed my John Jay students on the first day of class. There was an institutional silence in the classrooms. Students stared blankly ahead or down at their desks during the first few days in a new classroom located (for many of them) in a new school.

Students at any college or university that offers dormitory-living experience a certain college "'vibe,' an involvement in a climate of student-ness" (Mauk 2003, 370). However, Mauk writes that his community college students "seemed *unsituated* in the institution" (2003, 370). I find this sense of student *unsituatedness* the norm at John Jay, especially in the first few days of my classes. Students rarely know any fellow students in the classroom; there are no dormitories to center student life outside of the classroom. Though there is a cafeteria and a library, the implied campus of the college is the city itself. Students take the subway or a bus to the college. Some even challenge themselves to drive. It is a school of commuters, traveling from the distant reaches of New York City and beyond. This acknowledgement of the commuting distances in my students' lives became part of the fabric of this dissertation: Through their talk, through their pictures, and through their writing, I wanted to study how these students, strangers to each other as well as to me, began to animate the classroom.

Picturing Composition: The Three Assignments

There were three writing assignments, rooted in photography, which I assigned my students during "The Picturing Year." The first involved the students selecting important pictures, or personal snapshots, that the students already had (whether they or someone else had taken them); the other two assignments involved the students becoming photographers and taking their own pictures before any writing could begin.

Assignment One: Every Picture Tells a Story

In her book *Sandra Cisneros in the Classroom,* Carol Jago explains how Cisneros' essays and stories persuaded her as a teacher to have her students mine their own childhoods for material for writing. However, when Jago asked them to write about stories from their childhood, her students sat stupefied, transfixed by the blank pages in front of them, not knowing where to begin. Jago then instructed them to bring in snapshots of themselves, and in the resulting class, after "intense observation" in which students noted details found in the photos, she had students share their photographs and talk about them: "Within a few seconds, the room explodes with stories and laughter. The photos act as windows to the worlds of their childhoods, and most students find they have lots to say" (2002, 6). As Jago's example illustrates, her students' authentic and intimate personal snapshots lowered the bureaucratic impersonality of school. I was interested to see if *Pictures on My Wall* would set the tone in the early days of the semester, if the pictures my students would bring in and share and texts they would create would affect my classrooms in a positive way.

The assignment *Pictures on My Wall*, which is the basis for much of Chapter Three, has its roots in the theory that the personal photographs that surround us are vital, that the people in the photos are our important people, that their reproduced likeness gives the resulting image "a certificate of presence" (Barthes 1981, 87). W.H. Auden defines poetry as "paying homage by naming," suggesting that all of us have "sacred objects" in our lives that are due homage (Britton 1972, 120). I adapt Auden's definition of poetry to suit my pedagogy; in giving the assignment I wanted my composition students to present their important images, to write of them, to explore their meaning, to pay homage to them as part of the work in our classroom, "to attest that what I see has indeed existed" (Barthes 1981, 82).

In *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory*, Marianne Hirsch theorizes that "photographs offer a prism through which to study the postmodern space of cultural memory composed of leftovers, debris, single items that are left to be collected and assembled in many ways, to tell a variety of stories, from a variety of often competing perspectives" (1997, 13). In *Pictures on My Wall*, I asked my students to bring in important personal snapshots, Hirsch's "prisms," to class, to share with their classmates and use for the basis of an essay. Would allowing students to use personal photographs shift the balance in the classroom and help it become more student-centered? Would students become the assured tellers of their tales because their source material, their photos, were first and foremost theirs? Hirsch tells us that through snapshots, memories are “continued and perpetuated, by which the family’s [or friend’s] story would henceforth be told” (1997, 6-7). I would not have the answer key for what the images meant to my students; after all, the only one who can communicate the meaning of a personal snapshot is the one who can “attest” that what is pictured has “indeed existed” (Barthes 1981, 82).

Assignments Two and Three: Taking Pictures to Tell Stories

The two photography/writing assignments that followed *Pictures on My Wall* asked students to venture away from their desks and computers and to photograph in the spaces and places of their choice, the places and spaces in their neighborhoods and communities that were important to them. The experiences of the two assignments, *My New York* and *A Day in the Life* will be fully explored in chapters Four and Five, but following is a rationale for having the students become roving photographers in the writing class.

If the traditional site of composing is behind a computer screen or hunched over a notebook, I was interested to see what would happen when students with cameras in hand ventured away from the desk in search of subject matter in their neighborhoods and communities. James Britton writes, “Your representation of the world differs from mine, and this is not only in so far as the world has used us differently – that is to say we had had differing experiences of it. It is also because *your way of representing* is not the same as mine. We are neither of us cameras” (1972, 14). I was curious to see if the act of picture-taking in the physical worlds that surrounded my students would offer inspiration/stimulation for writing, and if the resulting texts combining word and image would become, as it did for writer James Agee and photographer Walker Evans in *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, “mutually independent and fully collaborative” ([1941] 2001, ix).

Composition scholars have engaged their students with visual stimuli in the past. In Lehman College in the mid-1970s, Jack Kligerman’s composition students ventured outside the classroom and photographed a tree on the Bronx campus as part of a writing assignment. As he reported in a 1977 *CCC* article “Photography, Perception, and Composition,” “The process of learning to see and of writing about what one sees is, like learning the desert, a difficult task” (174). But this didn’t daunt him; Kligerman concludes his essay with remarks that acknowledge the potential for having students photograph the world around them: “Whatever else we do as teachers of composition, we could, with the aid of photography, direct our students’ attention to the world of things ‘out there’” (1977, 177-178). His ending comments remind me of Ann E. Berthoff’s essay “The Intelligent Eye and the Thinking Hand” where she states, “thinking begins with perception” (1994, 109).

By having his students photograph so they could attain “literal’ vision,” Kligerman tried to get his students to “report” rather than “interpret” (1977, 177). He writes that “unless we can get our students to record what they see in the most unmetaphorical, uninterpretative way, then as teachers we are merely helping them confirm what they already believe” (1977, 176). In written assignments based on their photographic experiences of the same subject, Kligerman had his students describe exactly what they saw in the picture. Thirty years later I invited my students to chance beyond the literal and to become metaphorical and interpretative; they might confirm what they already believe, or they might learn new truths and new beliefs along the way.

Before Kligerman, the 1960s saw a flurry of new teaching ideas that challenged conventional discourse and that brought images and music into the writing classroom. In 1967, Charles Deemer wrote an essay for *College English* titled, “English Composition as a Happening.” In the few years that followed, other articles appeared, calling for English courses to become “experiences” (Berlin 1987, 150); the idea was that the “experience” frees the student from the confines of more traditional educational practices. As a result, to paraphrase John Lennon and Paul McCartney, the student’s mind relaxes and floats downstream, and from there good things (meaning *good writing*) can occur. Geoffrey Sirc’s more recent text, *English Composition as a Happening* (2002), takes inspiration from these earlier essays, and with disparate references to the Sex Pistols and the French Situationalists tries to shake up the established teaching patterns in the ways that writing is taught and turn the classroom into a “happening,” a somewhat spontaneous event propelled by music, visuals, and active interest by both students and professor.

Though I find the work of Deemer and Sirc highly informative, I was not as interested in turning the classroom into a place of “happening” as I was in loosening the “happening” from the physical confines of the academy: in other words, opening the doors and letting the sun shine in. It was not so much the walled classroom itself that I wanted to see become a site for “a happening;” instead I was interested in giving the students the freedom to record photographically and then textually in the spaces that *they* inhabit: their own neighborhoods and communities. To gather topics to write about, I asked my students to venture outside the conventional sites of composing with cameras at-the-ready.

To photograph is to pay attention to both oneself and the environment (Parry 1998), and I was interested to see what would happen when students ventured outside the traditional sites of composing to photograph for their *My New York* and *A Day in the Life* assignments. Would the visits inspire them? Would the resulting photographs help in re-inspiring them when they had to write? Rudolf Arnheim posits that photography is “privileged to help man view himself, expand and preserve his experiences, and exchange vital communications” (1974, 160) and tells us that “inevitably the photographer is part of the situation he depicts” (1974, 151-152). I was interested in seeing if being “part of the situation” inspired my students not just in the picture-taking moments, but in the days that followed, both at home and in the classroom, when they were creating textual meaning in response to the resulting photos and the fresh recollections of being in the picture-taking moment.

Geertz uses the phrase “being there” to describe the placement of the anthropologist in the field; the “incorrigible assertion” of the resulting ethnographic writing is that the anthropologist takes the explicit experiences of being in the field, “in this time, in this place, with these informants, these commitments, and these experiences . . . ” and uses that specific experience to inform his text (1988, 5). In response to *My New York* and *A Day in the Life,* I asked my students to pay attention to their chosen surroundings, to walk around with a camera in hand, to look, to see, to photograph. “Students who learn to look and look again, to observe and to observe their observations, are discovering powers they have not always known are related in any way to the business of writing," Berthoff argues (1994, 110).

In fulfilling the picture-taking aspects of these writing assignments, I imagined my twenty-first century composition students to be engaging in activities modeled after a mid-nineteenth century archetype: the *flâneur*. In the early- to mid-1800s, the *flâneur* was someone who would wander around a city, "someone, who, without any set purpose strolls through and observes the life of a city or town" (Brand 1991, 6), someone who was the "descendant of the character writer, the contemporary of the panoramist, the predecessor of the photographer" (1991, 53). The *flâneur* was a Parisian phenomenon in the dawning of modernity, a reference to writers and journalists who "wrote sketches of urban life from the perspective of a strolling or panoramically situated observer" (1991, 6). According to Walter Benjamin the *flâneurs* would "watch" street scenes as if they were watching a performance: "They would present themselves as reading these crowds as if they were reading the most innocuous and diverting texts" (Brand 1991, 6). In their writings, the *flâneurs* "could impose order upon the potentially disorienting diversity of the city, by reducing it to accessible images that could be collected and consumed" (Brand 1991, 7).

Brand writes that the phenomenon of the *flâneur* first existed in Paris and London, but he argues that the figure of the *flâneur* also existed in America, and of the important writers of the nineteenth-century, none had the imaginative connection with a city as much as Walt Whitman and Manhattan. And with Whitman, the figure of the *flâneur* and the photographer first merge. Whitman was twenty years old when photography was publicly introduced by Frenchman Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre in

1839. But by 1853 the daguerreotype was so popular in Manhattan that there were more daguerreotype studios on Broadway than in all of London (D. Reynolds 1995, 281). Reynolds writes that Whitman was fascinated with photography, because of its ability to reflect the reality he witnessed (1995, 281). “Whitman’s compulsion in *Leaves of Grass* to have everything, in his words, ‘literally photographed’ reflects his faith in the power of photography to absorb experience and hold it fast. In this sense, his poetic ‘I’ was a kind of roving camera eye aimed at the world around him” (D. Reynolds 1995, 282-283).

Urban areas were undergoing rapid change in the nineteenth-century in industrialization, transportation, and consumer activity, and the *flâneur* served to make meaning of the urbanity he observed (N. Reynolds 2004). The *flâneur* noticed all that was happening around him, then returned home to write down the observation. The *flâneur* existed in the infancy of photography, before the camera became portable, before Kodak revolutionized picture-taking and made it available to the general public.

As step-grandchildren of the *flâneurs*, the volunteers that made up the Mass-Observation movement that occurred in Britain from the late 1930s through the 1940s utilized tools of the available media, words, photographs, film, and sound, to record their observations of the daily routines of the British public. Their manifesto, published in a letter to the *New Statesman and Nation* on January 30, 1937, stated they intended to expose facts “in simple terms to all observers, so that their environment may be understood” (Crain 2006, 76). Though difficult to classify Mass-Observation, the group of writers, artists, and anthropologists sought to “understand something that anthropology and sociology took largely for granted: the everyday life of ordinary people” (Crain 2006, 77). Volunteers kept diaries of a single day, “making observations on how they and other people spend their daily lives" (Jennings and Madge 1937, ix), and this act of note-taking and data-collecting was repeated monthly. By January 1938, Mass-Observation had collected over 1700 of these journals, the observers becoming "the vanguard of a developing movement, aiming to apply the methods of science to the complexity of a modern culture" (Jennings and Madge 1937, ix).

With the assignments *My New York* and *A Day in the Life*, I instructed my students to spend time *observing* their communities and neighborhoods, and their own position within their locales. In the preface to *May the Twelfth: Mass-Observation Day-Surveys 1937*, Jennings and Madge note that "observing is of itself real value to the observer." They continue, "it heightens his power of seeing what is around him and gives him new interest in and understanding of it" (1937, x). Like the *flâneurs* and the Mass-Observers, I instructed my students to record what they saw using the composing tools available to them. Advances in photographic technology allowed the picture-taking activities to occur.

With cameras in hand, my composition students took their own "eye" and their own "I" to their surroundings, photographing in their neighborhoods and communities. Donald Murray writes that the "writer's basic job" is not to communicate what the writer already knows, "*but to explore his own experience for his own meaning*," whether, as Murray points out, that experience is in "the library or in the pub" (italics mine, 10). I wanted my students to explore their own worlds, but I realized that the ways of exploring that experience have changed. In the background for the 2003 NCTE position statement "On Composing with Nonprint Media," the authors state that "New media . . . are transforming the communication experiences of young people outside of school. . . . With multiple opportunities for student expression in the English language arts classroom, these nonprint media offer new realms for teachers of composition" ("On Composing with Nonprint Media"). Chapters Three, Four and Five will show what happened when "new realms" were introduced in my classes where students chose pictures, took pictures, and created texts that combined images and words. It will show how a writing classroom became an important site where students made meanings of their worlds, their images, their cultures, and themselves.

Data Collection

Data collection is an integral part of the ethnographic study. "Field notes, photographs, students' written work, teachers' planning notes are all field texts that help us step out into cool observation of events remembered with a loving glow" (Clandinin and Connelly 2000, 83). There were two major ways I collected data for my study, the grand undertaking that Clandinin and Connelly call the "archival task" (2000, 131).

- **Student work:** The pictures my students photographed and used to illustrate their texts, and the texts themselves, became vital evidence in this dissertation, and I illustrate and quote from their work extensively in chapters Three, Four, and Five.

  I did not choose a number of students to study; instead all the students who enrolled in my composition classes during the 2004/2005 year, and all the work they submitted and presented in the class, were considered as part of this study. As discussed in the previous section, during the course of the study I assigned three picturing assignments: *Pictures on My Wall*, in which students wrote essays in response to important personal images, *My New York*, in which students photographed and then wrote about meaningful spaces and places, and *A Day in the Life*, in which students photographed and then wrote about a meaningful ritual, process, or experience. Out of the 107 students that were enrolled in the four sections of English 101, 100 submitted final drafts of *Pictures on My Wall*, ninety submitted final drafts of *My New York*, and eighty-seven submitted final drafts of *A Day in the Life*. Ten students stopped attending class at some point during the semester.

- **Field notes:** My observations and impressions of class activities and discussions were written down in field notes, which Agee describes as "the cruel radiance of what is" (2001, 11), that I would type on a laptop computer after each class session. I also scribbled quick notes during class sessions on which I later elaborated. I also took notes after individual student meetings which took place before, after, or outside of, class. By the study's end, I generated 136 pages of single-spaced typewritten notes (64,402 words). Of these, fifty-seven pages (25, 644 words) were taken during the Fall 2004 semester and seventy-nine pages (38, 758 words) during the Spring 2005 semester.

In order to document my classes, I relied on my own observations and impressions because "the researcher is essentially the main 'measurement device' in the study" (Miles and Huberman 1994, 7). To gather additional perspectives on classroom dynamics and the way the work was proceeding, I arranged for a colleague to observe one class session each during the fall and spring semesters: during the fall semester, David Hyman, instructor of English Education at Lehman College, CUNY, observed my fourth period class on Wednesday, October 20, 2004; during the spring semester, Tim

Gerken, instructor of English at John Jay College, observed my third period class on Tuesday, March 2, 2005. After the observations, Hyman and Gerken confirmed my sense of what was taking place in the classroom.

Choosing the Stories to Tell

In attempting to give the reader what Geertz labels as a “thick description” of my experience (1988), in the following three chapters I attempt to put the reader in my skin to see through my eyes and to read what I read. A formidable challenge was selecting what stories to tell because there was much raw data on which to draw.

After “The Picturing Year” ended, I reread all the student work I had collected and reread, organized, then reread my notes again. In reviewing the data, I found myself drawn to the student work that captured the attention of fellow students. This became important criteria for my choosing of the stories to tell. By comparing my notes of classroom observation and my notes responding to student reaction to student papers, I started to see which student papers/pictures inspired, engaged, and challenged other students in class; I started to see which picture-papers created a student buzz in the classroom and which picture-papers generated questions and responses from fellow students.

My students had chosen their own topics, and they photographed and wrote their papers from positions of authority. As I analyzed the data, I became interested in the student texts that not just successfully explored worlds known to the students, but that expressed reflective thought of what the pictures, spaces, or experiences meant to them at the time of the writing. I decided to use works that engaged the readers (both myself and fellow students) with textual descriptions of the worlds and explanations of the reflective meanings of the worlds as well. I had seen many papers grow from rough drafts to final drafts, and I had witnessed the energy that students had put into their work; in culling through and reading the data, it became clear to me which student papers engaged the class the most and which had engaged me the most. I began the process of organizing the extended examples in the dissertation around this sense of discovery.

. As I continued to read through their work, the voices of my students kept ringing in my ears. In attempting to give the reader the feeling of "being there" in the classroom (Geertz 1973), I insert student comments and illustrate the text (in chapters Four and Five) with student photos. In each chapter I also look at specific student papers (seven in Chapter Three, nine in Chapter Four, and seven in Chapter Five), which succeeded in captivating me as a reader and from which I truly learned (Murray 1982, 177). I have cited the work or comments of sixty-three different students in the study. Of these sixty-three students, I have featured twenty-three extended examples from twenty of them. It was important for me to feature work by different students to give the reader a sense of the breadth and depth of the classroom experiences, an "increasingly common way to manifest the collaborative production of ethnographic knowledge" (Clifford 2002, 50).

As I began choosing the stories to tell and began weaving drafts of the experience, the narrative format also became clearer to me. In crafting the presentation of the study, I decided to take the work of the four classes and weave them together so that the narrative seems to unfold in one class, which for my telling of the tale, converts that data into an experience that the reader can more clearly comprehend (Bochner and Ellis 1996, 28).

The Picturing Year

My interest in this dissertation extends from my interest in learning and teaching. I was curious to see what happened if I planned, taught, and conducted a writing class rich in students' personal images and picture-taking experiences. Would a strong sense of a composing community develop? Would the students create personal texts which involved outside readers (other students, the instructor)?

Sondra Perl writes, "We constantly need to remind ourselves that findings from our research studies should be viewed not as the truths of laboratory science, but as particular and varying versions of what we have come to see and hear and observe" (1999, 95). In this dissertation, I am not trying to come up with any empirical truths; I have learned from Van Manen that a study like mine does not allow for "the production of law-like statements" (1990, 22); therefore, I am not trying to say that writing informed or inspired by picture-taking yields reproducible truths. The study was local in its orientation (one college; four different classes). I acknowledge that every classroom environment, every class session, every composition instructor is different. The recognition of each particular study being different is a tenet of ethnography. Geertz explains: "This capacity to persuade readers . . . that what they are reading is an authentic account by someone personally acquainted with how life proceeds in some place, at some time, among some group, is the basis upon which anything else ethnography seeks to do – analyze, explain, amuse, disconcert, celebrate, edify, excuse, astonish, subvert – finally rests" (1988, 114). And I, too, am different. As I write this (and continue teaching) I am a different teacher from when I began this study because I have learned from my classroom work and have adopted new practices. Yet I know I will be different the next year and the year after that as my teaching practices change and grow.

As I have pointed out in the previous chapter, I had established a student-centered classroom based on interest and respect for the lives of my students. And with this foundation in place, I set out to introduce photographs and picture-taking to my students as a pedagogical tool to help them discover and make meaning both in and outside of the classroom. As I have discussed in this chapter, there were over a hundred students enrolled in my four writing classes during the 2004/2005 academic year, and the stories I chose to tell in the chapters ahead are the ones I feel are most representative of the learning experiences that occurred.

Many interesting things happened during “The Picturing Year,” and it is my hope that the following three chapters “reveal rather than reduce” what Irmscher has called the ‘fullness of experience’” (Perl 1999, 95). In some ways, the creation of these chapters is informed by Deleuze and Guattari’s theories of “assemblage.” They write, “There is no longer a tripartite division between a field of reality (the world) and a field of representation (the book) and a field of subjectivity (the author). Rather, an assemblage establishes connections between certain multiplicities drawn from each of these orders . . . ” (1987, 23). I think of the different elements of this dissertation: the discussion and application of theory, the parameters of my study, the classroom observations and the work of my students, my own perception, awareness and response to my students’ work and classroom activities, all filtering through each other, finding their own assemblage in the textual place and space of this dissertation composed in the two years following the classroom practice. Through all of this I have learned about my students, about myself as a teacher, about non-traditional sites of composition, and about the rapid advances in digital picture-taking technology that have altered the landscape of what is possible in the creation of student-centered and student-created “texts” in the English composition classroom.

Chapter Three
I've Just Seen a Face: Sharing Identities in the Composition Classroom

> The role of time in most photographs is like that of a sorcerer's apprentice. Alchemy is afoot. . . . Photographs considered worthless, time's confetti, slipped from their niche in drawer or album, touch us like the tinkle of a bell at a séance or a ghostly murmur in the attic. And why not? They are snippets of the actual gauze from that most durable of ghosts, nostalgia. They restore the scent, if not the substance, of what was believed to be lost.
>
> — Wright Morris, *Time Pieces*

See Who We Are

Classes begin: a new semester full of student faces. I have stood in front of a class on the first day many times before, and each semester I revisit the same initial feeling of a new semester filled with so many unknowns. Opening day classes filled with freshmen are usually quiet at John Jay. Unlike colleges or universities where students primarily live in dormitories, where freshmen arrive the week before classes for orientation activities that give many a chance to get to know each other, John Jay's freshmen rarely know the others sitting around them before their first day. For these students their school is new, their teacher is new, and their fellow classmates are new. As discussed in Chapter Two, not only do I know that these students will represent different neighborhoods from New York's five boroughs and beyond, and that they will offer a cross section of the varied racial/ethnic mix that is New York City, but there will be students representing different experiences, world-views, races, ethnicities, classes and cultures sitting next to each other and as the semester continues wrangling with each other's work. Some will have lived in New York their entire lives, and some will have moved here recently from other states or from other counties. As the semester develops, I will learn that some students have only been speaking English for a few years. The faces that look at me, look away from me, and look at and away from each other are in all different shades and hues. They are nameless, their backgrounds as much a void to me as to each other, though I am thinking that as they move along this semester they will all get to know each other very well in many ways. They will be strangers slowly becoming familiar with each other.

An important aspect of establishing a sense of community in the classroom from the very beginning is to allow the students to learn about each other. Nan Elsasser and Patricia Irvine coined the term “new speech communities” to discuss the places “where teachers and students work to promote educational equity and cultural diversity” (1992, 32). The first days in this composition classroom are introductory days. Though the students do not know each other, and they do not know me, I want to establish a tone that their own lives will be vital in this class. After I distribute a syllabus/course information sheet and explain in broad brush strokes the purpose of the course, the students rearrange their desks to form a large circle. I pair students up and ask them to interview each other and to take notes about the following questions: “What is your name? Where do you live? Family? Do you work? What are your interests, your favorite film, book, music, sports team, food? Why are you here at John Jay? Where do you hope to be in ten years?”

The once quiet class buzzes with shared talk as strangers start to open up with each other. There is laughter in recognition of similar interests, and there are questions that need explaining (a favorite hip hop artist of one student is completely unknown to his classmate; a student who recently moved from Pakistan has never heard of Flatbush, Brooklyn, where his partner has lived all her life). I am part of this circle and trying to listen to individual voices in the din; obviously the ones nearest are the clearest, but conversations throughout the room come to me in waves. Some students have finished talking and are busy writing notes. Some students converse louder as their comfort level increases. But all get quiet when I ask for a volunteer to go first, who will introduce his or her partner to the class. All eyes on everyone, faces looking at faces, no one says anything. Awkward silence. A hand shoots up and a student announces, “I’ll go first.” Communication begins. Every student in the circle introduces his or her partner to the rest of the class; every one listens to each speaker. The first speaker begins: “My partner’s name is Beatriz, she currently lives in Washington Heights in Upper Manhattan. She graduated from Cardinal Spellman High School and has come to John Jay to study Police Science. She was born in the Dominican Republic and has an older brother. . . .”

Later in the period, the students engage in an initial in-class writing activity on their experience as writers, their successes and frustrations; At night, reading their responses, I am not surprised to discover that for many in the class, frustration outweighs success. Karen Surman Paley cites Nancy Sommers, who comments: “Whenever I ask students to discuss what they have disliked in prior writing classes, frequently they complain about having to write about ‘boring topics.’ When writing about their own experiences, either as individuals or in the context of family or wider cultural arenas, students feel some authority and they display confidence” (2001, 59-60). These students writing in front of me know this already.

One student writes, “as I’ve gotten older I realized that I write better when it’s about topics I choose and when I am stress-free.” Another writes “If asked to write about football or boxing, two topics that interest me, I could write a gripping well-balanced paper. But in my experiences as a student, teachers and professors never request papers of boxing or football.” He ends his piece by stating, “My goal by taking this class is to turn writing into something I would enjoy to do instead of something I have to do.” Students express their wanting to write but of personal or institutional barriers that have blocked them. One states, “Sometimes there are situations where you just can’t write anything, your mind goes blank causing you to repeat what you said before. There are even situations where the mind is full of knowledge and waiting to be burst out that one can’t figure out where to start. Those like me that rarely practice how to write struggle with this or many other situations.”

One of the surprises for me in reading their papers is how many students write of how the impact of an audience reading/responding to their work is important to them. For these students writing does not have to be / should not be a private communication between student and teacher. One student writes, “When I am writing I feel like it is the only time that I am truly myself. It is a way to show people the real me. It gives them a taste of what is on my mind and how I perceive things to be. I find English class to be my favorite class every year because I can show people the real me.” Another explains how he writes and performs: “Writing helps release negativity kept inside the soul. When I write down music negative or positive I write, read, then release it into the crowd of people eager to listen to the writing. Most people give me praise after the energy is released.” Another student, also writing about music, states, “I would write about things going on in my life. . . . In this way, it does touch some people and that is what means a lot to me.” And one student writing about a particularly harrowing experiences explains, “To me everything is one big presentation, and that also reflects in my writing. One day my teacher approached me with one of my papers and said to rewrite it. I was utterly shocked. It was my best piece ever. There were absolutely no spelling or grammar problems. It turns out he said that "you're not writing to an audience, you're writing to me. . . . "

There is mixture of ambivalence and enthusiasm in their responses. A student who begins her response by declaring, "I am a writer" starts the next paragraph with the statement, "I do not like my writing. . . . I do not like the pressure of knowing that someone, possibly multiple people, will be reading it and judging it, and through that judging me. I don't even like what I am writing now." But another student's feeling of success in writing is wrapped up in his positive feeling that he is now a freshman in college. He writes**, "**I've had many successes which I'm real proud of. I'm real happy that I'm the first in my house going to college despite the fact that I'm the third oldest out of eight kids. I would say I'm most proud of my family for supporting me in all my decisions and motivating me to keep going forward in college and in life no matter how hard it gets."

I read these papers but do not "mark" them. I had told the class I wanted to read a sample of their writing (and they in turn could read a sample of my responding). I am not being an "irresponsibly romantic" teacher in this refusal to highlight error (Shaugnessy 1977, 119); after all these students were writing of their successes and frustrations with writing. I simply do not want to become critical of surface errors or content, especially when the class has spent only half an hour on the writing. Instead I write one global comment on the paper concerning what I liked about what the writer is saying.

I use the act of returning the papers to the writers in the beginning of the next class as a way to further learn their names. When I return their papers, I walk up to students after calling their names and hand them their work, looking at the handwritten paper, looking at the individual student. For me this is a crucial step in attaching their names to their faces. Names and faces begin to stick, something that is important in developing a sense of trust and mutual respect in the classroom. Students should not be faceless names on an attendance or grading sheet. Learning the students' names quickly is a purposeful way I can steer the class away from the "banking" system of education that, as Paulo Freire points out, treats students as invisible and whose names are interchangeable, necessary only for grading. "Names are the first key to knowing and interacting with students as persons" (Smith and Malec 1995, 280). And this introductory class work begins to set the tone for sharing of personal photos and writing about images of close friends and family that will follow.

Beginning the Picture Voyage: Reading and Visualizing Images

As I discussed in Chapter One, there are many current composition readers that present visual images along with alphabetic texts. In their 2003 edition of *Ways of Reading: Words and Images,* David Bartholomae and Anthony Pertrosky write that, "Words and images do, in fact, exist together inside computers, inside the now standard environment for the work in composition" (v). I perused many of these texts to help me come up with an example to help begin our classwork of writing with images, and I select a portrait of Nancy Carpenter and her short essay "And My Hats Were Prettier," culled from *Picturing Texts* (Faigley et al. 2004). It is a two page spread; a black-and-white portrait of Carpenter sitting on a sofa surrounded by dozens of hats is on one page and the written text is on the facing page. I distribute photocopies of the photograph and essay and instruct my students to fold the piece in half. I tell them to begin by reading the image, then to write down the details they see in the picture as an exercise before they read the text.

Students volunteer to discuss the details they see, and there are a few assumptions mixed in as well. One student remarks that the image reminds him of the elderly ladies he sees in church. Another assumes Carpenter is a widow living in a small apartment because she is sitting on a very small sofa surrounded by her photos. A few students laugh at this generalization, and the class opens the page and now reads the accompanying text to see if it sheds further light on their thoughts on the image. Carpenter writes of a lifetime spent collecting hats, filtered through her experience as a black woman living in the segregated south in the mid-twentieth century. In the class discussion that follows, almost everybody agrees that the inclusion of the image truly helps them in visualizing the text, making it, as one student says, “come alive.”

The conversation leads to a discussion of the subject of the photo of Carpenter and the difference between a posed picture and a candid one. Mostly everyone agrees that this looks like a posed picture; the subject’s pose, her “Sunday” outfit, and the careful arrangements of all the hats surrounding the subject give the readers the textual clues that this is a set-up shot. A student explains that for her, each of Carpenter’s hats has its own story to tell. She explains that it is important for Carpenter to be surrounded by these items; Carpenter could probably explain the history and meaning of each hat. Her comments inspire more class discussions, and students start discussing what they would like to be surrounded by in a photographic portrait. There are many responses: shoes, art work, Barbie dolls, Sponge Bob paraphernalia, CDs, family, even sneakers in their original boxes. One student states that one of her favorite photos is of a collection of teddy bears that used to sit on her bed. The photo is now the background of her computer's desktop, so every time she turns on her computer she sees it.

It is at this point that I introduce the idea of their first assignment, *Pictures on My Wall*. I tell the class that they are to select a treasured photo (or photos) to write about; that photo may indeed be hung on their wall, or placed in an album, displayed on a bureau, on a locket, or even as a computer screensaver. I ask them to bring the photo(s) into class and to develop a rough draft and then a final draft of an essay that is crafted with the photo (or photos) in mind. But first I ask them to engage in freewriting to the following prompt: "What off the top of your head is *your* most important photo?"

The pedagogy is informed by the work of Peter Elbow, who begins *Writing Without Teachers* with an explanation of freewriting:

> The most effective way I know to improve your writing is to do freewriting exercises regularly. . . . Don't stop for anything. Go quickly without rushing. Never stop to look back, to cross something out, to wonder how to spell something, to wonder what word or thought to use, or to think about what you are doing. . . . The easiest thing is just to put down whatever is in your mind. If you get stuck it's fine to write, "I can't think of what to say, I can't think of what to say" as many times as you want or repeat the last word you wrote over and over again; or anything else. The only requirement is that you never stop. (1973, 3)

The class freewrites about their favorite photographs; the students then read their writing aloud or speak extemporaneously about what they’ve written. And as the discussion ensues, I begin cementing the connection of faces and names of my students. Jenny tells of a snapshot of her and her stepfather taken when she was much younger. She explains that they don’t get along or talk much anymore, and she keeps the picture hidden in her drawer: “I don’t want anyone to know I have it.” Tracey writes of a self-portrait of her and a friend driving on a wintry day: “It just reminds me of that day my best friend and I drove in silence feeling just the way the weather did. It is the background for my computer. I don’t think I’ll ever print it out though, it seems like it belongs there.” Other students respond that certain photos strike them to their core. Chang discusses a shot taken in 1991 when he was a young boy in Korea. His family lived in poverty on the side of a mountain: “I can’t forget about that. Now I’m living a decent life and going to college. The picture shows who I am and where I came from, and that picture is part of me.” For many, the photographs they write of are special because they feature loved ones who are not in their lives anymore. Ruth’s is a picture taken of her and her father when she graduated from kindergarten. “He looked so proud of me, and I was happy to be there with him.” On her bedroom dresser Sharon has a picture of her giving her grandfather a kiss on the cheek, taken when she was very young. “I was very close to him and his passing away was very upsetting for me. Every time I see that picture I think of him, and it makes me happy in a way because I know he would be proud of me if he knew me today.”

Photos help fuel our hopes, dreams, and identities, and for some students it is not just the photos, but the stories behind the photos that truly matter. Jonathan talks of a fishing trip with his stepfather, who doesn’t live with the family anymore: “All my life I tried to be someone he can be proud of.” Jonathan, who had received word the day of the trip that he had passed the initial NYPD test, writes of catching a big bluefish, his stepfather’s favorite, and he describes the picture-taking moment and the deeper meaning of the day:

> I took this picture with him while holding the big fat fish. The sun was creeping with the clouds and somehow there is a rainbow in the background. My father had the biggest smile I’ve ever seen and his facial expression was just priceless. Him knowing that I passed the cop test, he was real proud of me. I caught the big fat fish and the day was real nice. I have never felt prouder of myself.

But Charmaine looks at photography as a true sense of documentation. She’s a returning student and a former Marine. She discusses that she has had a formal portrait of herself taken every year for the past five years:

> I was always a big fan of taking pictures; however, it wasn’t until I attended a friend’s funeral and noticed that on the obituary was a cross instead of his picture. His family said that they didn’t have a recent picture of him, and he didn’t care to take them anyway. After attending two more funerals and noticing this trend, I decided to always have a recent picture of myself taken.

Writing Topics Start to Happen: *Pictures on My Wall* and the Stories

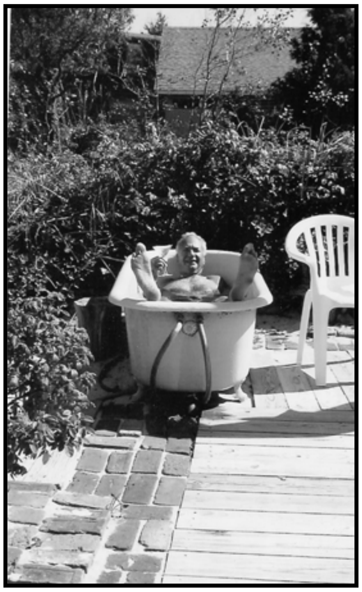

Figure 3.1. The author's father, Cape May Point, New Jersey. 2004.

The picture I decide to use in class to illustrate the power of the personal snapshot is not the photobooth one of my mother. Instead I present a recent snapshot of my father, taken during the previous summer. In the picture, my father, Walter, is relaxing in his bathtub in his backyard in Cape May Point, New Jersey (figure 3.1). I explain to the class the importance of the image to me: At the end of the day, my dad slips on a bathing suit and takes a bath in an old tub that is sitting on his sandy yard. The tub gets repainted every year because it sits outside all winter in the elements; as the students can see this past year the outside was painted bright yellow, the inside white. The tub is a place of ritual experience for my dad; he makes himself a vodka martini, then rests the stemmed glass on a tree stump placed next to the bath, and sits in the tub for a good long soak.

The photo inspires a lot of class talk; from the questions and comments raised, not many students have seen bathtubs situated in backyards. I explain to the class that in using this picture in a paper, I could write a general biography of my father, but that would get boring very quickly. Instead I explain how I would focus on one aspect of Walter’s life, his tub, and I would develop examples about how he relaxes in his tub, and how meaningful that tub is to him. The photo is a man in his tub, but the story, the eventual essay, would be much more. The story would give the picture resonance.

As I discussed in Chapter Two, in *Pictures on My Wall*, I ask students to select *their* treasured photo, a piece of Morris’s “time’s confetti” (1999, 18) or even a set of photos (two, three, four), and bring them to the classroom. It can be the image they wrote about earlier in the freewrite, or an entirely different one, but they need to bring in photos that are vital to them. In *Teaching to Transgress*, bell hooks writes of “transformative pedagogy” and “engaged pedagogy,” teaching methods she uses to get away from the banking system of education. Throughout the book, hooks points to the importance of establishing a community in the classroom. It is important for teachers to become active because, “some version of engaged pedagogy is really the only type of teaching that truly generates excitement in the classroom, that enables students and professors to feel the joy of learning” (1994, 204). hooks writes that our mutual interest in one another, teacher and students, is key: “As a classroom community, our capacity to generate excitement is deeply affected by our interest in one another, in hearing one another’s voices, in recognizing one another’s presence” (1994, 8).

The next session is our first class to feature student photos. The class splits into groups of five (arranged by where students are sitting, or the students’ own choice of groupmates) and the members in each group take turns showing each other their photos. The sharing and conversation is lively. I travel from group to group, pulling up a chair to join, listening while the students are discussing and sharing their work. In her work with middle school teachers, Nancie Atwell writes about the importance of the physical presence of teachers, and how it behooves them to sit at the same level as their students in workshop groups and simply listen; this pedagogy works for college classrooms as well (1998). Sitting *in* the group, not standing above them, I feel by extension and location "one of them." Though my teacher-authority remains intact, by sitting on their level I am positioning myself as an equal participant. And as I look at their photos and listen to the interactions among the groups, I am beginning to see and hear about the students' worlds outside of the classroom.

In Kenneth Bruffee's celebrated essay, "Collaborative Learning and the 'Conversation of Mankind'," he writes of knowledge communities and how "every student is already a member of several knowledge communities" (1997, 403). He continues:

> What students do when working collaboratively on their writing is not write or edit, or least of all, read proof. What they do is converse. They talk about the subject and about the assignment. They talk through the writer's understanding of the subject. They converse about their own relationship and, in general, about relationships in an academic or intellectual context between students and teachers. Similarly, what students do when working collaboratively in small groups . . . is converse. . . . They converse about and as a part of understanding. In short, they learn, by practicing in this orderly way, the normal discourse of the academic community." (1997, 403-404)

The students share their photos with their groupmates, and by extension with their teacher, and they seem animated in doing so. There is much showing and much telling. Laiza shows images of her dad driving, her apartment building, and shots of the Woodhaven neighborhood near her home. Tracey has many shots of her grandmother including ones of her posing in front of her house, cooking, ironing, and knitting. Luisa has about 20 high school prom pictures; her groupmates are immersed in looking and listening as she describes the process of a family friend creating a beautiful custom-made gown for the occasion. Carlton's photo and explanation transfixes his group. Carlton has brought in a picture that he had taken the past weekend of his two dogs after he had driven them to friends in North Carolina because he could not keep them in New York. He explains that taking the photo almost brought him to tears, and he feels choked up now looking and talking about the photo. His dogs meant a lot to him, and it was painful having to give them away. The heartbreak is obvious in his explanation and his groupmates are all engaged in asking questions relating to the image and the ordeal.

After about twenty minutes of shared group work, I tell the students that they will do some additional freewriting about the photos that they brought in to help set the tone for much more serious writing to come. I ask them: "With the photos spread in front of you, what is important to you about these images? Where do your thoughts take you while looking at the photos?"

In the past I would cringe when students would use the cliché "a picture is worth a thousand words." But now I want to put the cliché to the test; I hope that these treasured photos inspire good writing, a lot of good writing. William Saroyan once remarked, "One picture is worth a thousand words. Yes, but only if you look at the picture and say or think the thousand words" (quoted in Hunter 1987, 6). Hunter goes on to write, "A photograph invites the written information which alone can specify its relation to localities, time, individual identity, and the other categories of human understanding" (1987, 7). In this class, photos have already helped strangers in groups learn about each other; hopefully these chosen photos will now inspire insightful writing.

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Students take turns reading their recently completed writing aloud to their workshop groups. Angel writes of a piece about his friend "G" who is now in Iraq; Angel reads of his friend's love, and his own dislike, of the army. Tracey reads her freewrite about her grandmother. Terri reads her about how her mom makes her laugh when she feels depressed. Audie reads his freewrite about his church leader who became a second father to him. Laiza reads hers about her dad and how he is always lecturing to her.

Photos have been shared, and freewrites written. The next step is for students to craft rough drafts inspired by the photos and the sharing for the next class in which they will meet again in workshop groups. I tell them that I would like to see captions included with their photos, which can identify what is happening in the picture. The written captions can be anything from a short phrase to a couple of sentences. My mind is abuzz with questions: Will the combination of texts *and* photos turn the collaborative effort of writing workshops, the reading and responding to each other's texts, into a richer group experience? Will the addition of photos help the readers/listeners in understanding the writer/photographer? Will the addition of photos help the readers/listeners ask pointed questions about the writer/photographer's texts and photos? Will each group pull together in terms of not just the shared assignment but in sharing information about their own lives and creating an even more intimate classroom community?

***

The next class the students return to their workshop groups. Many, but not all, have photos and drafts; however, all students are involved. I visit a group and observe Seth, who has written only a paragraph (albeit over a page long) about his mother in the kitchen; he also has two snapshots of his mother posing in the kitchen. The group members take turns looking at the snapshots and then ask questions concerning the photos, which gives Seth ideas on how he can develop this essay further. He does not have a thesis yet, but as his groupmates ask him questions and comment about his pictures, he expands on details of his mother's identity in her kitchen. He tells the group how everyone in his family hangs out in the kitchen. Laiza asks him if his mom cooks Thanksgiving dinner. Seth says no, but he explains that even at other people's houses, his mother always ends up in the kitchen. In one of Seth's photos there is a dog in the corner; he tells the group how even the dog hangs out in the kitchen. The group sees the photos of his mother surrounded by cabinets, a blender, spices, stacks of canned and boxed food, and with Seth's continuing explanation, the group responds as if they can can visualize his mother orchestrating her turf and a kitchen coming to life. And with the group's response to Seth's images, to their questions and Seth's answers, there is also a paper coming to life, a paper fueled by photos, conversation with classmates, and freshly sparked ideas.

Krystal writes of a photo of her father. She distributes to her group a color snapshot of a man sitting calmly in a chair, but as she reads her paper aloud they learn that underneath that exterior there is a risk taker. Krystal offers some intriguing narrative examples in her essay of her father taking risks as a youngster in Guyana. Hers is a fully developed rough draft, and when I join the group halfway through her reading all of her groupmates are engaged in listening. She explains to them that she never knew this daring side of her father, she never knew of these details of her father's childhood. It was in culling through photographs of him and talking to him with this assignment in mind that these details came to the surface.

Jason's paper begins with an attention-getting opening sentence, "The calling of 'Sabaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa' is a sound often heard in Maple Lanes," and he proceeds to write a very personal and creative response about "Saba," the manager of a bowling alley near his home in Brooklyn. The entire group feels that the paper is well-written. His groupmates are eager to see the picture, and when Jason produces an 8x10 photo of Saba that illustrates many of the details that he writes about, including a change jar filled with over $4,000 that Saba wants to give to charity and bowling trophies that line the shelf above his subject's head, his groupmates remark that the paper "works" better with the photo. They feel that with the photo included, they can visualize the subject better because there isn't much physical description of the man in Jason's original essay.

As the class is coming to an end, I ask the students to do a freewrite about their thoughts of the past two sessions of groupwork. For Carlton, this is the first time he has been engaged in any type of group work in a classroom. He expresses that "discussing or critiquing our work made me feel like a critic." In response to learning about and from their classmates, students were positive. For some, like Genny, sharing images and text in groups helped her overcome assignment-anxiety. Genny writes: "At first I didn't want to share my essay or the picture because I was a little unclear of what you were expecting. After I heard the first essay, then the second, I felt a little better about sharing because they weren’t so different from my own work.”

Charmaine writes about the inspiration of her groupmates:

> I felt great about sharing photos and papers in class on Tuesday. I was able to see my groupmates outside of our class environment. I learned from Ana that love at first sight really does exist outside of movies. Ashley has a sister that she has not even met yet because of her schedule; she’s unable to go to Canada to see her. And Derek has a brother who’s still in high school yet he’s already taking college courses. The photos were a definite help. You had the exact visual that each groupmate was talking about instead of creating your own; therefore everyone was on the same page.

Sharon writes how the experience helped her begin to know her groupmates. “It was interesting to hear other people’s essays and see their photographs. After sharing all the essays, we all talked about them, and it was interesting to see how we could all relate to each others stories and experiences. I liked hearing everyone else’s essays and seeing their pictures because you get to know a little bit about the people in your group, especially since I didn’t know any of them before this.”

Ruth said much the same thing:

> It was not as bad as it seemed. One, because I was not the only one sharing my memories and, second, everyone had a very interesting thing to say about each other’s papers. In a certain way you feel closer to your classmate because we all shared something that maybe most of us did not even imagine. We learned

> various aspects and goals about each other. All the photos presented in the group were related to each other's papers. Not only did we understand the papers, but also each other."

Finally, one anonymous student writes:

> Sharing photos was a different and wonderful idea. This made me come out of what I would call a shy state of mind. Looking at other classmates' photos made me realize how alike we all are, also how we can relate to each other in different forms. The photos made me feel as if I was right there by them at that time period. The pictures made the essays crystal clear. Photos made each of us active [in the group] and made the assignment more fun.

Some thought the process was helpful in enabling them to share their own interests and feelings with their fellow students. Karen writes, "I felt really good sharing my picture with my classmates. It was a way of me releasing some of the stress I had inside. I had a chance to tell my peers how I really felt about that photo." Glenny, a young mother, writes that "it felt really great sharing pictures about my son. It's always a pleasure talking about him, and I missed him less because I got to look at his pictures during class." Abdullah writes that "there is no better feeling than being able to share my photos and papers with a group of strangers and feeling completely comfortable and confident about it." Anthony, who was absent that day, found out through a classmate what we had done in class and gave me this response when he returned:

> Had I been in class on Tuesday, I expect I might have felt perhaps a sense of relief and calm. I would much prefer my classmates get to know me and afterward make their judgments about me rather than at a first glance. My chosen

> photo and the accompanying essay explain a major aspect of my life and the bravery it gives me to freely express myself, which somewhat explains my seemingly odd outward appearance.

Carlton, who photographed and wrote of leaving his dogs, talks with me after class. He is a retired New York City Police Detective, a man who is more than twice the age of many of his classmates. Carlton tells me that this paper is very important to him. He has been out of school for so long, he wants to get “this paper right.” He explains to me that “what I like about this paper is that it *deeply explains* how I felt about Max and Mercedes, my pet dogs.” He writes in his draft that when he had to let his dogs go he “started crying.” He writes of tears flowing in the final two paragraphs of the essay; in fact he writes that his cousin did not want Carlton to drive from North Carolina to New York the night he gave away his dogs because he was too emotional. As Carlton states, “I wasn’t in the right condition to drive.”

Ebony also comes to see me, bringing a photograph of her grandmother. She tells me one of the examples in the paper is that her grandmother was the first African American woman to become a salesperson at Saks Fifth Avenue in Manhattan. I am captivated by the story, and I ask more questions of Ebony, hoping that the answers that she is giving me (or needs to come up with) will be used in the essay.

I think of Paley, who writes, “Students do feel pleasantly surprised when we value their lived experiences enough to invite them to put them into writing. . . . The point is, the topics that are close to the self stimulate inventive energy” (2001, 60). Ebony shares the image of her grandmother, and I ask questions about her grandmother’s experience at

Saks. Though I am responding to Ebony and to her image and not to her writing, the image is helping to give her much focus even before the first word hits paper.

Pictures and a Thousand Words

Patricia A. Sullivan writing about the power of her students' personal essays about family, states that students "are giving voice to their meanings, their confusion, their questions, their desires, all with a decided stake in the outcome. If we take our students' writing seriously as a form of cultural pedagogy, it offers us a glimpse into a social text, drawn from the cultural subconscious, that reveals us to ourselves" (1993, 47). My students have been striving to communicate the essence of their important images with their classmates and teacher, and the shared sense of discovery and disclosure has enabled them to come up with papers rich in vision and rich in meaning. The final drafts of the *Pictures on My Wall* papers are handed in to fulfill the assignment, but I feel more like a privileged reader of my students' personal work.

Seth

Seth writes of his mother in the kitchen. He includes three color photos, one per page at the end of the paper. The text of the essay reinforces the inclusion of the images. In the body of the paper, Seth writes: "Nothing can quite compare to the energy my mom brings to the kitchen. My mom and the kitchen go together like a battery to a flashlight. The kitchen feeds off her energy and in return gives her and us light." Seth has successfully found a topic and thesis through his exploration with photographing his mother in the kitchen.

In Seth’s words, the kitchen is always, “overflowing with sound and activity.” He writes:

> The countertops are littered with forks, knives, spoons spatulas, cans, and empty bags of food or seasoning. As my mom races back and forth from counter top to table, to fridge, and back to countertop my two dogs sit patiently waiting for any scraps of food that fall to the floor during the chaos. They’re like wireless vacuum cleaners that never run out of batteries. In picture number 2 you can see one of my dogs waiting to do his only job. If you look carefully you can read the eagerness in his eyes.

I like how Seth includes discussion of one of his photos collected at the end of his paper in the body of his paper. His paper flows well, each body paragraph building on the last in portraying the kitchen, and most importantly his mother’s presence. I comment that the paper has “energy and enthusiasm,” that the paper is “very compelling.”

I read again his essay; I am involved in his vision. Seth writes of his kitchen:

> It is the only place in the house where any major socializing occurs. Every major argument, talk, or family get-together always starts and ends in the kitchen. I recall that every time my mom first meets one of my girlfriends she is in the kitchen. Also the time I got a speeding ticket I told my mom about it in the kitchen and we had a big argument that ended, in the kitchen. It is also one of the most comfortable places in the house not because of the chairs, but because it seems to be alive and radiates with a welcoming vibe. Perhaps it’s even too welcoming, because the one time someone broke in they came in through the kitchen window.

I had seen Seth’s photos when he had presented them to his group and had listened as his groupmates offered him suggestions in the development of this paper. His paper has successfully bloomed from photographs with rough sketches of ideas to a vibrant, well-developed, fully illustrated final draft. The simple domestic snapshots he brought in seemed to open the door to writing, and his groupmates’ enthusiastic feedback aided in this process.

Sara

Sara takes the assignment, and she turns it into something unusual. The fourth page of Sara’s paper contains three four-by-six snapshots, two verticals and one horizontal, with the date “1987” written vertically down the center of the paper. These three photos were taken when Sara was a toddler, two of her with her father at a playground and one of her father by himself, “sipping on a cool Diet Coke in a canoe on the Delaware River Gap.” The color photos are inviting. Her dad (and the childhood version of Sara) are looking directly at the camera in all three shots, and the layout itself shows thought in the picture placement

Though the text doesn’t mention the photos, they serve as basis for the paper in a powerful way. The paper is about a recent excursion to a night club she went to with her father, which proved to her that she’s not a kid anymore.

“When I was a little girl my dad would always tell me, ‘when you get old enough I’m going to take you to a Latin club.” This comment that opens up the paper both harkens back to the photos of her as a young girl, but more importantly brings the reader right into the theme of this paper. She frames the whole paper around the night her father and his girlfriend took Sara to the Metro, where they danced and partied till 4 o'clock in the morning. She treats the reader to a present-tense account of the night, putting the reader in the club with her and her dad. I like the way she is able to focus her essay on something so tight, on one specific example that she develops through the entire paper.

Sara writes toward the end of the conclusion of her paper:

> Although there are times that my father may not like what I do, whether it be dancing too close with a guy or messing up in school, he is always there for me as a friend to talk to and confide in. That's why I admire him so much. Even though he took me to a club to have fun he still had that over-protective attitude the entire time. It may seem annoying at times, but it felt good to know that he cares. Not too many people have that connection with either one of their parents, but I'm lucky to have that special bond with my father. I wouldn't trade it for anything else.

As a teacher and a reader, I understand the connection; I can see why she chose photos of her and her father taken seventeen years ago to illustrate this essay. Sara writes of a rite of passage, of acceptance by her father as Sara has grown from girl to woman. Looking at the included images, it is obvious that both father and daughter have changed a great deal in the ensuing years. Yes, she's the girl in the photos, but these photos were taken a long time ago. That time was important, but the time now is vital. The relationship has changed. They could go to playgrounds together in 1987; in 2004 they can go to nightclubs.

Terri

Terri’s paper begins with a definition of her most important ritual: “A ritual is an everyday thing that I have grown up with around me for the past eighteen years. No. my ritual doesn’t consist of brushing my hair, my teeth, finding clothes to wear, or caring for a pet. Mine stems from a more emotional place. This ritual consists of four words that I express to the most important person in my life . . . ‘I love you mom.’”

Of the photos Terri includes, one is of her hugging her mother in a dining room titled “my ninth birthday,” which becomes important when reading the text; it is the birthday in which she is reunited with her mother in Puerto Rico. The other photo is also from her ninth year, and is of her parents and herself sitting in a small circle with bongo drums planted between Terri’s and her father’s legs. These are important personal snapshots that reinforce the text that they illustrate.

Her father’s illness is important in the essay, because it sets the stage for Terri missing her mother as much as she does. When he was terminally ill, he returned home to Puerto Rico. Terri traveled with him, but her mother had to stay behind in New York. She writes of her trip there:

> I remember the day when my father and I were leaving to go to the airport. My father placed me inside of the cab and locked the door shut. As he walked to the passenger side of the car I turned my head and caught my mom standing on the curb waving goodbye. Till this day I can still feel the cold coming from the car’s glass window as I pressed my face against it trying to catch one final glance of my mother. The taste of the salt, from my tears, caused me to gag and cough as my body began to shake from the strength of my sobs.

Terri writes of feeling alienated from her relatives in Puerto Rico, because she couldn't speak Spanish (and they couldn't speak English). And these feelings of alienation made her miss her mother even more so:

> I remember it was my ninth birthday. I had just gotten out of school and I was on my way to my grandmother's house, which was where my father and I were staying. The house was quiet and all lights were off. Thinking that my father and grandmother went to the hospital I went into the living room to watch some television. But instead I saw my dad, my nana, and some cousins holding gifts in their hands. As I was beginning to walk towards my father someone put their hand over my eyes. Once I smelled the perfume I knew who it was in an instant. It was my mother. I never thought I would be able to feel so happy in my life. For those few moments I felt that everything was going to be alright again.

His death a few months later made her realize that "the only person I had left was my mother," and because of this Terri began her everyday ritual. She ends the paper with this line, "Hopefully whoever reads this starts to let the one person they love know how much they appreciate them, because life is too short to let any emotion you feel for them be left unsaid."

Terri's writing makes the subject matter that is so important to the author, come through for the reader as well. Being able to view prized family photos of the author at nine with her mother and father brings the reader much deeper into Terri's reality; they greatly enhance her text.

I speak with Terri later that week after I return the papers and ask her about the inspiration. She tells me the paper was "a joy to write, but make no mistake about it, it took hours and hours of effort." However she explains, "I was able to watch movies in my head of the years, which made the writing so much easier."

Carolina

Carolina writes her paper on the relationship with her brother Oscar, "What I like about my paper is that I wrote things that came from my heart. . . . I feel that my ideas are organized and focused on the topic." She includes five snapshots of her brother from all different ages. The text is a loving portrait of their relationship, centered around the thesis that ends the introduction: "Although there are times I wish I were the oldest sibling, I thank God everyday for having an older brother like mine who has always taken care of me."

Her opening discussion is about growing up in Colombia:

> Even as we grew, he still made sure to include me in his soccer games or car race games with his friends and my cousins. . . . Often I would hear my cousins and my brother's friends telling him, "Oscar, do we have to play with your little sister again? You know how she gets when she doesn't win." I would feel so happy and spoiled when my brother responded saying, "Yes, she's my little sister, and I have to take care of her."

Carolina ends this paragraph with the sentence, "Memories like this make me realize how my brother cared for me from such an early age." This is a strong transition to the rest of the paper that contains recent examples of their relationship. Carolina discusses her brother, now twenty-two, helping her out when she went to her first "teen bash" and stayed out too late with friends by giving a fabricated explanation to their parents so she would not get in trouble, and of her brother tutoring her in physics to help her succeed in high school. With his regular help she went from a failing grade to an eighty-eight.

As I read Carolina’s paper and look at the photos, I am interested in the love and adoration for her brother that she is expressing both textually and photographically. It is a paper that seems less like an assignment and more like a keepsake, a testament to everlasting love of a sibling. The emotional paper ends on a high note: “I feel a great honor to be his sister, and I just hope as years go by and we all form our own families, we remain as close and as loving as we are right now.”

With Carolina’s permission, a few sessions later I photocopy her paper and distribute it to the class. Carolina sits at the front of the class and reads her paper aloud. Reactions are strong from her classmates about the paper and about the way the paper successfully meshes text and images. Many of her classmates feel that the images in the paper help them to “see” her world; the images of her and her brother together successfully illustrate the bond to which the paper refers. One student remarks that the “facial expression of Oscar on the motorcycle is wonderful . . . it’s something I couldn’t get from the text alone.” The inclusion of the five images helps them to see her world, the world she has successfully captured in words. Another student responds, “I never thought a sister can adore and love a brother so much. I am also a big brother, so in a way I learned from this. It reminds me when I was younger with my sister; I was the same way. It gave me flashbacks to my childhood with my sister and brother.” Other students wish they could have a brother like Oscar, one student remarking how she was won over by the love Oscar shows the writer: “I have a soft heart for families with values.”

Steve

Steve’s essay focuses on his fifth grade experience. The picture he includes is taken at graduation, of the author and his principal with many other cap and gowned students around them. He includes the caption, “Mrs. Paris and her most improved student, Steve, take the final shot of the year.” The essay concerns the trouble he fell into during his fifth grade year and how Mrs. Paris helped him out. His thesis statement, “Viewers of the picture would probably think Mrs. Paris and I had the best principal to student relationship, when I was an A student and never got in trouble a day in my life. But it was the total opposite.” In reading Steve’s sentence, I think of Barthes’ theory of personal photographs, that the snapshot is truly meaningful to the individual for whom the image deeply touches. For Steve, his simple snapshot reminds him of an important turning point in his life.

Throughout the paper, Steve offers vivid examples of getting in trouble with Mrs. Paris throughout fifth grade. His nickname was “Baby Too Bad” and he had his own gang of troublemakers called the “219 Killers.” He writes, “Everyone was scared of us, little kids, big kids, younger kids and even older kids.” Four body paragraphs are devoted to examples of the trouble he caused, but the turn-around comes in the fifth paragraph when he writes of his father visiting from Nigeria and threatening to bring Steve back with him:

> I didn’t want to go to Nigeria because I heard it was hot, humid, and the economy was doing badly. Teachers were also allowed to beat students when they

> misbehaved in class. I begged my mother to change my father's mind, and she said only if I would change my ways and graduate on time.

But even after his father's threat, Mrs. Paris still remains the center of the paper (and the reason he attributes to his turnaround). In the next paragraph he discusses how his schoolwork and school attitude was improving, "but the person that helped me the most was Mrs. Paris." He continues, "I was used to being in Mrs. Paris's office for bad reasons, but now I was there for a good reason. Mrs. Paris would tutor me in math, reading, and help me study for exams. She was more than a principal, she was like my personal computer."

Steve writes in his conclusion:

> Mrs. Paris also taught me very good lessons about life. She told me that life was hard but by working hard I could make life easier. Mrs. Paris was like my second mother. She wasn't scared to punish me and didn't hold back on giving me awards, and for that I'm thankful. If it wasn't for her I would probably be in jail by now or even worse. That's why this picture means so much to me. Every time I look at this photograph I remember both the good and bad times and what I would have been without Mrs. Paris

In reading the paper, I am reminded that my students' lives are continually changing because they are given new chances. Here they are in college, starting over yet again. I do not know who the trouble-makers were in high school or who coasted through past schooling without getting much work done. Here in college, students are fresh faces to their fellow students and their professors, they can prove themselves all over again.

Steve changed his attitude about school early on, with a principal whose life lessons still resonate years later.

Yi

Yi chose a picture taken on his senior trip in elementary school. He writes in the first body paragraph the ambivalence he felt about going on the trip. He was nervous about leaving his parents, but those feelings were soon replaced by the excitement he felt to be going with his classmates to Pennsylvania to see how the Amish lived.

The train ride itself was “not exactly what we expected because it was literally moving at five miles per hour. All we saw were acres and acres of crops for about an hour.” But the boredom forced his friends and him to reminisce about their days in school. Yi writes, “We soon realized that most of us would never see each other again after this graduation since we were all attending different middle schools. Graduation was scheduled one day after we returned from the senior trip. That was when I started to worry about the future because starting middle school was like starting a new life.”

Yi writes of the class’s visit to an Amish village (“we all agreed that life was not worth living if there wasn’t TV”) and how “everybody’s attitude about the trip changed when we found out we were going to an amusement park.” To cap off the trip, Yi found a $100 bill on the floor of a bumper car at the amusement park and went on a “spending spree by buying all types of food and candy for everybody in the class.”

Yi brings the whole paper, and the picture, together in the final paragraph. He writes:

> My senior trip was one of my happiest memories of my childhood. I had a blast from being around my friends and having a great time at the amusement park. The picture is a constant reminder of my childhood because it was the first time I experienced independence from my parents. I had a great time and whenever I am in a bad mood, this picture on my wall cheers me up.

This paper successfully gives the complete context for why the photo is important to him. It is a snapshot imbued with meaning, and through the picture Yi was able to retrace the meaning of that important experience.

Luisa

As I have illustrated, there are many papers from the study that exemplify the success that students achieved in composing essays inspired by their important photos. Luisa's paper is presented with nine of the twenty photos she originally brought to her workshop group. Previously, Luisa had shown the pictures to her groupmates, and she delighted them with her talk of the prom. Their interest and questions inspired more insight, more ideas. Her final draft is an example of a student immersing herself in the assignment because of the obvious importance of the subject matter.

This is a paper that matters to Luisa. She writes of her high school prom, and her focus is on the entire day, from the opening line to the last body paragraph when, "sadly and quickly the DJ announced the ending of our senior prom at 12:45." She writes of the final day of school, the ritual of getting ready for the prom, meeting up with her boyfriend, and all her friends and family photographing and videotaping as the couple enters the rented limousine:

> When my boyfriend, who lives two houses away, came with his whole family to put my corsage on, I was prepared to walk out of my house for the first time looking and feeling the best I had ever felt. My sister, whom without my knowledge invited all of her friends to witness me walking out of my house and ready to go, was outside along with the whole neighborhood. I live in an extremely populated Latin community. . . . Outside both of our families, along with our other friends' families who were sharing a limo with us, bathed us in photographs and made sure they caught us on the famous home videos.

Luisa communicates clearly in text and image just how important and vibrant that day was. She includes handwritten captions for all the images, referring to herself in the third person. In the final picture in the package, one taken of her at the prom, she writes: "After all the stress and preparation, it was all worthwhile in the end. Luisa smiles as a friend takes a picture that will become a great part of her life." Because the event was vital, the photos that recorded the event are vital to her as well. And the importance comes through in the text. In her concluding sentence she writes, "I cherish those memories in these photographs and in my heart. I'm glad that I have something that I can share with other people to show them how special my night was." For Luisa, these comments epitomize the success of the assignment.

Critical Reflection

I began Chapter Two with a photobooth image of my mother that I explained was vital to me. And throughout this chapter, I was interested in seeing what happened when students brought their own vital photographs into the classroom to share with their classmates and then used selected photographs as the basis of essays in which they would present the textual as well as the visual.

Rick Poyner writes of the joy of a snapshot photograph: “The snapping of the picture was a way of declaring: You are important, you matter to me, this moment was significant and we should remember it” (2006, 34). I look back at the *Pictures On My Wall* essays my students created in response to this assignment: Seth’s paper about his mother in the kitchen, Sara’s about going to a nightclub with her father, Terri’s about her ritual of saying “I love you” to her mother, Carolina’s about her relationship with her brother, Steve’s about the impact that his elementary school principal had on him, Yi’s about a class trip he took in elementary school, or Luisa’s about her prom, and I realize that what links these papers is the celebratory sense that the writers give to their pictured subjects. The composers found a genuine experience to expound on, in direct response to their visuals. My students have taken their snapshots, “what Lacan calls the *Tuché*, the Occasion, the Encounter, the Real, in its defatigable expression” (Barthes 1981, 4), and successfully communicated the *worlds* of the images in their texts. Through photographs, students have gained an understanding of their classmates’ complex and intimate lives outside of the classroom

In this first stage in working with student photos in my composition class, I have seen students’ excitement and interest increase when they have realized how relevant and empowering their own photographs could be to inspire writing. The essential qualities of these vital snapshots for my students are not in their technical or artistic merit, but in the content of the picture. When the semester began, my students wrote about writing, and some explained they were terrified of writing because they felt they would make mistakes, that they would write something wrong. The use of personal photographs has enabled students to become connected to their own work, and the sharing of personal photographs between classmates has helped foster a sense of community in the classroom.

In the opening weeks of the semester I have witnessed a class of commuting strangers become a classroom community, one that features the sharing of personal information and stories, the sharing of important photographs, and the sharing of important writing. West writes that “In their redaction of the photographer’s viewpoint, snapshots supposedly embody the selection, discrimination, and specificity so necessary to good storytelling, what Ruth Tooze calls the storyteller’s ‘sixth sense’ of knowing what material will constitute a compelling narrative” (2000, 179). It was the snapshots and the voices and stories explaining the pictures that has helped to provide a liberating sense of communication in my classes, a communication that has helped to inspire writing that shares the writer’s deeply personal world with a wider audience, writing that successfully brings the audience into the composer’s own realm.

Pictures on My Wall has been the first step in working with images and focusing on personal identity in the composition classroom. My students have become active agents in a classroom environment that strives to recognize and celebrate the world of the commuting students outside of school. As our work with images continues, I am interested to see what happens when our next photography/writing assignment, *My New York*, builds on these skills, when students’ own composing grows to encompass the taking of new photographs to inspire new writing.

Chapter Four
New Explorations in Composing

> To photograph is to appreciate the thing photographed. It means putting oneself into a certain relation to the world that feels like knowledge - and, therefore, like power.
>
> — Susan Sontag, *On Photography*

Venturing Out the Front Door

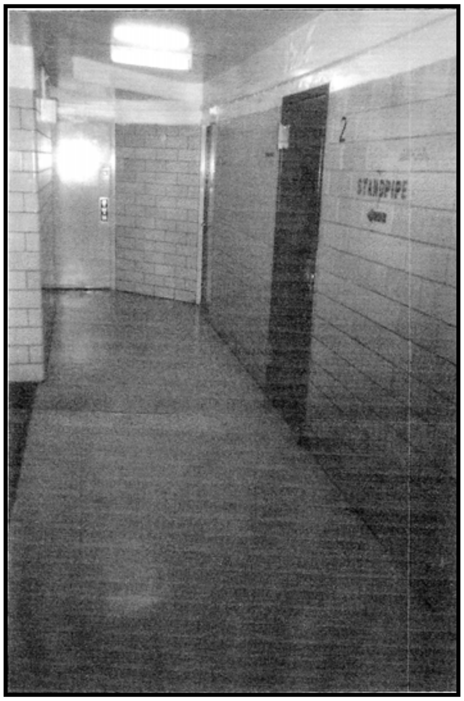

Figure 4.1. Chris, “When I look at this picture, I see myself about six to seven years back, as a young teenager, in the best place to be.”

The class sits in one large circle. I begin by presenting the next assignment in which the students will be photographing and writing about *their* New York City. As opposed to the previous assignment in which the students culled through photographs that were already available, then selected meaningful images for use in the project, *My New*

York calls for new photographs to be taken. I know from previous class discussions and student writings about photography that some students have access to digital cameras, cell phone cameras, and film cameras, but some do not. I bring in 27 disposable cameras to each class, enough to distribute to any student who does not have one.

As I discussed in Chapter Two, In *My New York*, students will begin by venturing into their current neighborhoods and communities, or neighborhoods and communities they used to live in, and photographing the places/spaces that are/have been important to them. An important aspect of this project is to encourage the students to respond critically to these places/spaces. Pete Hamill in his memoir *Downtown: My Manhattan,* writes: “Even today I wander through the city as if I were a young man. Something always surprises me. Something else fills me with wonder. I pass a building I’ve passed a thousand times before and see it suddenly in a new way” (2004, 15). Photographing requires that the photographer stop and look, and I am hoping that through picture-taking, critical thinking, group work and writing, my students will see their chosen spaces and places in a more meaningful way, and that they can become critical of their own lives in relation to their chosen images and picture-taking experiences.

In a 1941 visit to New York City, Claude Lévi-Strauss writes of the city as an “anthropologist’s dream, a vast selection of human culture and history” (Clifford 2002, 237). Clifford goes on to state that, “In New York, a jumble of humanity has washed up in one vertiginous place and time, to be grasped simultaneously for all its precious diversity and emerging uniformity” (2002, 244). In some ways I like to think of my students as burgeoning anthropological researchers, venturing out into the field and photographing places and spaces and examining their culture.

The writings of composition theorists inspire the pedagogy for the work in *My New York*. Paul Gutjar comments, “I push my students to look at the ordinary in order to put what they often take for granted into broader conceptual frameworks. By doing this, I want to make them more thoughtful about their world and their own actions” (1995, 69). Ira Shor writes, “When the class examines familiar situations in an unfamiliar way, transcendent changes become possible. Such an animation of consciousness can be formulated as extraordinarily re-experiencing the ordinary” (1980, 93).

Though students will be photographing in and around their homes and chosen communities, their writing will ultimately focus on their relationship to memories with the depicted subjects. As in *Pictures on My Wall,* in *My New York* students will share their selected images with classmates and explore personal histories represented in their snapshots. By exploring the memories of these places in talk and in text, students will hopefully gain critical insight into the meaning of these spaces in relation to their current lives and then create rich narratives informed by the images and picture-taking experiences.

James Britton has argued convincingly that students can achieve a “maturer view of themselves and the world by looking back into their childhood” (1972, 253). He continues:

> The mere act of contemplating a period in life when things seem to have been less transitory, more stable, may in itself be salutary for them: to realize its continuity with the present may help a sense of order to grow, an order embracing past and present, and providing, at times, a key to the solution of some of the riddles they are now confronting. (1972, 253)

I present to my class photocopies of a student paper that was submitted during the pilot study conducted the previous semester. While taking pictures of his neighborhood, Chris had photographed the hallway outside his apartment in his building, and that was the image he chose to explore in the paper (figure 4.1). His essay focuses on the meaning of this common space: the childhood games he and his friends played there, how their interests changed as they got older, and how they slowly abandoned the hallway for more mature pursuits. He writes of his hallway: "When anyone else might look at my photograph they might view it as just a picture of a hallway in the projects. . . . That is certainly not the case for me. When I look at this picture, I see myself about six to seven years back, as a young teenager, in the best place to be."

Chris then writes of himself and his friends playing hallway-basketball and hallway-baseball, and as they get older finding spots in the hallway to sit and talk about girls and give each other advice. Each body paragraph explains a specific activity that he and his friends would explore in the hallway. And in the conclusion he brings the meaning of that special place up-to-date:

> It wasn't until doing this project that I stopped to realize the importance of what that spot meant to me. . . . What I wouldn't do to travel back in time, to just spend one more night hanging with my boys. Now Victor is a grown man taking care of his responsibilities and also his two-year-old child. Calvin I see once in a while, we say hello, but it's not the same anymore. I stop to wonder whether they have taken the time out to remember what I've just reminisced.

I pass around copies of Chris's paper), and then students take turns reading his essay aloud. At the essay's end, I have them write for five minutes about what they liked about Chris's essay. I do not tell them how I responded to Chris's paper (my original comments to Chris captured my enthusiasm for the paper's success: "This is wonderful! You've done it! This is fully-developed and fully-realized – I feel like I'm there!"). But now a semester later, I want to hear from these students reading Chris's essay for the first time.

When it is time to talk, it seems as if almost the entire class contributes to the discussion about Chris's paper, which lasts for almost 40 minutes. Much of the focus of our talk is on authorial voice. One student opens things up by saying how much she "loves" how the writer's memory of events in the first two pages leads to the sense of nostalgia in the present-day conclusion. Other students recognize themselves in Chris's paper and join in:

"I used to rollerblade in my hallway."

"I like what he is saying about staying safe. That's an important part of growing up in the projects."

I delve further, "What do you like about the conclusion?"

One student cites the second to last line, ("Calvin I see once in a while, we say hello, but it's not the same anymore") with, "That's *heavy*. That says so much."

But another responds with a point about Chris's use of language, in particular the word *chill*, which causes many other students' hands to shoot up in response. In the middle of his second paragraph, Chris had written: "The three of us would *chill* day in and day out doing whatever seemed like fun [italics mine]." This student feels that Chris should have selected a better word. However, another student responds that the word feels “real” to her because the writer was trying to capture his world as he sees it/saw it. Yet another is particularly harsh towards Chris’s paper, saying the simple use of language makes him feel it was the work of a high school student. Another student then responds to this comment saying that there is nothing wrong with simple language; it can be very compelling. Big words, he says, don’t necessarily equal impressive writing. Many in the class agree that the word *chill* belongs in Chris’s paper. We talk of how personal papers like Chris’s can invite colloquialisms and the uses of such colloquialisms in personal narratives.

The students are inspired by Chris’s paper; one says that this essay helps her to “think differently.” Another, through Chris’s focus on his hallway, is reminded of the fence in her suburban back yard, and how as a kid she couldn’t go past it. Another talks of relooking at Chris’s picture: “When I first looked at the picture it was just a boring hallway. But after reading the essay, I can really see all the baseball and basketball action taking place.” Other students agree that the paper has a lot of appeal, and they continue to comment how the writer conveys honest emotions throughout by his use of language. Much of the class is involved in the conversation, and almost everyone is talking of the success of the essay, how its language use involves the reader in the writer’s otherwise private world.

I then build on our class discussion and introduce a theory about the making of Chris’s essay. I tell the class that by taking pictures, by going outside his apartment door in search of a subject to photograph, Chris spent time in his hallway, something that is an “ordinary” part of his life. He walked around, he sat down, and he found what he considered the best vantage point from which to photograph. Then, with that photo in front of him, and the photographing experience behind him, he was able to craft an essay about childhood memories and time passing, based on a picture-taking (and picture-looking) experience. I ask my students, “Can you do this? Can you walk around your home, your community, taking photos, opening yourself up to the possibilities of topics that you wouldn’t have thought of before you went out to photograph?”

We discuss possible photographic locations for them to shoot: I invite them to go on a photographic expedition to places or spaces that have meaning to them: around their homes or apartments, inside and out; familiar playgrounds and parks; old and new schools, neighborhoods where they used to live. I tell them to open themselves up to the experience of being outside their homes or apartments and to visit and photograph in places that are or have been important to them.

I think of the actions and writings of great writers who came before: Virginia Woolf walking around London, gazing out at the Thames from a bridge she hasn’t visited in a while: “For if we could stand there where we stood six months ago, should we not be again as we were then – calm, aloof, content?” (1984, 257). Walt Whitman in “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry,” addressing the future readers of his poem and future commuters journeying between Brooklyn and Manhattan, challenging them to experience what he experienced:

> Just as you feel when you look on the river and sky, so I felt,
> Just as any of you is one of a living crowd, I was one of a crowd,
> Just as you are refresh’d by the gladness of the river and the bright flow, I was
>   refresh’d,
> Just as you stand and lean on the rail, yet hurry with the swift current, I stood yet
>   was hurried,
> Just as you look on the numberless masts of ships and the thick stemm’d pipes of
>   steamboats, I look’d.

In the spirit of Whitman, I tell my students to see, to experience, to visit their own past and to think of the future. The visit, and then the critical reflection, will be important parts of this project. Freire writes “Reflection upon situationality is reflection about the very condition of existence: critical thinking by means of which people discover each other to be ‘in a situation’” (1998, 90). I explain that their own exploration is going to be key in this assignment, and that the specific choices of places and spaces to visit and photograph is up to them. It is their New York City. It is their world that they will be photographing and bringing into the classroom the next week.

Composing in the Streets

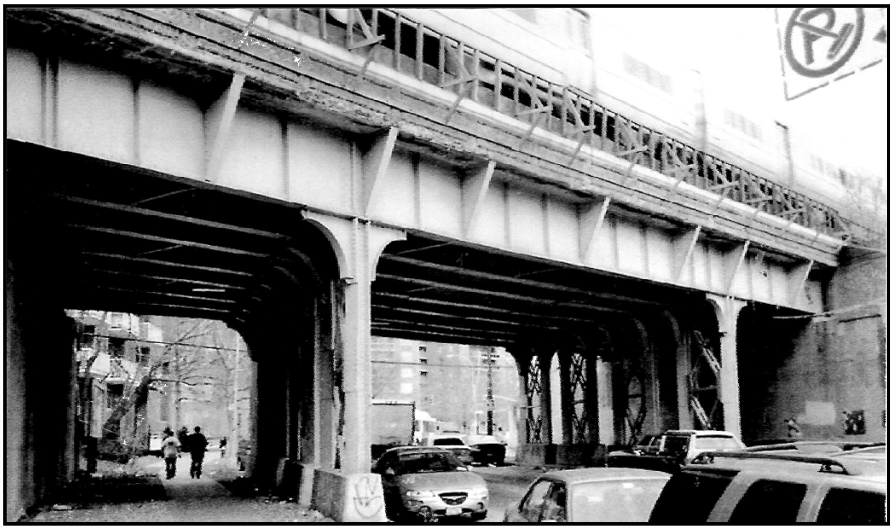

Figure 4.2. Mohammed’s Queens underpass**.**

I am at home thinking of my students photographing for *My New York* after our in-class discussion.

And I imagine this scenario:

It’s a Saturday afternoon in Jamaica, Queens, and my student Mohammed is sitting on the sofa watching some T.V., but not paying much attention. He has a lot to do over the next 36 hours, but like many other students he procrastinates. He thinks about his responsibilities. Maybe his mom is after him to do his household chores. Maybe there’s a part-time job that he has to go to. Maybe there are religious services on Sunday morning. Maybe there is a special girl that he’s planning on meeting Saturday night. Maybe there’s schoolwork: a history test to study for, some sociology homework.

And there is also this assignment for English class. . .

He looks at his camera. He’s had this camera for a few years. He has taken some pretty important pictures in that time. He picks it up, looks through the viewfinder, thinks to himself, *hmmmm . . . maybe this could be interesting*. He gets up off the sofa, dons a sweatshirt, and with camera in hand leaves the apartment, walks down the hall to the elevator, takes the elevator to the lobby, then he is out the front door to his neighborhood outside, a neighborhood he has been part of for most of his eighteen years.

He walks out of his building. It is an overcast day. On the busy sidewalks people are walking on their way home, on their way to some nearby stores, or on their way to the subway. He faces his apartment building and with his camera at the ready puts the viewfinder up to his eye.

Snap.

This feels weird. I wonder if anyone is looking at me?

He walks on a bit past the playground where he spent all his warm-weather days as a kid. He looks over the metal fence and sees a bunch of kids playing, going down the slides, swinging on the swings.

Snap.

I remember playing Manhunt here. It seems like not that long ago and long ago at the same time.

Snap.

He continues walking. He passes some stores.

Snap.

His subway entrance.

Snap.

He has an idea. His old middle school is about a mile away. He used to walk there, but now he wants to get there fast. He goes back to his building and gets in his car parked at the curb and drives, tracing his childhood steps. About five minutes later he parks under the tracks of the elevated train. .

I remember so much happening here around this underpass – I'd walk under here every day on my way to middle school. So much happened here: There was that fight about five years ago, I was such a stubborn 13-year-old.

He hears the unmistakable rumble of a train approaching. When the train is passing directly overhead he looks through the camera's viewfinder.

Snap.

I'm looking at all these cigarette butts all over the sidewalk, and I remember all the pulls I had had under here.

Snap.

And Theresa . . . this is where we had our first kiss.

Snap.

In my mind, I see a whole essay taking shape for Mohammed before any words have been committed to page. He's photographing many landmarks in his neighborhood, but the further he ventures, the more he photographs, and the more stories come to him.

This is Mohammed's journey as I imagined it. In the class following his actual photo shoot, my student Mohammed discusses where he had photographed in his Queens neighborhood and where this experience took him. The shot of the underpass (figure 4.2) riveted his workshop group, and Mohammed explained that this underpass is "where it all happened, where all the "firsts' took place," his first fight, his first cigarette, his first kiss. Through Mohammed's telling, I was able to create the imagined scenario.

Here are other stories that happened when composition students became photographers and brought their city into the classroom.

The Students' City Enters the Classroom

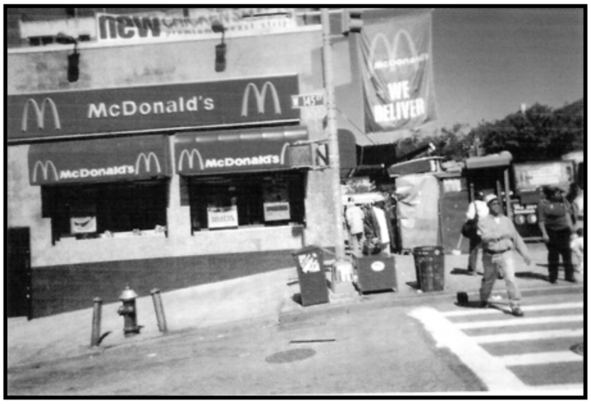

Figure 4.3. Scarlette, "The residents of 145th Street and Broadway utilize this McDonald's as one of the best places to just sit, enjoy a meal, and relax."

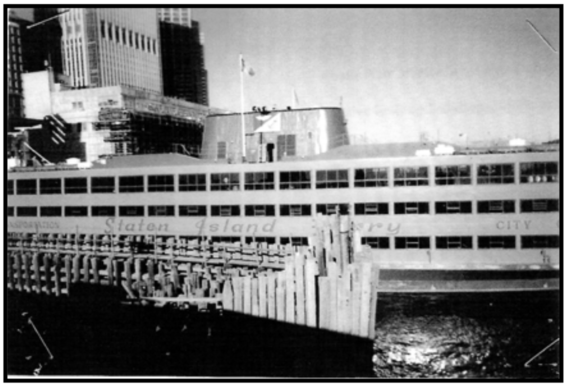

Figure 4.4. Karen, "Here sits the beautiful Staten Island Ferry awaiting for all to board."

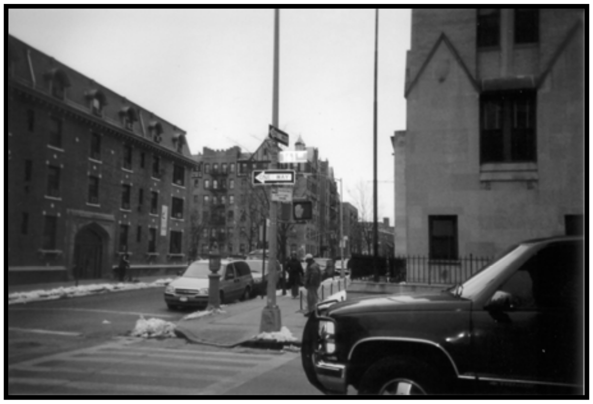

Figure 4.5. Ashley, "This is 161st Street. Unlike Rochdale Village, 161st Street looks vivid and relaxing, like people actually live there. I know I did, and I'm grateful for all the memories it left on me."

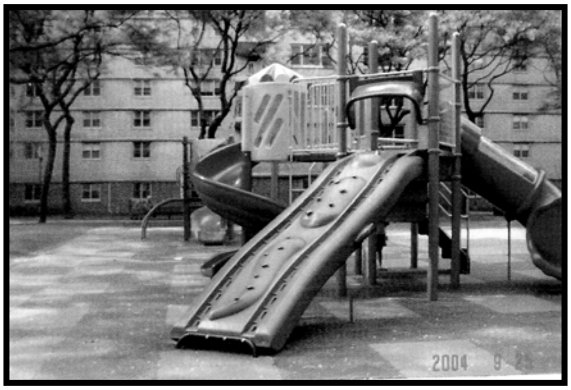

Figure 4.6. Anna, "This is my playground outside my building. Growing up, I spent most of my childhood days playing with my friends on the slides."

Kristen walks into class with her camera firing, taking two flash photos of the class getting settled. Her dramatic entrance puts the class on notice: we're here to deal with photography. As Kristen settles, I ask her what she photographed since we last met. She responds: "I was excited to see my friend Dave. He was incarcerated for a long time and just to see that he didn't age a bit even though he's eleven years older than me made me happy.” She explains further that she was moving the day she took her photos and photographed the place she was leaving behind, moving from Jamaica to Far Rockaway, Queens. She says that she will miss her old corner store, but she will be able to look back on the photos in years to come. This assignment made her realize that she has no photos of the other places she has lived and loved, and that these recently taken photos will be important.

Today students return the disposable cameras to me. For our next class meeting, I will have the film processed and developed, and then will return their prints to them. For students who used their own cameras, they will bring prints of the shots for our next class. But for today’s class the focus is on sharing the picture-taking experience. We get in a large circle and engage in a freewrite about the picture-taking experience, and then share the stories.

Ashley is in a bubbly mood. She had taken a few pictures of her quiet Queens neighborhood where she now lives, but most of her photographs were taken in her old neighborhood that she moved from three years before, including images of the building’s façade, nearby intersections (figure 4.5[3]), even the outside door of her apartment. She tells many animated details about the visit: When she showed up with her camera in her old neighborhood, “all the younger kids in the building were going “Ashley!! Ashley!!” She explains she went upstairs to photograph her old apartment door and found the new tenant in the hallway disposing of trash. When Ashley took a picture of the door the current tenant became very indignant. Ashley laughs as she retells the story, relishing the recounting of her picture-taking experience, and her classmates laugh in recognition of similar shared experiences. Someone asks where her old neighborhood is, and she responds "161st Street." Chang pipes up, "Hey, I live on 164th Street."

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[3] Figures 4.3 – 4.29 include captions written by the student authors. The captions were printed underneath the corresponding images in their final drafts.

Others join the discussion, adding details of their picture-taking experiences. Kyle, in a sinister sign of the times, tells the class that he felt "like a terrorist, like I was committing a crime" when he was walking around his neighborhood taking pictures. He continues, "When I was taking pictures of my block and the park, I was getting flashbacks of all the times I used to play outside and act up." Scarlette agrees, stating that she enjoyed the process of taking pictures of her neighborhood (figure 4.3) "because I was able to look back at my old days."

Terri feels that the photographic experience helped her to slow down and dwell on the past. She explains: "A place that meant most to me was the steps outside of my building, because I have fond memories of me and my friends sitting on the steps during the summer." She goes on to say, "I thought that this assignment was creative and emotional because it brought back memories when I was a kid and I rarely ever get time to think about the past." Anastasiya also remarks that the assignment made her think of the past, something she doesn't do that often. Anastasiya explains to the class that she has moved about five times in the past ten years since moving to Brooklyn from her native Russia, and that this past weekend she visited her old Brooklyn neighborhoods of Sheepshead Bay and Bensonhurst to photograph places that she hasn't visited in years. She says that the assignment was "really cool . . . . I have always wanted to visit these places but never had time and I kept forgetting. This assignment made me revisit."

Abdullah talks of photographing in her old neighborhood and other spots in Staten Island where she lives, but her favorite picture-taking spot was the view out of one of the windows of her house. She found the picture-taking assignment a very emotional experience, not so much taking the pictures, but being there and looking around her, feeling the feelings of the place. She says, “I embraced the moment . . . I just breathed in all the spaces” to figure out what each space meant to her. Other students bring up their experiences, among them Anna who photographed in her park (figure 4.6), Karen who photographed the Staten Island Ferry that she takes every morning to Manhattan (figure 4.4), and Alfred who photographed his family’s new home in Putnam County, New York.

I ask a question for quick writing: “Did photographing your New York City cause you to look at your world any differently?” Many students respond that photographing forced them to slow down, to re-see. Jonathan states that it was interesting for him, “because I’m so used to my neighborhood through my eyes that I don’t see anything wrong with it. But with a camera you just sit back and look at it differently. It definitely helped me see my topic.” Beatriz, who photographed in Washington Heights, adds, “I took pictures of my block, Fort Tryon, this “huge” staircase off Overlook Avenue and 187th Street, and places that are really special to me because I live there, go there often, or the views. I *love* photography, I *loved* this assignment.”

Nicole shoots her hand up. She answers my question indirectly, first telling the class of memories of milking cows when she was younger in the Dominican Republic. She has to pause as her classmates begin to laugh; I imagine they are envisioning their well-dressed attractive classmate in the country, squeezing udders. When her classmates calm down, Nicole continues that the activity was such a “normal” aspect of her life back then. When she compares that life with her current one in New York City, she realizes that although she’s only nineteen, she’s lived in two radically different worlds.

Nicole then talks about the Stevens Commons, a housing project where she lives on Flatbush Avenue in Brooklyn. She doesn’t discuss her picture-taking experiences; instead she talks about the hardscrabble world she inhabits in the projects, with random violence and rampant drug use. While Nicole is talking, the class is riveted. No one interrupts. When she finishes speaking there is a heavy silence in the usually animated room. Carlton breaks the spell and with a quiet but powerful voice tells Nicole that her comments are “very deep.” Looking directly at her, he reflects about the way he looked at things 25 years ago when he was 19, and he agrees with her worldview; looking around today things really aren’t much better. His classmates listen intensely. Carlton, the elder statesman in the class, the retired police detective, then talks about the responsibility of youth, how important it is for “you” (looking slowly around the class at every student seated) to stay in school. He talks about the difficulty of hanging with friends who are not in school, the importance of getting friends not in school to stay on the right track. He talks about the difficulty in later life of “getting it together” if you’ve spent your teens and twenties on the street. He talks about a friend of his who had dropped out of high school and who is today, in his mid 40s, still a messenger, holding the same position he has held for over 20 years. He comments that during his career with the New York Police Department he has either made or assisted in over 20,000 arrests.

20,000 arrests!

Carlton hammers home the message to his much younger classmates: “You’re *in* college. You’ve made it so far. Stay in school. Stay out of trouble!”

The class sits stunned. The photos, and the talk of the picture-taking experiences of neighborhoods, led to Nicole’s monologue, which brought forth Carlton’s powerful sermon. The hour and fifteen minute class had ended minutes earlier, a class where we wrote and talked about picture-taking in neighborhoods and the memories and stories that came to us, but no one has stirred to pack their bags and leave.

A Teacher Responds to the City of his Students

The next week the final drafts of the *My New York* papers come in. It is night when I open the folder and begin to read. As I read and respond to my students' work, I begin to realize that something is going on here. As I witnessed my students sharing photos and reading freewrites and rough drafts of their projects, I became aware that the work that the work my students were creating in response to *My New York* was important to them. Now, in reading their final drafts of text and image, I find myself responding not just as their teacher but as an engrossed reader who is privileged to be allowed access to their worlds. In the practices of picture-taking and writing of vital places and spaces, my students created powerful essays of personal identity and of memory.

In the following pages, I present two sets of successful *My New York* essays in which the picture-taking experiences led to the creation of meaningful texts. The first set focuses on my reading and response to the *My New York* essays of Kyle, Angelique, Yi, Michael, and Seth. The second set of *My New York* essays were "published" in the classroom; Beatriz, Sid, Ana, and Sharon volunteered to read their work to the entire class, and I feature the responses of fellow classmates to the student essays as well as my own comments.

Kyle

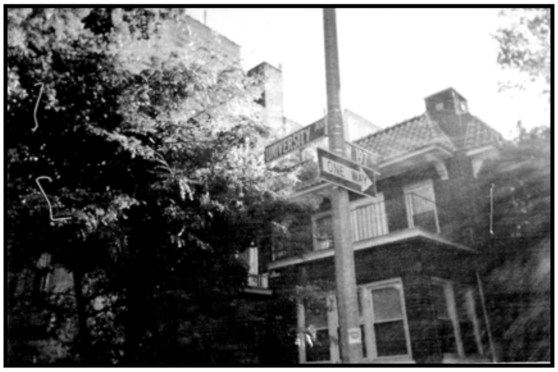

Figure 4.7. Kyle, “At the one way intersection.”

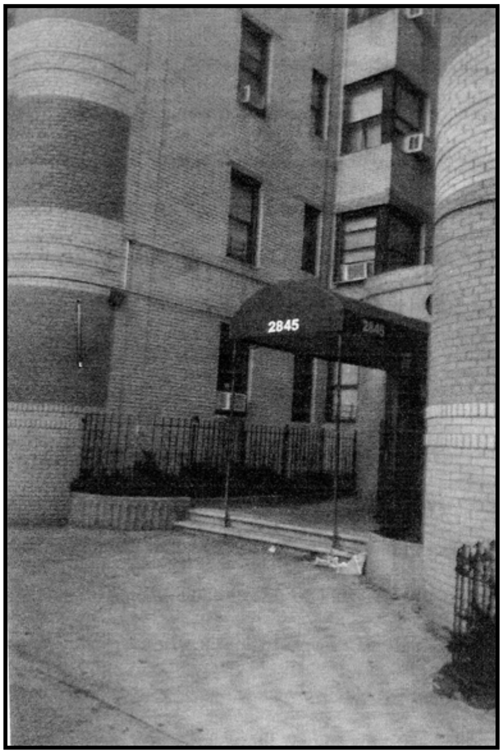

Figure 4.8. Kyle, “The infamous front of the building where flocks of followers would come and pray.”

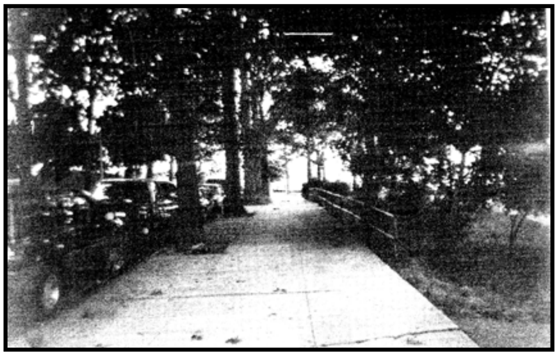

Figure 4.9. Kyle, “Across the street where everybody would come and chill.”

Kyle’s successful essay about his New York focuses on how important his block is to him. The photos connect to the writing; the writing reflects on the photos. It is a well-crafted package of image, caption, and text.

The first paragraph immediately draws the reader into the paper:

> It’s a little after sundown on a warm July night and the party has just begun. I put on a white tee shirt, some blue denim shorts, and a pair of construction Timberland boots, and I head outside to my New York, 197th Street and University Avenue. I run down the stairs, usually skipping about two or three

> steps from the third floor all the way down to the lobby. From here I walk through one locked door, then to another door where I reach my destination, the front of my building. As I look around I see everybody and everything that has influenced my life the past eighteen years. I have had many experiences, good and bad, on this little block that will be a part of me for the rest of my life.

The introduction puts the reader right into Kyle’s Timberland boots and the present moment, but the next paragraph places the reader in a memory of the author:

> I remember when I was a young kid about thirteen or fourteen hanging outside from about three o’clock in the afternoon till about two o’clock at night just having fun, playing baseball in the park, playing manhunt (a game in which one team of kids has to locate and capture another team of kids), or just sitting outside playing dominoes for money in slippers with a pack of David’s sunflower seeds and homemade Lipton iced tea. If we were feeling very spontaneous, we would tell our friends to go get two pairs of boxing gloves, and we would fight until we just got tired and went home.

Through his choices of images and details, Kyle brings the reader into this world, into his head, into his place. In the next paragraph he discusses winter on the block:

> In the winter time it’s a different story. Everybody doesn’t go home to keep warm, they just wear more clothing. If we’re lucky enough to get some snow, we would have the biggest snowball fight in the neighborhood. . . . We would use old boxes that were outside, break them down into sleds, and ride them down the hill across the street from my building. We would try to have races in which the rider would be pushed down by four or five other people behind him.

> The funniest thing that we used to do was pretend to be wrestlers and have matches in the park, on the snow, with real body slams and wrestling moves. We would spend hours from day to night just having fun; it was a good place where you could just let out your anger and frustrations of your life, even for a little while.

Time passes. Kyle writes of the changes to the block in the third body paragraph. He no longer writes from memory, he now writes of what he currently sees on the block:

> As I come home from work or school and I see the same men who I had seen when I was growing up, I notice how the conversations are different. When I was younger they would try to teach me about how to act and behave, and now I lecture along with them to the younger kids that live around where I live. . . . I’m pretty sure that I’m referred to by the teenagers as one of the older men that they could be talking about. The younger teenagers come around when we are outside and ask us advice on how to handle their problems, listen to the stories that we have about our past in the neighborhood.

In this paper, each paragraph offers a different slice of Kyle’s life, but the focus remains on the block, of his role in the block. The pictures and picture-taking experience have provided structure and meaning to him, meaning that he writes about in the conclusion of the essay :

> This block is my New York. I have spent countless hours of my life around here, and have made the transformation from a boy to a young adult. As I write this paper now, my mind becomes cluttered with old memories and old feelings. As I look at the pictures of my building I can recall what I said, where I

> was standing, how I was feeling, like it just happened yesterday. When I look at the pictures of the sidewalk where the park is, I can remember all the times I spent there. The pictures aren’t just some kind of image; they provide me with a connection between myself and my environment. If I walk down the street somewhere else it wouldn’t have the same effect on me. I have learned the way that the world works by constantly observing the surroundings of where I live.

For Kyle the picture-taking experience and the photos themselves influence the writing of the paper. Kyle’s pictures are very powerful agents in the paper. The caption for the picture of the front of his building reads, “The infamous front of the building where flocks of followers would come and play.” Kyle’s use of the word “infamous” is important; after all, Kyle just wrote about the front of the building throughout his paper. I imagine he has seen pictures of stars’ homes, of Trump Tower, of all sorts of famous sites; he has now “published” his own site and wrote about it and shared it with his classmates and with his teacher. Of course it is “infamous.” There is a bit of hubris here, but also the sense of a writer truly communicating how he reads and sees his home world.

When I read Kyle’s *My New York* essay and look at his photos, I see a writer who is excited by the opportunity of real communication. I see a writer who is aware by photographing and reminiscing that time has gone by, that he is not the young boy he once was. I see a writer who is looking critically at his world and his place in it. At the beginning of the semester Kyle wrote “I really have never been a good writer.” With his *My New York* essay, I see a good writer, one who is actively interpreting and sharing his world with his classmates and teacher.

Angelique

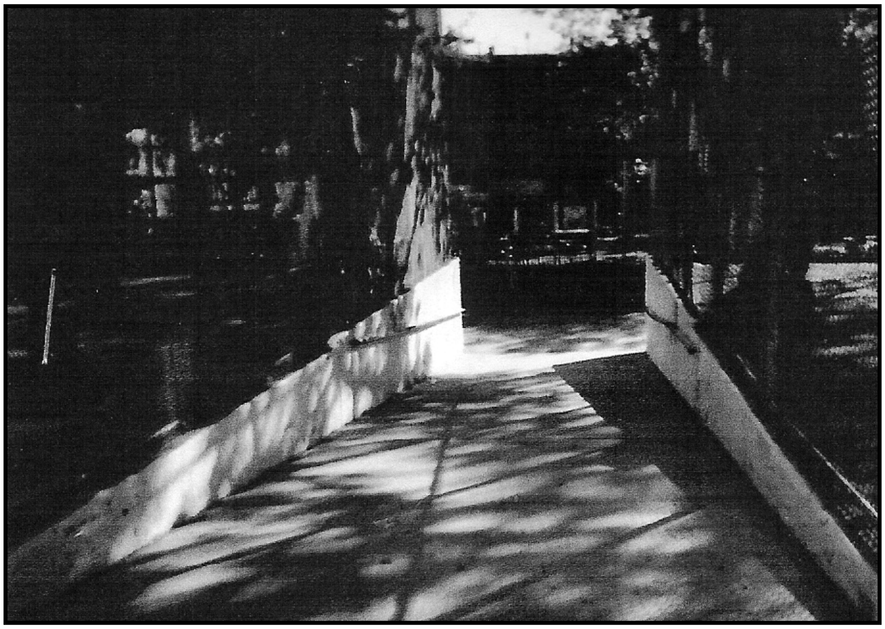

Figure 4.10. Angelique, “Nowadays the ramp stands alone with no playmate, no purpose, and no one to call its own.”

Angelique had told her groupmates that she went to the playground she used to frequent as a youngster to take pictures. But when she was on-site, photographing the swings, seesaw, jungle gym and basketball court, she spied this cement ramp (figure 4.10), and the focus of her *My New York* paper was born.

She begins her paper, “When I hear children laughing and giggling I can only think of one place,” and she then leads the reader to a park she frequented as a young girl in Ridgewood, Queens. The last sentence of the introduction is her thesis: “When I think of how great this park is, I don’t think of the swings or the playground or even the sprinkler system, I think of ‘My ramp!’”

She writes, “Most people would look at it and see a slab of slanted cement, but I see more.” Her citing of “most people” is intriguing. Like Chris’s comment about his hallway ("When anyone else might look at my photograph they might view it as just a picture of a hallway in the projects . . . "), Angelique assumes that her audience would not find meaning in the pictures of a banal part of a playground. Angelique states that "most people" (whether tourists, strangers, maybe even the reader of the essay) would see her subject purely for its functional, aesthetic role. Angelique, however, has a privileged, informed way of seeing. She sees the ramp as something different; she can "see more" because the ramp stands for so much more to her.

This important idea of "seeing" is used as a rhetorical device to introduce the next three body paragraphs. She begins each of these paragraphs with the opening sentences set in a parallel structure: "I see my first sled ride," begins paragraph three, in which she writes of experiences after snowstorms, going down the incline. "I see a race ramp," begins paragraph four, in which she writes of foot races in warmer weather up and down the ramp. "I see a ramp from my childhood to my adolescence," begins paragraph five, in which she is now older. While in the third body paragraph, she tells of playing basketball and riding her bike around the playground at the top of the ramp, Angelique writes of a more mature view of the ramp in paragraph five. It is no longer a place to launch a race or a sled; it is a thoroughfare between point A and point B.

Angelique addresses the passing of time further in the conclusion, writing of the significance of the ramp on both a literal and a figurative level:

> Now that I'm older I notice how very important this ramp was to me. It not only was my favorite thing at the park, but it is a symbol. A symbol of my growing up, my childhood, my laughter, and my simplistic happiness. I no longer go to the park and play on the ramp, but its spirit does live on. I recently took my

> little brother to the park and the first thing he went to with his skateboard was the ramp. He played all day just going down it while sitting on his skateboard. He even got other kids to race him with their bikes, scooters, and roller blades. So sadly I cannot continue to call it my ramp, but at least I know someone else is enjoying it. Who knows maybe one day he too will declare it “my ramp.”

Angelique’s caption below the snapshot doesn’t admit to these future fun-seekers, but it captures the way she sees the ramp when she photographed it: “Nowadays the ramp stands alone with no playmate, no purpose, and no to one call its own.” As with Chris’s paper of a hallway, Angelique’s paper succeeds because she uncovers critical recognition of an important aspect of her own world. By photographing and writing of an unremarkable “slab of slanted cement,” Angelique has infused this ramp with meaning. And this kind of infusion occurred when she ventured out with her camera to figure out (and photograph) what was important to her.

Yi

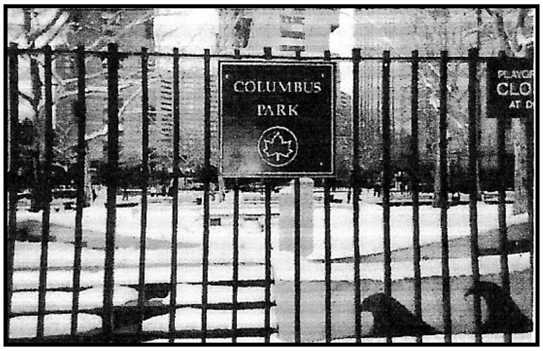

Figure 4.11. Yi, "Columbus Park is closed due to a recent snowstorm."

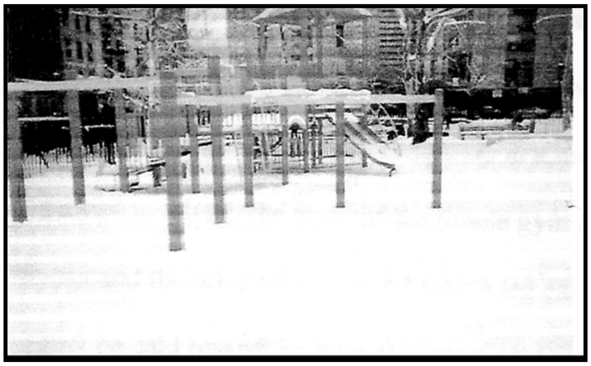

Figure 4.12. Yi, "The playground today has a new look to it."

Yi wanted to compose an essay about the playground he used to frequent in New York's Chinatown, but when he returned to the playground to photograph for *My New York* after an absence of many years, he was reminded that the old playground he knew and loved had been replaced by new play equipment years earlier. However, even though the images of the new equipment don't illustrate the play equipment he writes of in the paper, his visit back to the park was still important to Yi.

The body of the paper deals with the wonders of the playground that Yi experienced as a youngster. He writes, "Columbus Park was my second home. It provided an escape from my daily life at home." Yi explains that the physical activities he could not do at home, the running, jumping, and yelling, he could freely do at the park on its rickety swings, monkey bars, jungle gyms, ladders and slides. He writes of fierce games of tag, of injuries, and of gaining courage to go on the equipment. And he also writes of the time when he was in fifth grade when the park was closed for renovation and the disappointment of the reopening: "A year later, when the playground was rebuilt entirely, new jungle gyms and rubber floor mats were the first thing I noticed. I visited this park with my friends to give it a try, but it just was not the same. We didn't have fun because the new equipment was suited for a much younger age group."

These sentiments are crafted in the paper's conclusion. After writing of the childhood antics in Columbus Park, Yi writes this conclusion:

> Although the old playground is no longer here, the memories will always be with me. My days of playing tag are long gone, but I can always revisit them and all the other happy memories my friends and I shared in this playground. Many of my memories have faded from me, but they came back when I was taking pictures of the park. It hit me when I saw a bunch of kids running around throwing snowballs at each other without a care in the world and having so much fun doing it. It made me think of a time in my life I was able to do that. Though the playground looks different from the one I knew growing up, it still has that same atmosphere that I know and love.

Yi's photographs (figures 4.11 and 4.12) visually enhance the critical point he raises in his conclusion; his visit to the playground, albeit a changed playground, inspired the memories and picture-taking which infuse the paper. In his freewrite about the picture-taking experience, Yi wrote that, "taking pictures helped me see the topic better because it brought back memories just setting foot in the park." No kids are running or jumping in Yi's wintry shots included in his final draft, but their presence is referred to in his concluding remarks, which helped transport him back to a time when the original playground, and the opportunity for unsupervised fun, was vital for the writer as a young boy.

Michael

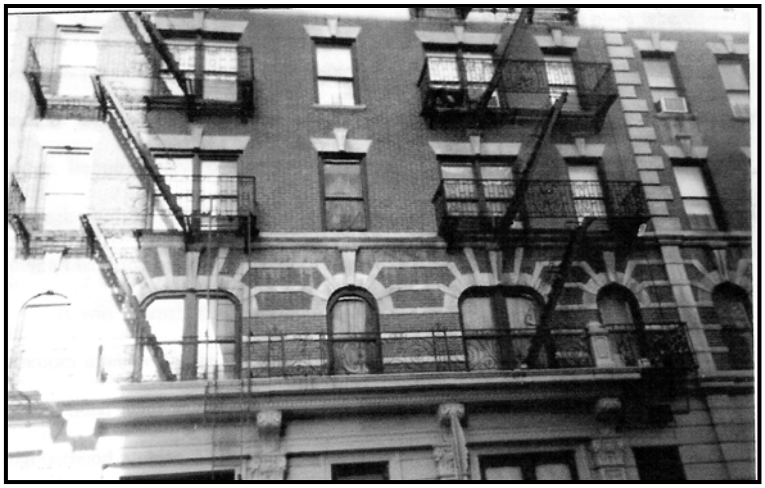

Figure 4.13. Michael, “The first apartment I lived in that has so many fond memories.”

For his *My New York*, Michael, a student in his early twenties who recently transferred from another college, returned to his first apartment on 129th Street and Madison Avenue in Harlem. He includes a shot of the entranceway to his former building with a “No Loitering” sign and a shot of the front façade of the building (figure 4.13). He writes that the building “still reminds me of home,” a phrase that captures the longing of memory and nostalgia which are in evidence throughout the essay.

Michael doesn’t begin his paper with thoughts of his recent visit. Instead, he begins with a vision of the New York City that he imagines tourists to the city would see: “The daytime streets are filled with people, the world’s financial district on Wall Street is booming, and the lives of New Yorkers are always moving at a hustle and bustle pace. At night you can see New York’s beautiful skyline that remains bright all year round.”

He connects his first body paragraph to the introduction, much like he connects a tourist's vision of New York to his own: "In all its splendor, New York is home to a place that I am fond of, and it brings back memories of a time when life seemed to be perfect, at least at a child's age. It was an apartment on the first floor building, #51, on 129th Street and Madison Avenue in Harlem." Most importantly for Michael, this was the last apartment he lived in with his mother before she died. He states, "Although we lived in the hood and didn't have much, this little shack was my home and I wouldn't have traded it for any other place in New York." He then writes of powerful memories of his early years.

He writes of an apartment filled with people, who were "sometimes family but usually my parents' friends, the neighborhood junkies." Michael was growing up when the crack epidemic was running rampant, and he explains how he and his sister stayed inside the apartment to escape the streets. However, staying inside soon became tiresome: "Being incarcerated in our apartment, my sister and I learned to make the best of it usually playing hide and seek. This became old pretty quickly since there weren't many places to hide in the little container we were in. After the games became boring, I was on to new things. I would just find myself in all sorts of things, mainly trouble."

He describes waiting for his parents to come home, knowing he was going to get into trouble:

> I paced the floor and listened to every voice in the hallway from the front door to hear when they approached. I soon heard the sound of my mother talking in almost a whisper at the door. The sound of the key in the door made me run to my bed and pretend as if I were asleep. My sister eagerly waited to deliver the

> news, and as they opened the door I could hear her saying, “Ma, you ain’t gonna believe what Michael did.” Shortly after my father came in the room with his belt, and the last thing I remember was the feeling of leather.

Even with the punishments and the parental substance abuse, the family home is a place of powerful attachments for Michael, fueled by memories of his mother:

> So this small apartment is more to me than just the place where I first lived, or where I spent countless hours, or even where I got my first “whoopin’.” Our apartment was the first and last place I lived with my mom and those memories will never be forgotten. . . . She had this real softness to her, but her tongue was a double-edged sword that would slash at a moment’s notice. Every morning before we would leave for school she would say, ‘if you can’t beat ‘em, you betta get something out the trash and beat ‘em, cus you betta not come back here beat up.’ My sister and I would usually laugh as we walked out because we knew that she was going to say this. I would give anything to hear those words again.

In the conclusion of the paper, Michael brings back his opening vision of what New York City must look like to an outsider. It stands in stark contrast to the world he has just written about:

> New York City is a beautiful place to see and it can draw you in by all it has to offer. When you aren’t from New York and you’re just visiting, it’s just the place where you want to be. Shopping malls, fancy restaurants, Broadway, visual attractions; you name it New York has it. In my New York, our first apartment is the best place for me to visit. Although it’s not a main attraction to many, it still reminds me of home.

For this assignment, Michael photographed outside the building that housed his family when they *were* a family. He brings the fresh perspective of that visit into a paper that tries to make sense of experiences both brutal *and* tender from almost twenty years previously. Reading Michael's *My New York*, I am deeply affected by his vision, his honesty, and by the craft of his writing. This is a powerful paper, inspired by memory and a recent picture-taking experience.

Seth

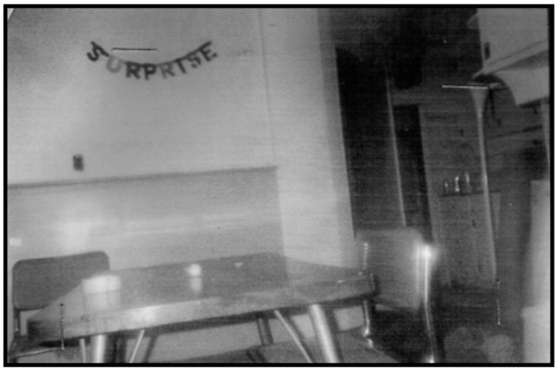

Figure 4.14. Seth, "The only ping pong ball left after the many ferocious beer pong battles."

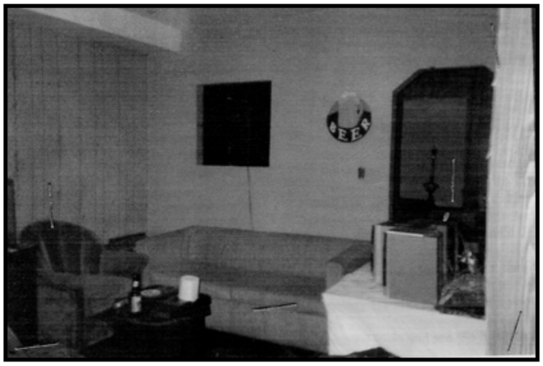

Figure 4.15. Seth, "The Conference Room, where all important meetings take place."

While the three previous essays dealt with outdoor spaces in neighborhoods, some students chose to photograph interior spaces in response to *My New York*. In Seth's case, the unassuming photographs of a basement apartment would not lead a reader to predict the intensity of the essay that is to follow. Seth photographed and wrote about a basement apartment, his current "conference room" where he has many parties. But this apartment is where his grandmother used to live, and her absence (she died when he was in third grade) is almost a physical presence in his work. Though on the one hand the essay is about grieving, at the same time it seems to be a well-crafted discussion on the joy of life, the joy of living for the moment, something he learned from his grandmother and her death, and which he still thinks about all these years later.

After reading the draft of his *My New York* essay to his workshop group, Seth explained his composing process. He remarked that it was important for him to be in the space, to photograph the space, and that the visit was vital for the outcome of his paper. Seth stated that “in order for this paper to be good, it had to have a purpose; it just couldn’t simply be about a place.” He explained that in spending a lot of time in the room just thinking and taking pictures, his thoughts about his basement became clearer and the essay began to take shape. The paper begins with a sentence that invites the reader to enter his frame of mind: “Imagine a place where you could go to be alone and think without being disturbed by anyone but your own shadow.”

Seth writes about his grandmother’s apartment, how “as a child I would get into disputes with my family and immediately run onto my back porch and fly down the stairs into my nanny’s apartment.” He further explains that “any time I was feeling upset I would go see her and she would make everything seem ok. She would always listen to what I had to say no matter how upset I got and would seem to understand. It was in her understanding of my problems that they just seemed to disappear from my memory.” His grandmother passed away when Seth was in third grade, and that traumatic event prevented him from visiting the room again. He writes, “For a time I wouldn’t go down there because I was afraid. I think I was scared to be there because it would make me think of death. It made me see the reality of death, and I thought that by thinking about it I too would die.” As the paper develops he explains how he transcends this experience, and was able to visit the apartment, “not thinking about death but of life, and how much I still wanted to do and see.”

He then makes the transition to the present and explains how transcending her death has helped him celebrate life. He now finds “the good in everything, and because of that I enjoy everything I do.” He writes, “When my grandmother died I was so young that it made me angry and fearful of death, I didn’t have the understanding that my nanny seemed to have. But now through my years of experience I’ve come to realize that through her death she taught me her last and most valuable lesson. She taught me not to live my life in fear and sadness, but to go out and make the best of the time we have, and that if we keep ourselves happy we can attempt to bring others the same happiness so that they don’t miss out on this great adventure and privilege of living.” It is this lesson that Seth celebrates in this, his basement apartment, which has been very important to him.

The Students Respond to the City of their Peers

While visiting workshop groups, I had listened to students discussing their images and reading their writing in response to *My New York*. Because I had spent time with all the groups, I was familiar with all of their stories. But the students were only familiar with the texts and images created by other students in their groups.

In our classrooms, freshmen writers begin to understand the importance of audience in their work and to acknowledge that they are “writing for flesh-and-blood human beings, readers who want them to bring their interests into a course, not simply [for] teachers who are poised with red pens, ready to evaluate what they don’t know” (Sommers and Saltz 2004, 139). Murray writes that “There is nothing quite so exciting as to see writing come to life in a classroom and a student turn into a writer during the course of a year. This can happen and this will happen if your students publish . . .” (1982, 133).

The novelist Henry Roth entered the City College of New York in 1924, and like all other incoming students, enrolled in a required writing class[4]. One of the assignments was to write an “expository essay about how to construct something complex,” and Roth chose to write about his recent experiences as a plumber’s helper in the Bronx (Kellman 2005, 77). Roth composed a narrative of his experience installing pipes from a bathroom and kitchen to a sewer in the street. The writing focused on Roth’s own personal experience in laying pipe; however, Arthur Dickson, his professor, felt that Roth’s response did not fulfull the assignment. What Roth handed in, Dickson commented on the paper, was narration, not exposition. Roth received a *D*.

But, as Kellman asserts, Roth’s fortune changed as the semester ended:

> [Roth] was duly shocked when, on the final day of the semester, Dickson singled his work out in class and read it out loud. It was a transforming event for the anxious undergraduate to hear his own words pronounced by the instructor, as if the author were Keats or Tennyson. Dickson announced that he was recommending “Impressions of a Plumber” for publication in the campus literary magazine and the essay appeared in the May 1925 issue of *Lavender*. . . (2005, 77).

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[4] As mentioned in Chapter Three, John Jay’s 10th Avenue building was originally home to DeWitt Clinton High School. Henry Roth began his high school studies in New York City’s Stuyvesant High School, but in the fall of 1920, transferred to Clinton High School which housed approximately six thousand male students (Kellman, 63).

Over eighty years ago a college freshman writes a paper that is “published” in his classroom, and it becomes a “transforming event” for the young writer Henry Roth, who would go on nine years later to publish *Call It Sleep*, a novel “modernistic in method, biblical in cadence, yet intensely personal in its re-creation of family life and street life in the old Jewish ghetto” (Dickstein 1987, BR1), considered “one of the few genuinely distinguished novels written by a twentieth century American” (Howe 1964, BR1). I find Roth’s college paper inspiring in its creation and its reception.

In my classroom, I planned to make photocopies of some of my students *My New York* essays, their words and images, and invite the composers to read the work aloud to their classmates. Inspired by Roth’s experience over eighty years earlier, I wondered if publication, in this case, the reading aloud of papers to the entire class, would enable “transforming events” to happen in my classroom. I started with Beatriz in the Fall semester and asked her if she would read her paper to the class. The following semester, I asked for volunteers to read final drafts of their *My New York* essays aloud to the class, and Sid, Ana and Sharon agreed to do so. Here are their stories that were shared with the class.

Beatriz

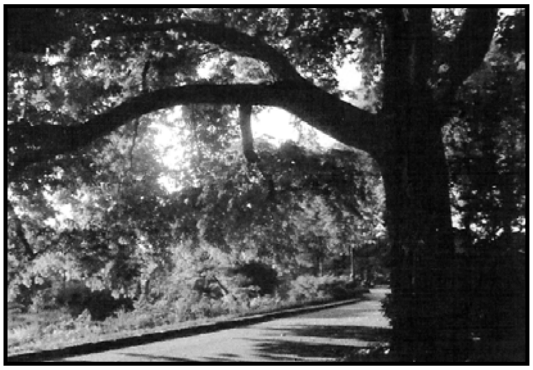


Figure 4.16. Beatriz, “The entrance of the park always reminds me of *The Secret Garden*.

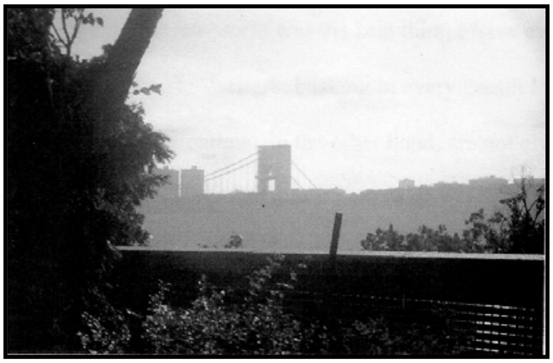


Figure 4.17. Beatriz, “The George Washington Bridge seems to become a part of nature from afar.”

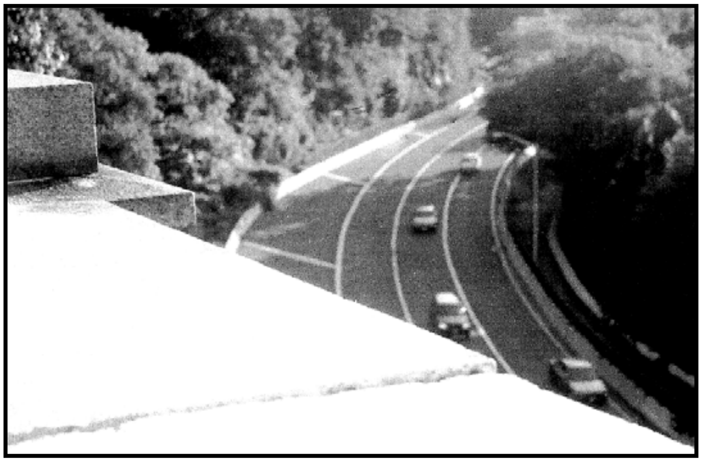


Figure 4.18. Beatriz, “Above the speeding cars, this is my favorite spot in the park.”

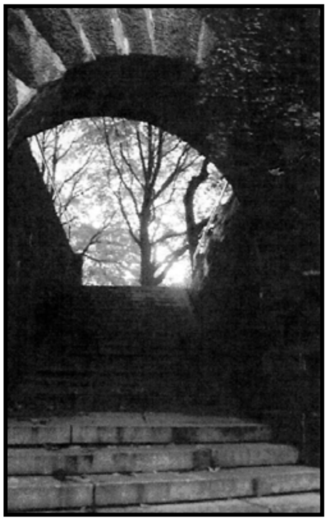


Figure 4.19. Beatriz, “Most of the ‘structures’ have stones in them.”

Beatriz reads her paper and the class follows along with photocopies. She explains first that she enjoys any pictures taken of the George Washington Bridge because she lives so close by it. “I love the lights at night, and if you go to Fort Tryon Park, every spot makes the bridge look picture-perfect.” For the assignment, she had taken her camera on a photo expedition and had photographed her neighborhood in

Washington Heights, but when she wandered into the park, her purpose became clear to her.

Beatriz begins to read the paper, which is a rumination of a walk through Fort Tryon Park. She has included four images taken during the visit (figures 4.16 – 4.19) which have been inserted into her text, one of which she describes as "my favorite spot in the park," a ledge where Beatriz sits and watches the cars on the Henry Hudson Parkway speeding below her (figure 4.18).

Beatriz comes to love "her" park. She describes how the transformation happens:

> I will never forget the first day that I went to the park on my own. I felt a bit overwhelmed with a recent argument I just had with my mom, and a bit frustrated with the notion of being misunderstood. It was my freshman year in high school, and I felt as if every hour I spent out of my house was some sort of rebellion towards my parents, and I think they took it as that. I stood in that park for a good four hours. Just sitting there watching the bridge, the cars speed by, and the ships that would occasionally pass was soothing. Being out of *my* world into this *new* world was the best thing I have ever given to myself. In fact, I revel every time I go to the park, basking in every breath I take there and the solitude I (occasionally) have.

Beatriz writes of the effect that the park has on her:

> [The park] transports you back into this romantic time, with concerns that were never impersonalized through Instant Messaging, email, or even phones. I always live in a fantasy world when I enter. I can't help but thoroughly imagine this world of handwritten letters that takes effort and full emotion. . . .

> I cannot explain the trance that overpowers me and pushes me into this oblivious carefree world whenever I am there.

As I reader, I am swept into her world, and I am wondering if her classmates are as well. The photos work exceptionally well with the text, providing the visual evidence of the places she writes about. The images offer her paper validity because *she was there*. She types the paper at a computer, inserts the digital photos on her computer, but she had visited the park herself in person for this paper, for photographic consideration and textual inspiration. And that real visit, and the textual and photographic explorations of that experience, are alive on the pages of her paper.

When Beatriz finishes reading, the class offers applause. As they are clapping my head is brimming with responses to her work, but I want to first hear from her classmates. Are they as captivated by the writing, by the images, by the visitation, as I am? They are, but these responses are not what inspires the greatest class discussion.

The first response to her paper is a classmate telling her, "Yes I love your paper," but what captivates him the most is her use of the word "bootleg."

In her second paragraph, Beatriz had written, "I am not going to lie. Fort Tryon was never at the top of my favorite places list. In fact, I never really considered the park to be anything more than a *bootleg* version of Central Park for Upper West Siders [italics mine]."

"It is great," her classmate exclaims, referring to the word, and then other classmates get in on the quickly elevating discussion. Yes, students add, it is slang, it is colloquial. A student even compares Beatriz's use of "bootleg" to the word "chill" that Chris used in his essay about his hallway, and states that Beatriz's word "adds so much flavor to what she is saying." And as the class discussion grows, classmates who live in Upper Manhattan state they know exactly what Beatriz is saying because they live around the same park, and they agree that Fort Tryon is a "bootleg" version of New York City's much more celebrated Central Park. They explain that the word is so familiar to them from other settings: those "bootleg" watches, handbags, and perfume that the students see offered for sale on 125th Street in Manhattan and Fordham Road in the Bronx. The "bootleg" CDs and DVDs that are for sale on the same sidewalks. "Bootleg" is not the "real thing," they explain, and "rich society" can look down on it, but "bootleg" can be just as good when you can't afford the other.

But the talk moves on from word choice to the look of the whole paper, in which the images have been inserted with the text. Diego comments that by looking at the photos and reading the text he feels like he "knows" the paper, though in reality he has never been to Beatriz's Fort Tryon Park. Dee explains that she is "in awe" of Beatriz's work, stating that Beatriz's paper really inspires her to write. "It's like seeing a great artist," she says, and Dee admits to her classmates that she is going to strive to do this kind of work in the future.

Sid

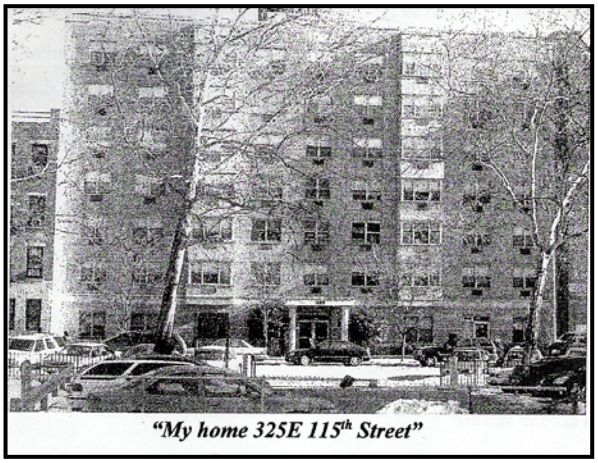

"My home 325E 115th Street"

Figure 4.20. Sid, "My home 325 E. 115th Street."

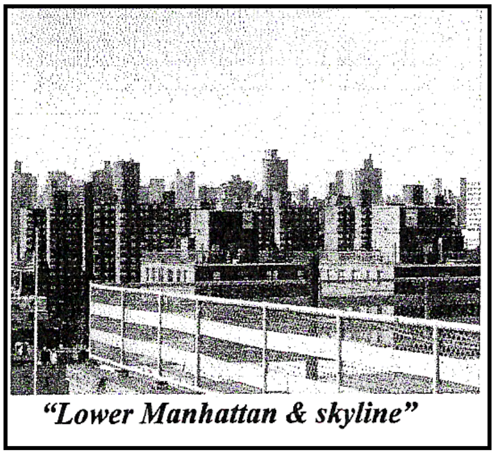

"Lower Manhattan & skyline"

Figure 4.21. Sid, "Lower Manhattan & skyline."

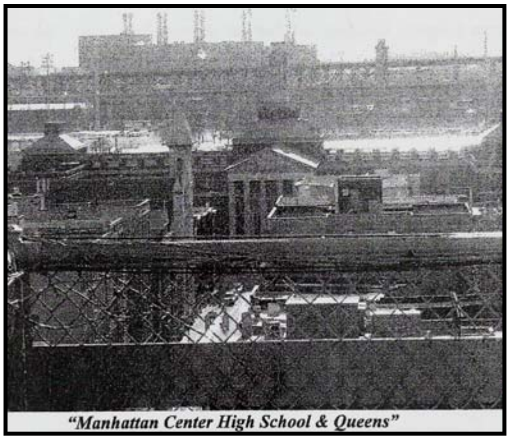

"Manhattan Center High School & Queens"

Figure 4.22. Sid, "Manhattan Center High School & Queens."

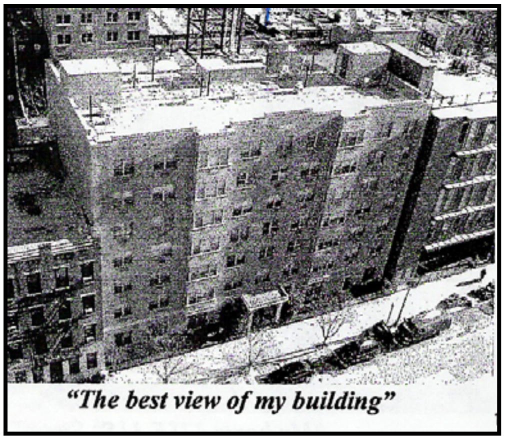

"The best view of my building"

Figure 4.23. Sid, "The best view of my building."

Sid walks slowly up to the front of the classroom to read his paper. Although the previous week, in the comfortable presence of his workshop group, he volunteered to present his work to the larger audience, I sense he is getting "cold feet." He murmurs to me, "I don't want to read this." His classmates, especially his groupmates, encourage him: "Come on Sid. Read it!"

The previous week I had sat in on Sid’s group as he was presenting his paper and pictures to his groupmates. He began by distributing a batch of photos, most of them taken from rooftops, and he explained that they all were “the other side of Harlem, what people won’t see.” He seemed proud of the images, telling us in the group that he had photographed early in the morning on a sunny day, when “it seemed like I could see the entire world from the roof.” The group was captivated.

Now Sid sits down at my desk in the front of the class and looks across at his fellow classmates. He pauses.

“Awlright . . .”

I distribute photocopies of his essay to the class. He settles into his chair and begins to read as the class follows along with their copies of his essay.

“In this paper, I want to help show people my area, or at least the way I see it through my eyes. When many people hear ‘East Harlem’ they may not get the same mental picture as I do, which is home. . . .”

The class’s attention is rapt. Sid continues:

> After that first time of being up there, I fell in love with that spot and it became my new hangout and hideout. From my new vantage point, I felt as if I was my childhood hero Batman. This was due to the simple fact that I was able to see all that was going on in my area from this height. My favorite thing to do was to go atop that roof and watch people enter and exit my building, then when I saw a person I knew I would faintly call their name just loud enough that they would look around wondering where the voice was coming from. It was this place high

> above the ground that gave me the freedom to act like a child. . . . I had no cares or worries while resting atop the building.

Sid retraces his childhood shenanigans in the paper, but as the paper develops he explains that now he doesn't get a chance to get up there that much, "due to my busy schedule and enforced police regulations forbidding access to the roof." But even with these obstacles, he still manages to visit and enjoy the views, he explains, of Lower Manhattan, the East River, Queens, and the George Washington Bridge. He asks rhetorically in the paper, "who can blame me for that?" And then Sid responds to his own question, addressing the reader: "I have a feeling you would want to do the same." He writes, "While from the ground these things are seen and admired, it is taken to a new level when you are seeing spaces and places from good heights." Sid is aware of avoiding repetition, and he varies his terminology. Throughout the paper it is not just a "roof;" he refers to it as a "tower," an "observation deck," and a "rooftop castle"

In the conclusion, after presenting pages of photographs and text, Sid directly addresses the reader to visit East Harlem:

> The views that I have showed you are great, but they only get better by viewing them yourself. Throughout this process, I have heard over and over why each place has meant so much for each person, yet I would like to do one better, which is to invite you to visit. I hope that now when you hear East Harlem . . . that you think of more than you read, hear, or see on the T.V. or in movies, because for a long time I have felt that my neighborhood has gotten a bad rap, but that is all beginning to change.

His classmates are quick to applaud when he finishes reading. Cassie is one of the first responders, telling him she felt he was “like a reporter” in his paper. She tells Sid that his paper is very informative, that he plays with stereotypes of what Harlem is to other people. It is “a very down to earth paper, and the pictures help a lot.” She explains further, “They’re like pictures from brochures, except it’s Harlem!” She likes the paper so much that she relates it to her own neighborhood: “Who would think of telling the reader to visit Bed Stuy?” she asks. The class laughs.

Other students join in. Abdullah says that all she ever hears is bad things about Harlem; she thinks the paper works so well because it is positive and it really involves the reader, saying that the paper, “challenges the way we think of the neighborhood.” Sharon likes his use of words, especially calling his building his “rooftop castle.” Charmaine tells Sid that some of the pictures taken from his roof “make me feel nervous.” Sid responds that when he showed his mother this paper, she wasn’t happy with some of his shots either; looking at his rooftop photographs, she scolded him that he was standing much too close to the edge.

Ana

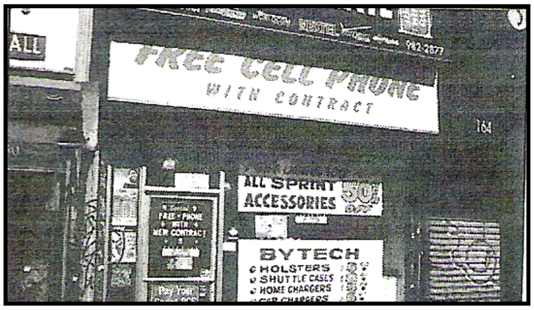

FREE CELL PHONE
WITH CONTRACT
ALL SPRINT ACCESSORIES
BYTECH
HOLSTERS
SHUTTLE CASES
HOME CHARGERS

Figure 4.24. Ana, “Cell phone store - Delancey Street.”

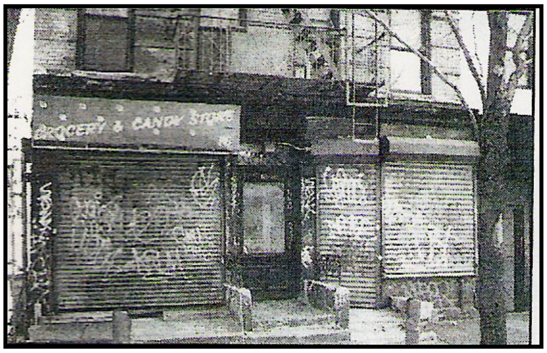

GROCERY & CANDY STORE

Figure 4.25. Ana, “Vacant storefront - Clinton Street.”

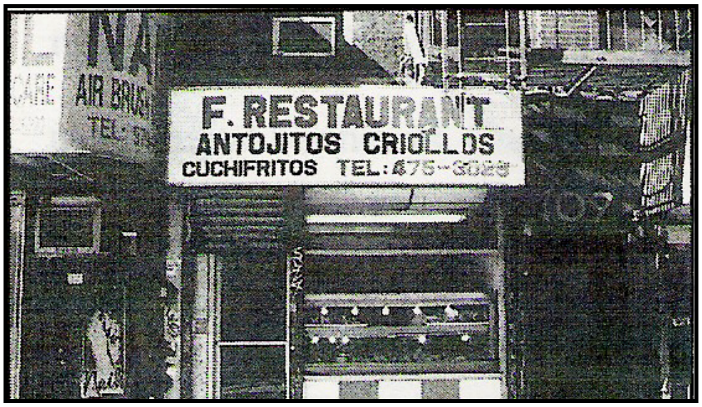

F. RESTAURANT
ANTOJITOS CRIOLLOS
CUCHIFRITOS TEL: 475-3025
AIR BRUSH

Figure 4.26. Ana, “Cuchifritos - Clinton Street.”

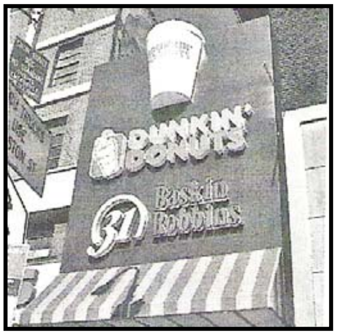

DUNKIN' DONUTS
31
Baskin Robbins

Figure 4.27. Ana, “Coffee and ice cream – Delancey Street.”

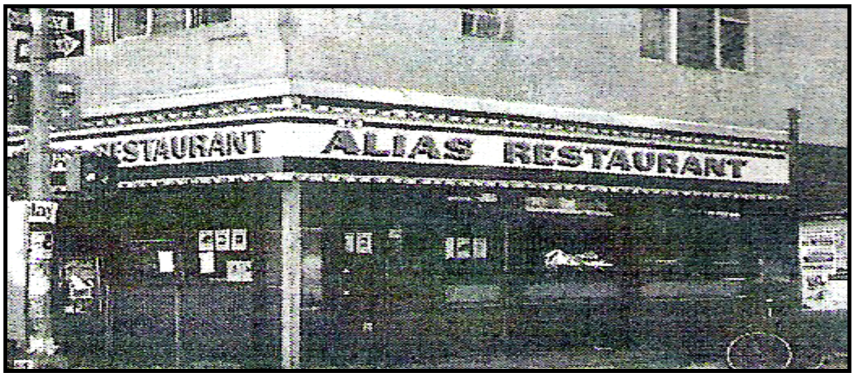

RESTAURANT
ALIAS RESTAURANT

Figure 4.28. Ana, “Alias Restaurant - Clinton Street.”

Ana goes next. I distribute copies of her paper to the class. She walks up to the front of the class, sits next to me, and introduces her paper on her neighborhood of her New

York City, the Lower East Side of Manhattan. She explains to the class that she has been living there for five years, and that when she first moved there from Brazil, she did not speak any English or Spanish, only Portuguese. She has grown so much in these five years: she has experienced a new country, a new city, a new community, a new language. She has changed so much, and her paper is about change; in her paper, Ana documents how much her community has changed around her in the past five years.

The class is looking through the pages of her paper, stopping at the five photographs of various storefronts on the Lower East Side that signal the changes in Ana's neighborhood, and she begins to read. She lives on Suffolk Street and likes her neighborhood because, as someone who emigrated from Brazil four and a half years ago, there is "still a large Latino population living there." But her thesis is that the neighborhood is constantly changing, "and I am sad to see some of the unique features of the neighborhood slowly fade away."

When she first moved to the Lower East Side she felt welcomed because the neighborhood offered people from many diverse cultures:

> Residing in this neighborhood has been a good experience for me because I have been exposed to people from many diverse cultures. Observing their customs helps me to remember a little bit about the unique parts of my own Brazilian culture. The presence of so many Latinos in the neighborhood has helped me to adjust to life in New York. Although I did not speak any English or much Spanish when I arrived, I felt immediately comfortable on the streets in this neighborhood because the stores and restaurants were very similar to the ones I had grown up around in the small city of Sao Luis, Maranhâo, Brazil.

But the heart of her paper is how everything is changing around her. Her paper deals with the concept of “before and after,” which she communicates in text and in image. She writes:

> Although I feel very comfortable living in this neighborhood, I also cannot avoid noticing how fast the neighborhood is changing, and I am a little sad to see some of its unique features disappear. In the past, the streets on the Lower East Side were filled with all of the basic shops that a family might need. There were numerous bakeries, butcher shops, shoe repair, and hardware stores. Sadly most of these shops have closed their doors because of rising rents, and all that is left are empty storefronts. Once empty storefronts are being renovated into chic clothing stores and expensive restaurants. . . . One example of the changes affecting the Lower East Side is the restaurant named Alias at the corner of Clinton and Delancey Streets. Up until a few years ago this small Spanish food restaurant served home-cooked meals at an affordable price. Alias now has a new owner who has kept the same name and décor, but the menu has been modified to people willing to pay two or three times the old prices for a meal.

Ana’s paper is both a celebration of what used-to-be as well as a cautionary tale of the changes that continue to affect her neighborhood. I am reminded of Wright Morris returning to photograph his family’s homestead in Norfolk, Nebraska to take the photographs that would be incorporated into *The Home Place*. He writes, “Nothing will compare with the photograph to register what is going, going, but not yet gone. The pathos of the moment, the reluctance of parting, we feel intensely” (1999, 112). In Ana’s paper, each one of her examples of new stores in the neighborhood directly refers to a photo, whether it is Alias, a new Dunkin' Donuts that replaced a smaller coffee shop, or a cell phone shop, which "sells a very popular product, and is relatively cheap to start up, but actually does little to service the needs of the people who live in the community."

When she finishes reading her paper, the entire class applauds. As with Sid and Beatriz, I wait for responses from the class before offering my own. Abdullah remarks on the wonderful stories Ana tells in her paper, and Ana responds that she could have developed this much further (it was five pages already). Her classmates are quick to respond that the photographs help show the reader that her neighborhood is special to her. They can see the changes, and they can see the original storefronts that made her feel at home when she first moved there. Ana explains that the entire paper came to her through the picture-taking experience in walking around her changing neighborhood: "The pictures are the major points in the essay. Without the pictures, the essay would be lifeless."

Sharon

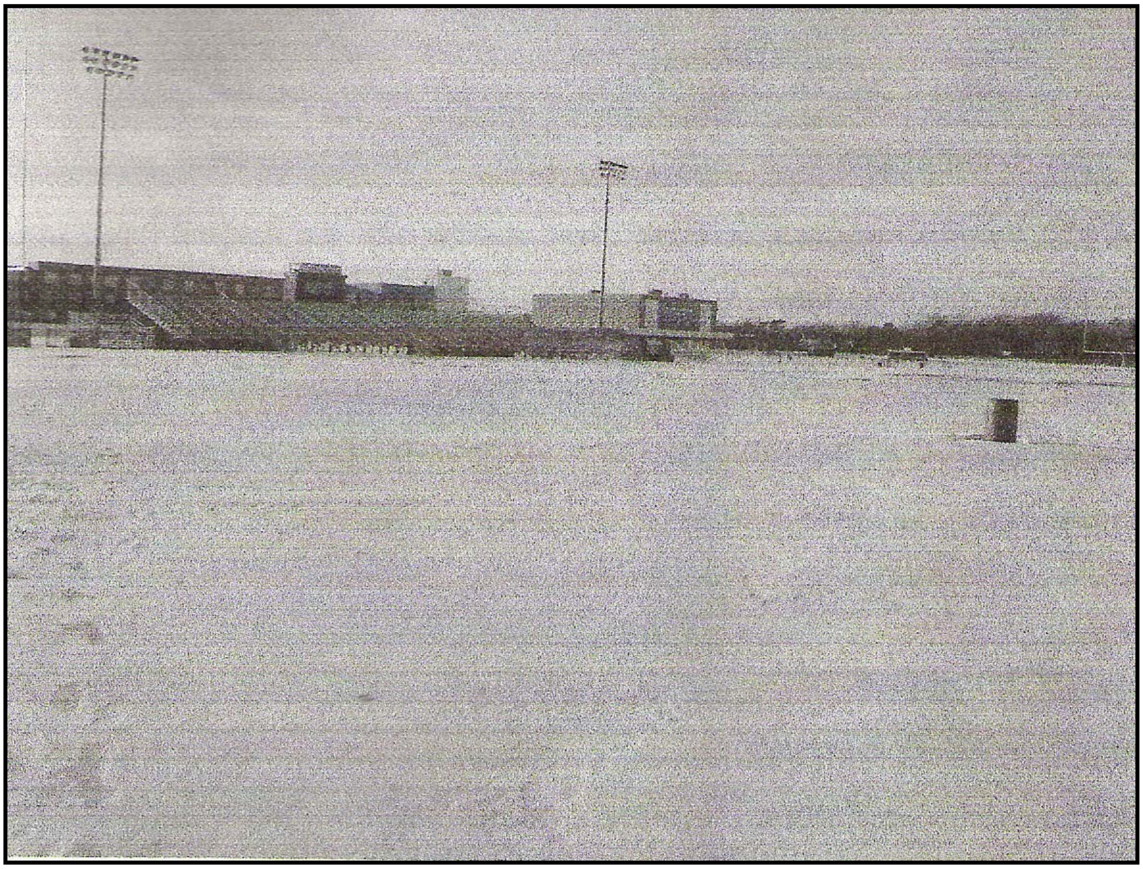


Figure 4.29. Sharon, “Even though the football field is empty this time of year, it still brings back memories to all Patchogue-Medford students.”

Sharon explains the moment of inspiration:

She drives herself on a overcast wintry afternoon from her home in Long Island to her old high school. She parks the car and trudges through the parking lot on her way to the football field. She begins taking pictures of the goal posts and the scoreboard, of the school in the distance. She heads to the bleachers, climbs them, wipes the snow off and sits down. She stares ahead at the frozen field on this grey day, and thoughts come back to her, memories of her high school days when she was on this very field surrounded by friends, by fellow cheerleaders, and by the football players. She’s deep in thought and lifts the camera, looking through the viewfinder.

Snap.

Before words take shape, images and feelings do. She is here now, on this frozen field, a world away from a computer where she would write her essay, but the whole paper is coming to her, the crowds, the excitement, and the rich memories. She is aware of all the details of a paper that is yet to come in the picture-taking present on a frozen football field on a cold, grey day.

For some students, *My New York* exists beyond the borders of the city into Long Island, New Jersey, or upstate New York. In giving this assignment, I had told my students not to take the title of the assignment literally; the point of their work was to compose an essay of place, in photos and in words. The project could be *My New Jersey* or *My Connecticut*.

Or *My Long Island*. Before reading her paper, Sharon first shows her classmates four black-and-white images of snow-covered fields that illustrate this paper in which she thinks back on her experience as a high school cheerleader. In the essay she writes of the four years she spent as a cheerleader for the Patchogue-Medford Raiders, with her main focus on the fall of 2002. She tells her classmates that she had gone to photograph her old school and the football field in the dead of winter. In first presenting her photos to her group, she had lamented the fact that when she visited in mid-February, the field was covered in snow, not how she remembered it during game times. But, she explains to the class, sitting in the empty bleachers and photographing on a grey, frozen afternoon helped her focus. The visit stirred memories that she incorporates into the paper.

Sharon begins to read, and the reader is swept right into her mindset in the introduction:

> Stepping onto the football field at my old high school, the same feelings rush back into my mind, and it feels like only yesterday. The anticipation . . . the excitement . . . the enthusiasm . . . It's game day. . . . Nerves are soon replaced with an overwhelming adrenaline rush. The team runs out in formation. The field is illuminated by the tall, gleaming lights. As soon as they step foot on the moist turf, a thundering roar comes over the bleachers, which are packed tight with faithful fans. They start the ritual chant . . . *Raiders! Raiders! Raiders!*

In her next paragraph she gets to the heart of her paper. She discusses how football was the biggest sport in her high school, but narrows her focus to the fall 2002 by the paragraph's end: "Standards were set really high that year. Before football season even started, *Newsday* had already predicted Patchogue-Medford was taking the number one spot. We were so excited!"

In the next four paragraphs Sharon discusses the games, the pre-game rituals and the excitement building throughout the school as the team went on to become Long Island champions during the 2002 season. And she discusses her role as cheerleader as part of the team, part of the energy, part of the drive.

Her final two paragraphs serve as an elongated conclusion, and the black-and-white photographs seem to bear witness to the sense of nostalgia of which Sharon writes. One could say there are ghosts on the empty snow covered field in her photos that she uses to illustrate this piece. She writes in her text, "Sitting in those bleachers today, I can still hear the chants and screaming fans." She continues:

> Even today when you go down to the field you can feel the school spirit and exhilaration, even though right now the field is bare and covered with a fresh blanket of snow. Sometimes when I go down there I wish I was back in high school. I wish I could relive those awesome nights and be able to experience the thrill all over again. But I cherish the memories that I have, and I can relive those moments . . . sitting on the bleachers and just looking at the field, replaying the good times over in my mind. There is no where else that I'd rather be.

After those powerful sentiments, Sharon looks up. Her paper is finished. Her classmates quickly respond to all that they like about her work. Many comment about the "flow" of the paper, how paragraphs seem to naturally "flow" from one point to the next without any sense of choppiness. The point she raises about high school memories seems dramatic for students as well; Sharon's essay jump-starts other students to compare their high school memories to hers. Some students are in awe of the black-and-white photos; such open space is not found in most New York City high schools, even the ones that have fields.

I witness how powerful the act of "being there," of which Geertz theorizes in relation to anthropology, can relate to composition. The act of being there, of sitting in the actual stands and photographing, has enabled Sharon to compose this fully-realized essay of memory and identity.

Critical Reflection

As I listened to and read students' *My New York* papers, and as I listened to their reflections on the photographing and writing experiences, it became apparent to me that, yes, the photos were important to this project. But maybe even more important was the picture-taking process itself. Students left the traditional site of composition to take their photos, and these acts informed and inspired their written texts. By taking their own photographs, they were composing away from the traditional places of textual creation, away from the blank white pages staring at them from their bedroom, living room, or library desks, away from empty screens of their computer monitors, and away from the dreaded composing at midnight hours. Instead they brought their cameras with them into the field, and with them a new sense of composing.

Sense of *place* has been linking with sense of *space*.

My students chose their spaces, but in many ways the places/spaces chose them. Students wrote of places/spaces they were born into or moved into as young children when their own sense of agency had not yet developed; Michael, Kyle, Angelique, Yi, Seth, and Sid all wrote about childhood places that were crucial physical places in their lives simply because the places were where important parts of their childhood took place. Schneekloth and Shibley discuss placemaking and the fact that "it is about everything, because the making and sustaining of place is about living – about places, meanings, knowledges, and actions" (1995, 18). For my composition students, the sense of place mattered, whether they were photographing and writing about their churches, the places they worked, their old schools and neighborhoods, current hangouts or places of solace and recovery (one student wrote of her apartment's living room and how the comfort of the room had helped her recover from the horror of a rape; another wrote of her family's new apartment that they moved into after they had been robbed and physically assaulted in their previous living space).

As in any writing class, some papers did not succeed. While only four out of the ninety papers submitted for the *My New York* assignment did not contain images, some were much further-developed than others. However, overall I sensed that the act of picture-taking helped students discover and then narrow their topics. Though there were a few papers about a general community or neighborhood, most authors focused on a specific site or place; the resulting texts helped students learn about their classmates' lives and interests, whether driving on a particularly harrowing stretch of Manhattan's FDR Drive, volunteering for the Lawrence-Cedarhurst Fire Department in Long Island, or shooting hoops at the East Triangle basketball courts in Harlem. The photographs and picture-taking experiences helped them link their compositions to specific events and feelings.

***

I began this chapter imagining how Mohammed photographed and started composing what would turn out to be his response to *My New York*. Like his classmates, Mohammed had brought in pictures, had explained the pictures to his groupmates, had figured out what pictures to use in his essay, and had written and revised a draft that was inspired by the photo and picture-taking experience. His final draft includes figure 4.2. In the essay he writes of his first fight, his first cigarette, and his first kiss, all centered on the sidewalks under the trestle.

> The underpass was truly a space of many memories and good times. Not everyone can experience multiple things in the same place that really mean a lot to him or her. I was lucky enough to have that happen to me. Now every time I drive around the underpass, I just pull over on occasion and pretend that I am a 13-year-old kid again waiting for his friends after school. What is more, I sat there in my car wondering how fast those years really went by, and I let out a big sigh as I move forward in life.

Jonathan Mauk writes that many instructors in his college think of their students as “uninvolved, uninterested, and unmotivated,” and he states that most teachers blame their students’ commitments outside the college, “those elements that provided centrifugal force away from the academic institutions” (2003, 371). I have spent the past few weeks helping my freshman students to critically examine their home world outside their academic identity; I have seen them involved, interested, and motivated, working in and with the academic third space, a space outside of the college classroom or campus that students can conceive of as “academic.” (Mauk 2003, 380). My students have photographed and written about important aspects of their identities and communities, and the resulting texts have served to legitimize those lives and neighborhoods to each other as well as to their teacher. Importantly, these texts have helped deconstruct the compartmentalization that commuter students frequently experience.

Chapter Five
New Forms of Composing

> We are forced – at times by our failures – to grapple with the potential relationships between the ubiquitous and chaotic new visual and the comfortingly familiar, more linear verbal. Awash in both good and bad examples . . . we are discovering that it is no longer enough to fragment our concepts of literacy, bracket off our traditional blocks of text, and just stick to what we know.
>
> — Catherine L. Hobbs, “Learning From the Past”

I Hear My Students Singing

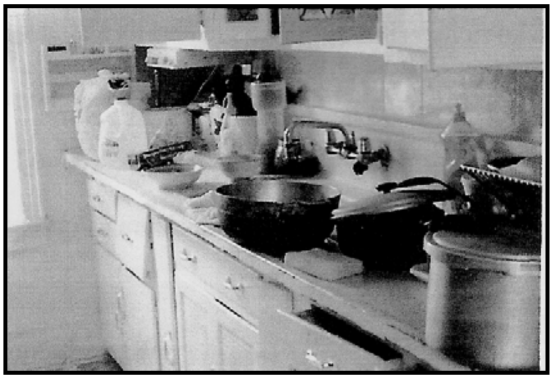


Figure 5.1. Christine, "My kitchen, a mess."

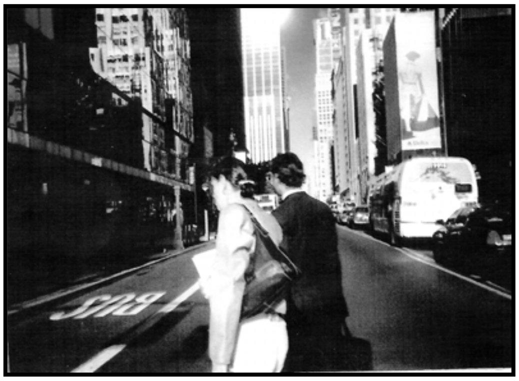


Figure 5.2. Anastasiya, "Walking to work down Madison Avenue

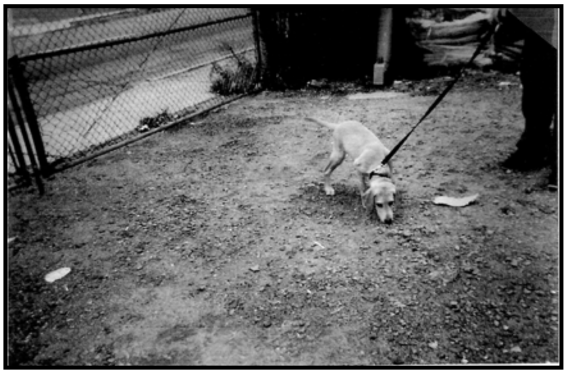


Figure 5.3. Alex, "Taking Rusty out for his morning walk."

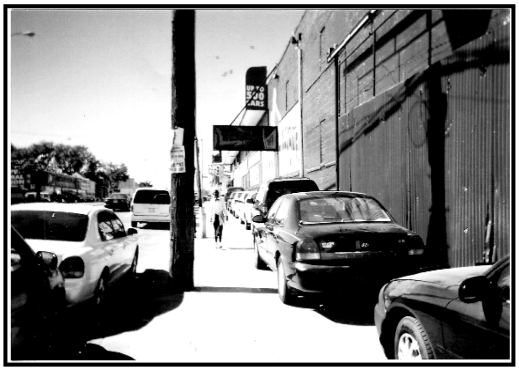


Figure 5.4. Baldeo, "The place where the most annoying sound is ‘zoom, zoom, zooooooooooom’..."

In chapters Three and Four, I have written about what happened when personal snapshots and picture-taking experiences were featured in the composition classroom. I discussed my reaction to student work and have given examples of selected students sharing their images and ideas and reading their work aloud, but absent in my pedagogy was a classroom focus on how the text and image could be presented together on the page. In this chapter I discuss our final picture-taking assignment, *A Day in the Life*, and I examine what happens when students are given the opportunity to design the layout of their visual/textual work in the composition classroom. I show how students present their work in which they purposefully craft the combination of photographs and words, whether as photocopied versions of final drafts or as in-class visual/textual presentations.

Outside Identities Enter the Classroom: Successes and Frustrations

In Chapter Four, I discussed the creation and reception of Henry Roth's college paper in his City College classroom in 1924. In "Impressions of a Plumber" Roth writes of process, a process in which he is personally involved. I think of my students and the variegated communities in which they are involved: school, family, friends, religion, and work. These students have explored their spaces and places in their *My New York* essays, and many of their texts touched on the confluence of these communities. For their next assignment, *A Day in the Life*, I instruct my students to photograph during the ongoing process of everyday activities. The photographs, and the experience of photographing, will illustrate and inform their *A Day in the Life* narratives. "Only that which narrates can make us understand" (Sontag 1989, 23).

In preparation for *A Day in the Life*, I ask the class to brainstorm about topics that may interest them. Students know the pattern because we have done this before. Some write feverishly, some gaze at the blank walls as if the whiteness can offer them some inspiration. After about ten minutes, we go around the room, discussing possibilities of topics, of things to come. Everyone has a chance to read. Or to pass. Stephanie volunteers first. She says she is planning to get a tattoo over the weekend, and maybe she will photograph that momentous event. As one can imagine, this comment causes some buzz in the classroom. Diego has his hand up next. He tells us all that he works with his brother on the weekends and together they repossess cars. Maybe he will bring his camera with him as well and photograph the numerous encounters he has. Like Stephanie's, Diego's activity generates much feedback. Students want to know where he works, what it is like. Carolina is especially interested; she just bought a 2005 Nissan Altima, and hopes he doesn't come after her. She tells the class that she's thinking of photographing her car from the inside and outside and writing of the experience of learning to drive for the first time in a brand new automobile. Other suggestions include family meals, working, commuting to school, going to the barbershop, cooking a meal, and babysitting.

"Besides shopping, cooking, cleaning, laundry, home repairs and shuttling relatives to doctors, [our students] spend a lot of time commuting from home to school to work and back to school to work and back to school or home again" (Shor 1980, 75). In this assignment where I am asking my students to compose essays in which they are examining aspects of their daily routines, I am asking them to consider their multi-faceted lives as vital subject matter worthy of exploration. I think of Whitman's "I Hear America

Singing" and the carpenter, mason, boatman, shoemaker, wood-cutter, and mother, "each singing what belongs to him or her and to none else." In this assignment, I am hoping that my students can present their own versions of Whitman's "strong melodious songs," the fabric of their selected lives, in pictures and in text.

During the week following picture-taking, the class meets in groups to read and share their *A Day in the Life* pictures and essays in progress. The class breaks into workshop groups of five or six. Some students were inspired to bring their cameras to work: Kristi photographed at a pastry shop in the Bronx where she has worked since she moved to New York from Albania as a young teenager, and she writes of a typical shift behind the counter with her "hot and cold" boss; Kristina photographed at a clothing store at the Queens Center Mall where she works as a salesperson; Anastasiya photographed her commute from John Jay's campus to the midtown office where she works after school (figure 5.2); Baldeo photographed outside an auto body shop in Queens where he works, and he writes of a typical workday experience in "painting, sanding, compounding, and plastering" (figure 5.4).

Some keep their focus close to home: Lara took a self-portrait of herself at four in the morning to accompany an essay about what it's like to have insomnia; Anna photographed and writes of the weekly housecleaning chores she has to do along with her younger sister; Andy photographed and writes about his videogame addiction; Christine photographed and writes of cleaning the house in preparation for a surprise party (figure 5.1); Alex photographed and writes of the ritual of caring for his dog (figure 5.3). Diego also chose his dog as a topic, and photographed and writes of taking his pit bull Max out for an evening walk. Though his group was disappointed he did not write of his experiences repossessing cars, which he mentioned in class previously, they liked his paper about Max so much that when I sat down with the group (after Diego had already presented and read) they had him read the paper again in my presence; they were especially impressed with his attention-getting opening line, “It’s ten p.m., do you know where your dog is?”

And some students were lucky enough to have important events in their lives happen during the time spent photographing and writing *A Day in the Life*: Sophia photographed and writes of accompanying her very pregnant aunt (who does not speak English) to the hospital and staying with her throughout the birth of the baby. Tracey decided to get her very long hair cut, and she had a friend photograph her as she had five inches cut off her waist-length hair. In her group, she passes around six snapshots and reads aloud her draft, which explains how she’s “trying to deal with my loss and look at the positives of the situation.”

But a noticeable number of students are not prepared. Roxanne comes to class empty handed. Without pictures or a draft, she apologizes to the group. She explains that she photographed her ten-month-old niece, and she wants to write about taking care of him, but she is not sure what to do; her “voice” isn’t coming. She is afraid if she wrote a “straight” piece about taking care of the baby it would be boring. Like Roxanne, Jennifer doesn’t come in with work and seems at a loss. She explains to her group that she brought her camera to the party supply store where she is employed and photographed the shenanigans that occurred while working there, but she is unsure how to develop the essay. Their groupmates offer both Roxanne and Jennifer encouragement based on their ideas, but because neither of them had visual or textual work with them, the advice, “keep at it,” and “sounds good, put it in writing,” is fairly generic.

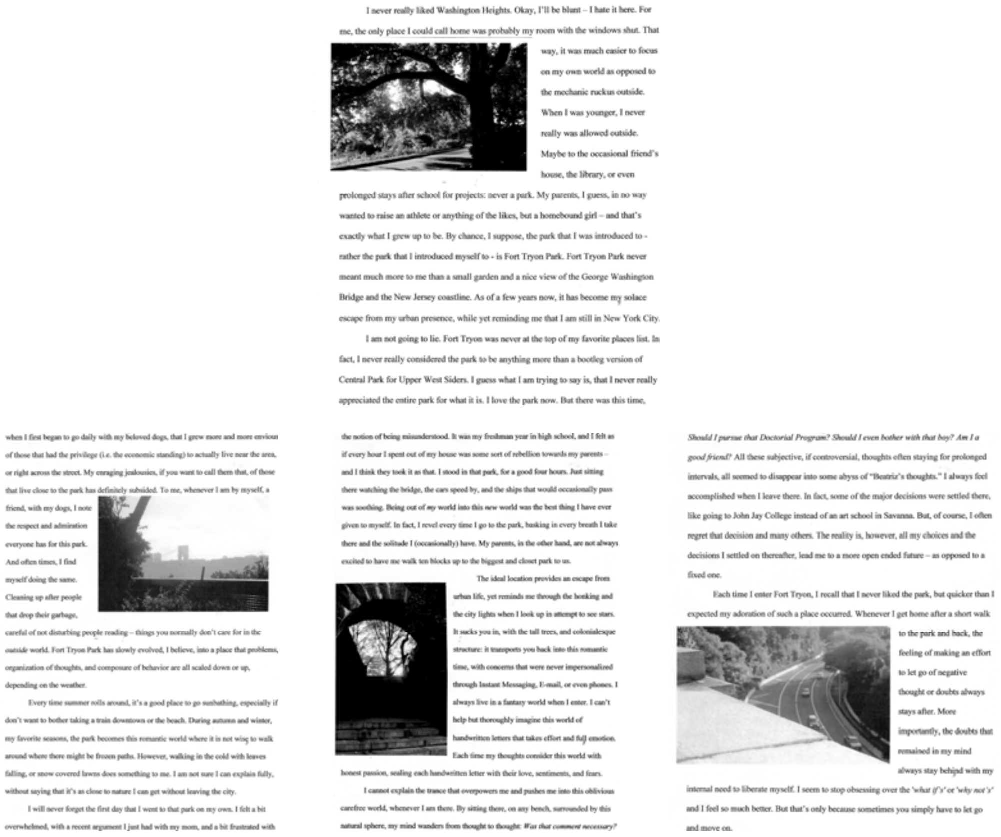
Jenny, who also does not come to class with photos or a draft, is unhappy. She tells her group that she photographed this weekend while at her job as a bartender, but she doesn’t particularly like her job. She doesn’t even like to drink. Her groupmates offer her some ideas, but she is resistant. For her, though pictures have been taken, the idea for the paper is going nowhere.

I am with another group when I hear an exclamation of “I got it” above the din of the busy classroom. I look over and see Jenny motioning me to come to her group. In their talk, I learn, one of her groupmates asked her more specific questions about what she does on the weekends. One family tradition that takes place, Jenny replied, and that will be taking place this very weekend, is bingo at her grandmother’s house. As she talked with her group about her family bingo, Jenny tells me, the *A Day in the Life* project became clearer for her.

This weekend she’ll get someone else to tend bar. She says she can’t wait to tell her family what she needs to do for her English class homework.

She has to play bingo.

Photographer/Author/Designer: On Creating Graphically Sophisticated Texts



I never really liked Washington Heights. Okay, I'll be blunt – I hate it here. For me, the only place I could call home was probably my room with the windows shut. That way, it was much easier to focus on my own world as opposed to the mechanic ruckus outside. When I was younger, I never really was allowed outside. Maybe to the occasional friend's house, the library, or even prolonged stays after school for projects: never a park. My parents, I guess, in no way wanted to raise an athlete or anything of the likes, but a homebound girl – and that's exactly what I grew up to be. By chance, I suppose, the park that I was introduced to - rather the park that I introduced myself to - is Fort Tryon Park. Fort Tryon Park never meant much more to me than a small garden and a nice view of the George Washington Bridge and the New Jersey coastline. As of a few years now, it has become my solace escape from my urban presence, while yet reminding me that I am still in New York City.

I am not going to lie. Fort Tryon was never at the top of my favorite places list. In fact, I never really considered the park to be anything more than a bootleg version of Central Park for Upper West Siders. I guess what I am trying to say is, that I never really appreciated the entire park for what it is. I love the park now. But there was this time, when I first began to go daily with my beloved dogs, that I grew more and more envious of those that had the privilege (i.e. the economic standing) to actually live near the area, or right across the street. My enraging jealousies, if you want to call them that, of those that live close to the park has definitely subsided. To me, whenever I am by myself, a friend, with my dogs, I note the respect and admiration everyone has for this park. And often times, I find myself doing the same. Cleaning up after people that drop their garbage, careful of not disturbing people reading – things you normally don't care for in the *outside* world. Fort Tryon Park has slowly evolved, I believe, into a place that problems, organization of thoughts, and composure of behavior are all scaled down or up, depending on the weather.

Every time summer rolls around, it's a good place to go sunbathing, especially if don't want to bother taking a train downtown or the beach. During autumn and winter, my favorite seasons, the park becomes this romantic world where it is not wise to walk around where there might be frozen paths. However, walking in the cold with leaves falling, or snow covered lawns does something to me. I am not sure I can explain fully, without saying that it's as close to nature I can get without leaving the city.

I will never forget the first day that I went to that park on my own. I felt a bit overwhelmed, with a recent argument I just had with my mom, and a bit frustrated with the notion of being misunderstood. It was my freshman year in high school, and I felt as if every hour I spent out of my house was some sort of rebellion towards my parents – and I think they took it as that. I stood in that park, for a good four hours. Just sitting there watching the bridge, the cars speed by, and the ships that would occasionally pass was soothing. Being out of *my* world into this *new* world was the best thing I have ever given to myself. In fact, I revel every time I go to the park, basking in every breath I take there and the solitude I (occasionally) have. My parents, in the other hand, are not always excited to have me walk ten blocks up to the biggest and closet park to us.

The ideal location provides an escape from urban life, yet reminds me through the honking and the city lights when I look up in attempt to see stars. It sucks you in, with the tall trees, and colonialesque structure: it transports you back into this romantic time, with concerns that were never impersonalized through Instant Messaging, E-mail, or even phones. I always live in a fantasy world when I enter. I can't help but thoroughly imagine this world of handwritten letters that takes effort and full emotion. Each time my thoughts consider this world with honest passion, sealing each handwritten letter with their love, sentiments, and fears.

I cannot explain the trance that overpowers me and pushes me into this oblivious carefree world, whenever I am there. By sitting there, on any bench, surrounded by this natural sphere, my mind wanders from thought to thought: *Was that comment necessary? Should I pursue that Doctorial Program? Should I even bother with that boy? Am I a good friend?* All these subjective, if controversial, thoughts often staying for prolonged intervals, all seemed to disappear into some abyss of "Beatriz's thoughts." I always feel accomplished when I leave there. In fact, some of the major decisions were settled there, like going to John Jay College instead of an art school in Savanna. But, of course, I often regret that decision and many others. The reality is, however, all my choices and the decisions I settled on thereafter, lead me to a more open ended future – as opposed to a fixed one.

Each time I enter Fort Tryon, I recall that I never liked the park, but quicker than I expected my adoration of such a place occurred. Whenever I get home after a short walk to the park and back, the feeling of making an effort to let go of negative thought or doubts always stays after. More importantly, the doubts that remained in my mind always stay behind with my internal need to liberate myself. I seem to stop obsessing over the '*what if's*' or '*why not's*' and I feel so much better. But that's only because sometimes you simply have to let go and move on.

Figure 5.5. Beatriz's final draft of *My New York.*

As my students' rough drafts of *A Day in the Life* beget final drafts, their responsibilities as composers grow. Like photojournalists, my students have photographed for their *A Day in the Life* assignment, and like writers, they have written their texts. Now I ask them to don another hat and become designers in composing essays in which they digitally insert their images into their text. I ask that the pages of their final drafts be illustrative pages, a mélange of text and image.

At the onset of this dissertation study I had not planned to include any requirements about new composing forms, the combination of image and text in student papers. As discussed in chapters One and Two, in the framing of "The Picturing Year," I wanted to examine what would happen when students used their own photography in a composition class. Student photography, the act of picture-taking, and the impact of the visuals and picture-taking experiences on student writing and the classroom community were going to be the crux of the study. But a student paper, submitted in the Fall 2004 semester in response to *My New York*, surprised me, excited me, and inspired me to challenge my students further.

In Chapter Four I have written of Beatriz's essay on Fort Tryon Park, showing the impact that being in the park and photographing had on Beatriz, and how the class had responded to her text. While most of her classmates physically attached a separate sheet of photographs to the back of their essays, Beatriz digitally *inserted* the photographs she had taken into her text. In essence, the inserted photographs became part of her text. Carolyn Handa writes that she wants her students to get beyond the "Wow!" factor of successfully having image and text presented on the page (2001, 4), and I felt Beatriz had done this. Reading Beatriz's paper combining word and image, I was virtually swept into her world. I thought of Barthes who wrote, "The text you write must prove to me *that it desires me*" (1975, 6). Beatriz's combination of photo and text invited me into her chosen world as her privileged reader. The photos worked well situated in and illustrating the text, providing the visual evidence of the places she writes about, the "polymorphic orientation" that enables the reader "to approach literacy as a performance that involves both language and images" (Fleckenstein 2004, 614). With her *My New York* essay, Beatriz showed that he is more than just a gifted writer; she has the tools, curiosity, and technological know-how to turn her essay into graphically sophisticated composition. My head was spinning with new possibilities.

Before the start of the next class, I asked Beatriz about the combination of image and text in her final draft. She replied that it was the only way that made sense; for her, the pictures needed to be part of the text, not simply added to the paper at the end. And I saw the sense of it all, something I had not comprehended until Beatriz submitted her paper: *If we are writing and including pictures, the images need to be integrated with the words. They need to be a vital part of the final textual layout.*

In incorporating her own photographs into her text, Beatriz realized that "images are not just ornamental supplements to written texts, but complex texts in their own right" (Hill 2004, 122). I realized I was doing a disservice to my students in allowing them to staple, tape, or paperclip photos to a final sheet of their paper, as if the technological advances that have taken place in the last ten years have never happened. Beatriz's paper showed me the need to introduce all my students to the necessary composing tools so that they all could have the ability to create graphically sophisticated text.

Patricia A. Sullivan writes of the transformation of word *processing* into word *publishing* that began in the late 1980s. She looks at the pedagogical issues that the change brought on, and argues that "writers must become sensitive about how pages look, attuned to how readers will see pages, and able to negotiate a look for pages that supports the aim of texts" (1991, 56). For Sullivan, the biggest difference in the leap from word processing to publishing is that the designer can now group separate components of image and text together creating "meaning on the page" (1991, 58). The student *writer* thus importantly becomes the student *designer*. "All texts have a look and feel that contribute to their meaning, in addition to the words they include. Like people, texts have a body language that often communicates more than what they actually say" (Faigley et al. 2004, 434).

The professional presentation of the images in Beatriz's paper in the fall semester inspired me. If she can successfully become a student designer, others can as well. I asked myself: *Can I modify these assignments in the spring semester so that I require that all student papers incorporate design?* I have made disposable cameras available for all who need them. What can I do to empower students with the graphic opportunity to do what Beatriz has done? Carolyn Handa explains that her students are wired. She states that they use "sophisticated word-processing packages and software that allows them to draw, design, create movies, and edit or retouch photographs and videos. They can operate Photoshop and PageMaker; they write in JavaScript and HTML" (2004, 1). Though I imagined some of my students would not have the technology available at home, many would, and I could teach them how to insert their own pictures into their documents and create professional-looking papers.

Handa writes, "Our students' twenty-first century lives are nothing if not visual" (2004, 1). But my students are not Handa's. Though I wanted my students to design graphically sophisticated texts, I couldn't separate a classroom into the "haves" and the "have nots[5]." Hawisher and Selfe, in their collection about the use of technology that dates back to the early 90s, state that in using technology we need to make decisions

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[5] Equitable access to technology is an important point. In order to ask my students to create graphically sophisticated texts, I could not take for granted that they all had access to the technological tools needed to create digital images that could be inserted in a text. And though John Jay College has banks of PCs (with Microsoft Word and PowerPoint installed) in computer labs and in the library available for student use, there were no scanners available on campus for student use. To enable all of my students to have access to the necessary technology, I purchased a small scanner that I kept in my office that I connected to my laptop computer. For students who needed my assistance, I scanned their prints and burned their images onto CDs, which they could then use in any computer in the school (or at home).

"carefully considering the issues affecting our students and ourselves: how, for example, we can provide equitable access to technology for all students in our classes regardless of . . . socioeconomic status" (1991, 2). Beatriz was aided by having a digital camera and being very familiar with all aspects of her word processing program. Could I require sophisticated picture layouts for all my students in my composition classes? I was already asking them to photograph; could I ask them to create professional looking documents as well with their photographs as important components of the final text?

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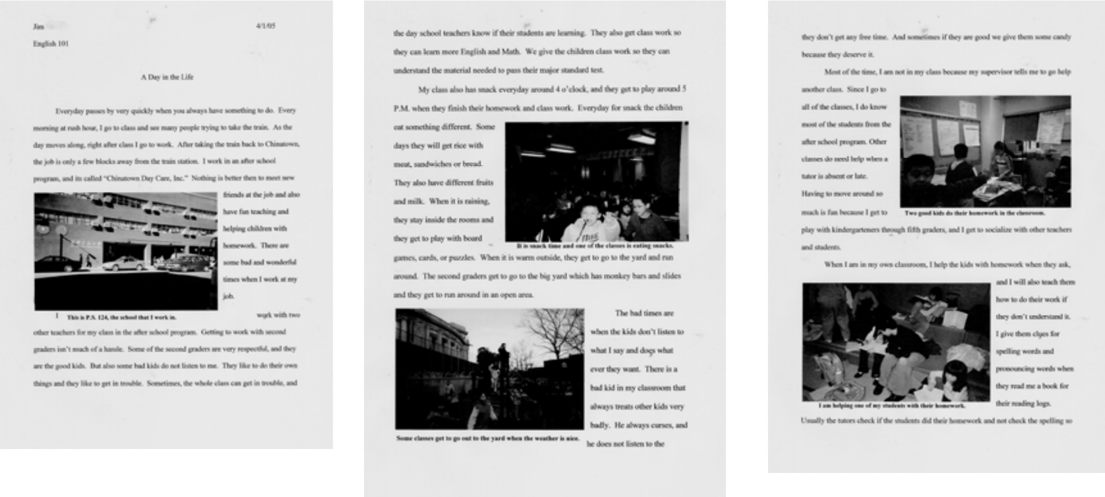
I could, and I did. Diana George states that "more than any other technology, desktop publishing has moved writing instruction into the world of design" (2002, 26). In the Spring 2005 semester, I tell my students that they have to look at the discursive spaces on their pages and consider the presentation of both text and image. Using the computer, projector and screen, I show my students Beatriz's paper from the previous semester, and I am pleased and surprised that some of them are familiar with combining word and image on the page. When I explain how Beatriz inserted images in her text, Diego asks if he can show the class another option. He jumps at the opportunity to present to his classmates. Using his current paper, which he has saved on a flash drive, Diego starts typing, inserting, cutting and pasting, showing his fellow classmates the myriad of creative tools one can use to help illustrate a document. I, with the rest of the class, watch, listen, and learn.

Following is a set of five *A Day in the Life* papers, along with my responses, from the Spring 2005 semester. These essays are from students whose work has not been featured in the study so far, and whose graphically sophisticated compositions in response to *A Day in the Life* reinforce a foundation of this study: we can learn much from our students if we allow them the opportunities to create meaningful texts.

Kwong



Jim [redacted] 4/1/05

English 101

A Day in the Life

Everyday passes by very quickly when you always have something to do. Every morning at rush hour, I go to class and see many people trying to take the train. As the day moves along, right after class I go to work. After taking the train back to Chinatown, the job is only a few blocks away from the train station. I work in an after school program, and its called "Chinatown Day Care, Inc." Nothing is better then to meet new friends at the job and also have fun teaching and helping children with homework. There are some bad and wonderful times when I work at my job.

This is P.S. 124, the school that I work in.

I work with two other teachers for my class in the after school program. Getting to work with second graders isn't much of a hassle. Some of the second graders are very respectful, and they are the good kids. But also some bad kids do not listen to me. They like to do their own things and they like to get in trouble. Sometimes, the whole class can get in trouble, and the day school teachers know if their students are learning. They also get class work so they can learn more English and Math. We give the children class work so they can understand the material needed to pass their major standard test.

My class also has snack everyday around 4 o'clock, and they get to play around 5 P.M. when they finish their homework and class work. Everyday for snack the children eat something different. Some days they will get rice with meat, sandwiches or bread. They also have different fruits and milk. When it is raining, they stay inside the rooms and they get to play with board games, cards, or puzzles. When it is warm outside, they get to go to the yard and run around. The second graders get to go to the big yard which has monkey bars and slides and they get to run around in an open area.

It is snack time and one of the classes is eating snacks.

Some classes get to go out to the yard when the weather is nice.

The bad times are when the kids don't listen to what I say and does what ever they want. There is a bad kid in my classroom that always treats other kids very badly. He always curses, and he does not listen to the they don't get any free time. And sometimes if they are good we give them some candy because they deserve it.

Most of the time, I am not in my class because my supervisor tells me to go help another class. Since I go to all of the classes, I do know most of the students from the after school program. Other classes do need help when a tutor is absent or late. Having to move around so much is fun because I get to play with kindergarteners through fifth graders, and I get to socialize with other teachers and students.

Two good kids do their homework in the classroom.

When I am in my own classroom, I help the kids with homework when they ask, and I will also teach them how to do their work if they don't understand it. I give them clues for spelling words and pronouncing words when they read me a book for their reading logs. Usually the tutors check if the students did their homework and not check the spelling so

I am helping one of my students with their homework.

Figure 5.6. Kwong's final draft of *A Day in the Life*.

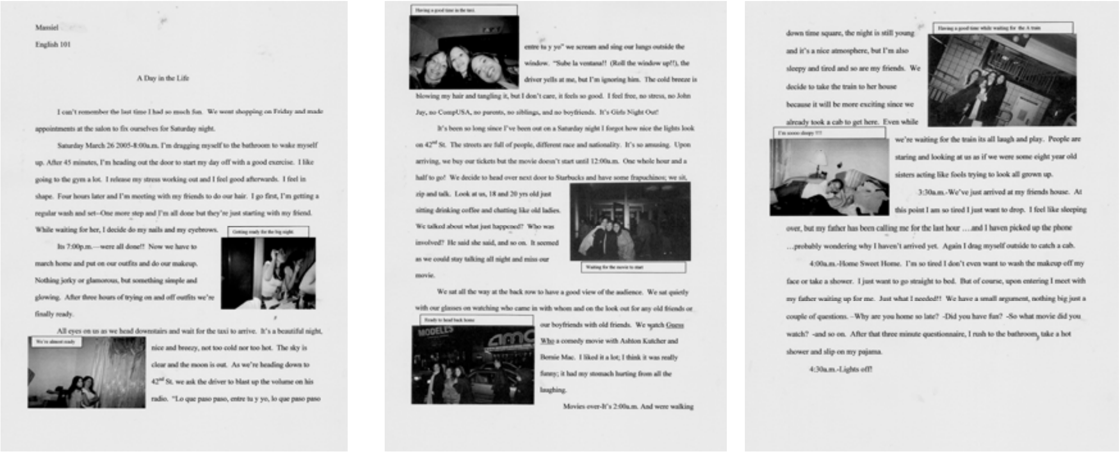
Kwong's paper (figure 5.6) is devoted to his experience working at an after-school program in his Chinatown neighborhood. He writes that "Nothing is better than to meet new friends at the job and also have fun teaching and helping children with homework." It is a four-page paper illustrated with five photos (the fourth page, not pictured, is text alone), and each photo reinforces or advances ideas that are presented in the text.

The image that illustrates the introduction to the paper is of the outside of the building where Kwong works. The caption reads, "This is I.S. 124, the school that I work in." On the second page, Kwong writes about engaging the students in literacy activities:

“When I am in my own classroom, I help the kids with homework when they ask, and I will also teach them how to do their work if they don’t understand it. I give them clues for spelling words and pronouncing words when they read me a book for their reading logs.” The two photos that are juxtaposed in this text illustrate Kwong’s written example. One image is captioned, “Two good kids do their homework in the classroom;” another has the caption, “I am helping one of my students with their homework.” For the images on page three, Kwong makes the transition to less structured times in the students’ day. In a paragraph about the kids getting a chance to eat, Kwong includes a picture of a group of kids in a cafeteria with the caption, “It is snack time and one of the classes is eating snacks.” In a paragraph about recess, Kwong places a picture of kids climbing on playground equipment, and he includes the caption “Some classes get to go out in the yard when the weather is nice.”

The images root Kwong’s writing; the reader sees the world he is presenting on the same page with the corresponding written information. It is a well-organized, well-presented document in which the writer succeeds in informing his reader about a specific part of his own world separate from his college freshman identity.

Massiel



Massiel [redacted]
English 101

A Day in the Life

I can't remember the last time I had so much fun. We went shopping on Friday and made appointments at the salon to fix ourselves for Saturday night.

Saturday March 26 2005-8:00a.m. I'm dragging myself to the bathroom to wake myself up. After 45 minutes, I'm heading out the door to start my day off with a good exercise. I like going to the gym a lot. I release my stress working out and I feel good afterwards. I feel in shape. Four hours later and I'm meeting with my friends to do our hair. I go first, I'm getting a regular wash and set–One more step and I'm all done but they're just starting with my friend. While waiting for her, I decide do my nails and my eyebrows.

Getting ready for the big night

Its 7:00p.m.—were all done!! Now we have to march home and put on our outfits and do our makeup. Nothing jerky or glamorous, but something simple and glowing. After three hours of trying on and off outfits we're finally ready.

We're almost ready

All eyes on us as we head downstairs and wait for the taxi to arrive. It's a beautiful night, nice and breezy, not too cold nor too hot. The sky is clear and the moon is out. As we're heading down to 42nd St. we ask the driver to blast up the volume on his radio. "Lo que paso paso, entre tu y yo, lo que paso paso entre tu y yo" we scream and sing our lungs outside the window. "Sube la ventana!! (Roll the window up!!), the driver yells at me, but I'm ignoring him. The cold breeze is blowing my hair and tangling it, but I don't care, it feels so good. I feel free, no stress, no John Jay, no CompUSA, no parents, no siblings, and no boyfriends. It's Girls Night Out!

Having a good time in the taxi

It's been so long since I've been out on a Saturday night I forgot how nice the lights look on 42nd St. The streets are full of people, different race and nationality. It's so amusing. Upon arriving, we buy our tickets but the movie doesn't start until 12:00a.m. One whole hour and a half to go! We decide to head over next door to Starbucks and have some frapuchinos; we sit, zip and talk. Look at us, 18 and 20 yrs old just sitting drinking coffee and chatting like old ladies. We talked about what just happened? Who was involved? He said she said, and so on. It seemed as we could stay talking all night and miss our movie.

Waiting for the movie to start

We sat all the way at the back row to have a good view of the audience. We sat quietly with our glasses on watching who came in with whom and on the look out for any old friends or our boyfriends with old friends. We watch Guess Who a comedy movie with Ashton Kutcher and Bernie Mac. I liked it a lot; I think it was really funny; it had my stomach hurting from all the laughing.

Ready to head back home

Movies over-It's 2:00a.m. And were walking down time square, the night is still young and it's a nice atmosphere, but I'm also sleepy and tired and so are my friends. We decide to take the train to her house because it will be more exciting since we already took a cab to get here. Even while we're waiting for the train its all laugh and play. People are staring and looking at us as if we were some eight year old sisters acting like fools trying to look all grown up.

Having a good time while waiting for the A train

I'm sooo sleepy !!!

3:30a.m.-We've just arrived at my friends house. At this point I am so tired I just want to drop. I feel like sleeping over, but my father has been calling me for the last hour ....and I haven picked up the phone ...probably wondering why I haven't arrived yet. Again I drag myself outside to catch a cab.

4:00a.m.-Home Sweet Home. I'm so tired I don't even want to wash the makeup off my face or take a shower. I just want to go straight to bed. But of course, upon entering I meet with my father waiting up for me. Just what I needed!! We have a small argument, nothing big just a couple of questions. –Why are you home so late? -Did you have fun? -So what movie did you watch? -and so on. After that three minute questionnaire, I rush to the bathroom, take a hot shower and slip on my pajama.

4:30a.m.-Lights off!

Figure 5.7. Massiel's final draft of *A Day in the Life*.

Massiel takes the reader on a Saturday evening adventure with her and her friends in the "crossroads of the world:" Times Square (figure 5.7). The adventure actually begins early in the morning when she wakes, but the heart of the paper is the heart of Saturday night, beginning at 7:00 and ending at 4:30 in the morning. The night out is presented in a well-organized manner. Massiel keeps the evening's events in chronological order; she includes seven photographs, each one an important component that chronicles part of her narrative, and each one illustrating a textual passage that alludes to the world of the image. The chronological organization of the narrative strictly follows the chronological order of the written narrative.

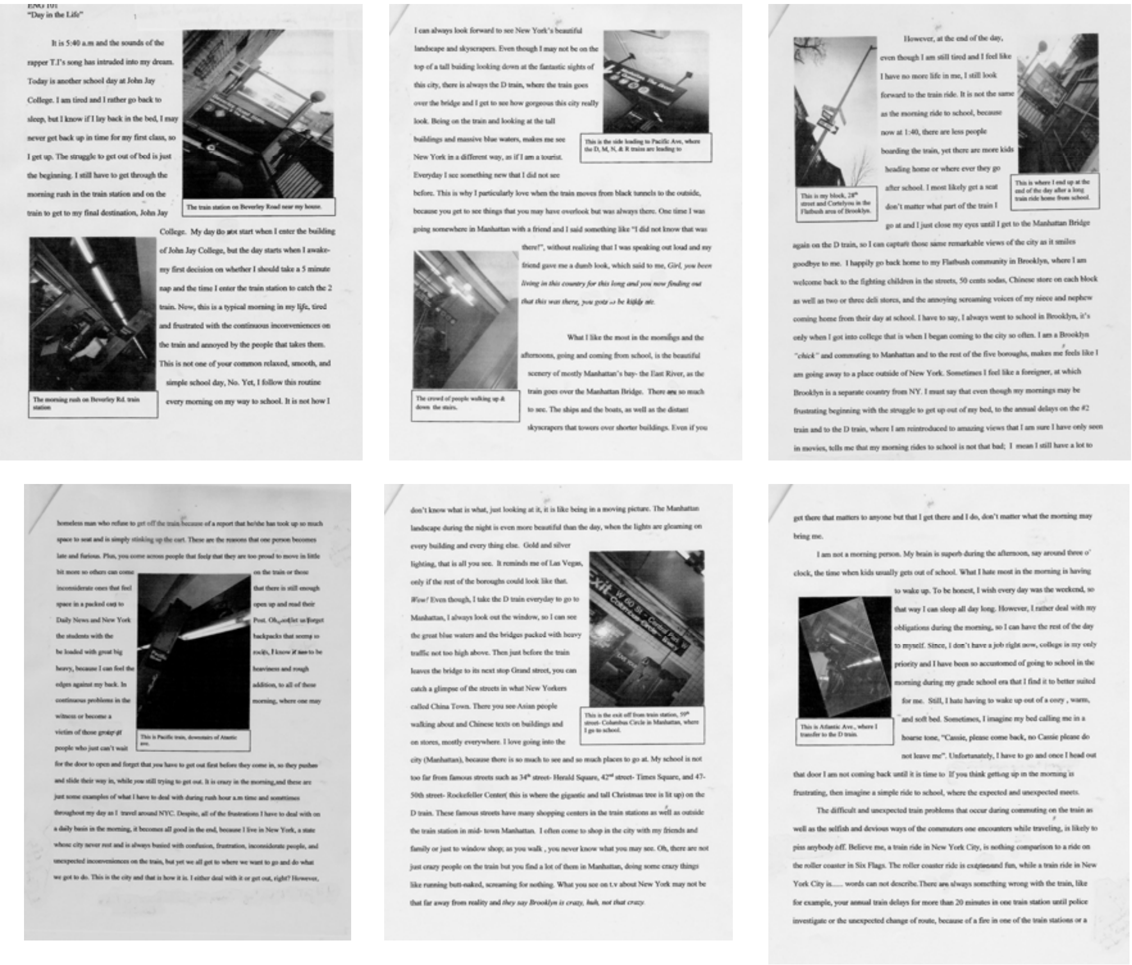
Massiel photographs her friends getting ready and putting on makeup and heading to Times Square via taxi. She describes the cab ride:

> It’s a beautiful night, nice and breezy, not too cold not too hot. The sky is clear and the moon is out. As we’re heading down to 42nd Street, we ask the driver to blast the volume on his radio. “*Lo que paso paso, entre tu y yo, lo que paso paso entre tu u yo*,” we scream and sing our lungs out outside the window. “*Sube la ventana!*” (Roll the window up!) the driver yells at me, but I’m ignoring him. The cold breeze is blowing my hair and tangling it up, but I don’t care. It feels so good. I feel free, no stress, no John Jay, no CompUSA, no parents, no siblings, and no boyfriends. It’s Girls Night Out!

In the paper, Massiel explains that it has been a while since she has been out with her friends on a Saturday night, and she describes what they did on the night she photographed. She includes photos of the three friends outside a movie theater, in front of some of the glittering signs that make up Times Square, goofing around while waiting for the A train to take them home, and finally a portrait of herself reclining in her bed with the caption, “I’m soooo sleepy!!” Because Massiel brought the camera with her on her excursion, she was composing throughout this fun night out with friends.

For Massiel, I imagine this project coming to life before one word was typed on a computer, the topic and construction of the paper presenting itself in the streets of the glittering city as the events were actually occurring. And to this reader, the illustrations give me a privileged look into the “real world” of my student. I read it as joyful communication. The paper stays organized throughout, and the text and photos combine to give the reader the strong sense of excitement the writer had in both experiencing her night out and communicating that joy in a paper rich in text and image.

Cassie



ENG 101
"Day in the Life"
1

It is 5:40 a.m and the sounds of the rapper T.I's song has intruded into my dream. Today is another school day at John Jay College. I am tired and I rather go back to sleep, but I know if I lay back in the bed, I may never get back up in time for my first class, so I get up. The struggle to get out of bed is just the beginning. I still have to get through the morning rush in the train station and on the train to get to my final destination, John Jay College. My day do not start when I enter the building of John Jay College, but the day starts when I awake- my first decision on whether I should take a 5 minute nap and the time I enter the train station to catch the 2 train. Now, this is a typical morning in my life, tired and frustrated with the continuous inconveniences on the train and annoyed by the people that takes them. This is not one of your common relaxed, smooth, and simple school day, No. Yet, I follow this routine every morning on my way to school. It is not how I

The train station on Beverley Road near my house.

The morning rush on Beverley Rd. train station

I can always look forward to see New York's beautiful landscape and skyscrapers. Even though I may not be on the top of a tall buiding looking down at the fantastic sights of this city, there is always the D train, where the train goes over the bridge and I get to see how gorgeous this city really look. Being on the train and looking at the tall buildings and massive blue waters, makes me see New York in a different way, as if I am a tourist. Everyday I see something new that I did not see before. This is why I particularly love when the train moves from black tunnels to the outside, because you get to see things that you may have overlook but was always there. One time I was going somewhere in Manhattan with a friend and I said something like "I did not know that was there!", without realizing that I was speaking out loud and my friend gave me a dumb look, which said to me, *Girl, you been living in this country for this long and you now finding out that this was there, you gots to be kiddin me.*

What I like the most in the mornings and the afternoons, going and coming from school, is the beautiful scenery of mostly Manhattan's bay- the East River, as the train goes over the Manhattan Bridge. There are so much to see. The ships and the boats, as well as the distant skyscrapers that towers over shorter buildings. Even if you

This is the side leading to Pacific Ave, where the D, M, N, & R trains are leading to

The crowd of people walking up & down the stairs.

However, at the end of the day, even though I am still tired and I feel like I have no more life in me, I still look forward to the train ride. It is not the same as the morning ride to school, because now at 1:40, there are less people boarding the train, yet there are more kids heading home or where ever they go after school. I most likely get a seat don't matter what part of the train I go at and I just close my eyes until I get to the Manhattan Bridge again on the D train, so I can capture those same remarkable views of the city as it smiles goodbye to me. I happily go back home to my Flatbush community in Brooklyn, where I am welcome back to the fighting children in the streets, 50 cents sodas, Chinese store on each block as well as two or three deli stores, and the annoying screaming voices of my niece and nephew coming home from their day at school. I have to say, I always went to school in Brooklyn, it's only when I got into college that is when I began coming to the city so often. I am a Brooklyn *"chick"* and commuting to Manhattan and to the rest of the five boroughs, makes me feels like I am going away to a place outside of New York. Sometimes I feel like a foreigner, at which Brooklyn is a separate country from NY. I must say that even though my mornings may be frustrating beginning with the struggle to get up out of my bed, to the annual delays on the #2 train and to the D train, where I am reintroduced to amazing views that I am sure I have only seen in movies, tells me that my morning rides to school is not that bad; I mean I still have a lot to

This is my block, 28th street and Cortelyou in the Flatbush area of Brooklyn.

This is where I end up at the end of the day after a long train ride home from school.

homeless man who refuse to get off the train because of a report that he/she has took up so much space to seat and is simply stinking up the cart. These are the reasons that one person becomes late and furious. Plus, you come across people that feels that they are too proud to move in little bit more so others can come on the train or those inconsiderate ones that feel that there is still enough space in a packed cart to open up and read their Daily News and New York Post. Oh, and let us forget the students with the backpacks that seems to be loaded with great big rocks, I know it has to be heavy, because I can feel the heaviness and rough edges against my back. In addition, to all of these continuous problems in the morning, where one may witness or become a victim of those [illegible] people who just can't wait for the door to open and forget that you have to get out first before they come in, so they pushes and slide their way in, while you still trying to get out. It is crazy in the morning,and these are just some examples of what I have to deal with during rush hour a.m time and sometimes throughout my day as I travel around NYC. Despite, all of the frustrations I have to deal with on a daily basis in the morning, it becomes all good in the end, because I live in New York, a state whose city never rest and is always busied with confusion, frustration, inconsiderate people, and unexpected inconveniences on the train, but yet we all get to where we want to go and do what we got to do. This is the city and that is how it is. I either deal with it or get out, right? However,

This is Pacific train, downstairs of Atantic ave.

don't know what is what, just looking at it, it is like being in a moving picture. The Manhattan landscape during the night is even more beautiful than the day, when the lights are gleaming on every building and every thing else. Gold and silver lighting, that is all you see. It reminds me of Las Vegas, only if the rest of the boroughs could look like that. *Wow!* Even though, I take the D train everyday to go to Manhattan, I always look out the window, so I can see the great blue waters and the bridges packed with heavy traffic not too high above. Then just before the train leaves the bridge to its next stop Grand street, you can catch a glimpse of the streets in what New Yorkers called China Town. There you see Asian people walking about and Chinese texts on buildings and on stores, mostly everywhere. I love going into the city (Manhattan), because there is so much to see and so much places to go at. My school is not too far from famous streets such as 34th street- Herald Square, 42nd street- Times Square, and 47-50th street- Rockefeller Center(this is where the gigantic and tall Christmas tree is lit up) on the D train. These famous streets have many shopping centers in the train stations as well as outside the train station in mid- town Manhattan. I often come to shop in the city with my friends and family or just to window shop; as you walk , you never know what you may see. Oh, there are not just crazy people on the train but you find a lot of them in Manhattan, doing some crazy things like running butt-naked, screaming for nothing. What you see on t.v about New York may not be that far away from reality and *they say Brooklyn is crazy, huh, not that crazy.*

This is the exit off from train station, 59th street- Columbus Circle in Manhattan, where I go to school.

get there that matters to anyone but that I get there and I do, don't matter what the morning may bring me.

I am not a morning person. My brain is superb during the afternoon, say around three o' clock, the time when kids usually gets out of school. What I hate most in the morning is having to wake up. To be honest, I wish every day was the weekend, so that way I can sleep all day long. However, I rather deal with my obligations during the morning, so I can have the rest of the day to myself. Since, I don't have a job right now, college is my only priority and I have been so accustomed of going to school in the morning during my grade school era that I find it to better suited for me. Still, I hate having to wake up out of a cozy , warm, and soft bed. Sometimes, I imagine my bed calling me in a hoarse tone, "Cassie, please come back, no Cassie please do not leave me". Unfortunately, I have to go and once I head out that door I am not coming back until it is time to If you think getting up in the morning is frustrating, then imagine a simple ride to school, where the expected and unexpected meets.

The difficult and unexpected train problems that occur during commuting on the train as well as the selfish and devious ways of the commuters one encounters while traveling, is likely to piss anybody off. Believe me, a train ride in New York City, is nothing comparison to a ride on the roller coaster in Six Flags. The roller coaster ride is exciting and fun, while a train ride in New York City is...... words can not describe.There are always something wrong with the train, like for example, your annual train delays for more than 20 minutes in one train station until police investigate or the unexpected change of route, because of a fire in one of the train stations or a

This is Atlantic Ave., where I transfer to the D train.

Figure 5.8. Cassie's final draft of *A Day in the Life*.

Throughout the semester, Cassie's papers have had a lot of energy to them. Her papers have all been well-developed and involving to the reader, and this one is no different. In her *A Day in the Life,* Cassie writes of her commute to John Jay on the subway, and the six-page paper is well-illustrated with nine photographs, one of her block in Flatbush, Brooklyn, two shots of her subway stop, five shots taken either on the subway or waiting for the train, and a shot taken at the West 59th Street stop where she exits to go to school (figure 5.8).

She writes of taking the D train over the Manhattan Bridge:

> What I like the most in the mornings and the afternoons, going and coming from school, is the beautiful scenery of Manhattan and the East River as the train goes over the Manhattan Bridge. There is so much to see: the ships and the boats, as well as the distant skyscrapers that tower over the shorter buildings. The Manhattan landscape during the night is even more beautiful than the day, when the lights are gleaming on every building and everything else. Gold and silver lights is all you see. It reminds me of Las Vegas. Even though I take the D train everyday to go to Manhattan, I always look out the window so I can see the great blue waters and the bridges packed with heavy traffic not too high above. Then just before the train leaves the bridge to its next stop Grand Street, I can catch a glimpse of the streets of Chinatown. There you see Asian people walking about and Chinese texts on buildings and on stores . . . .

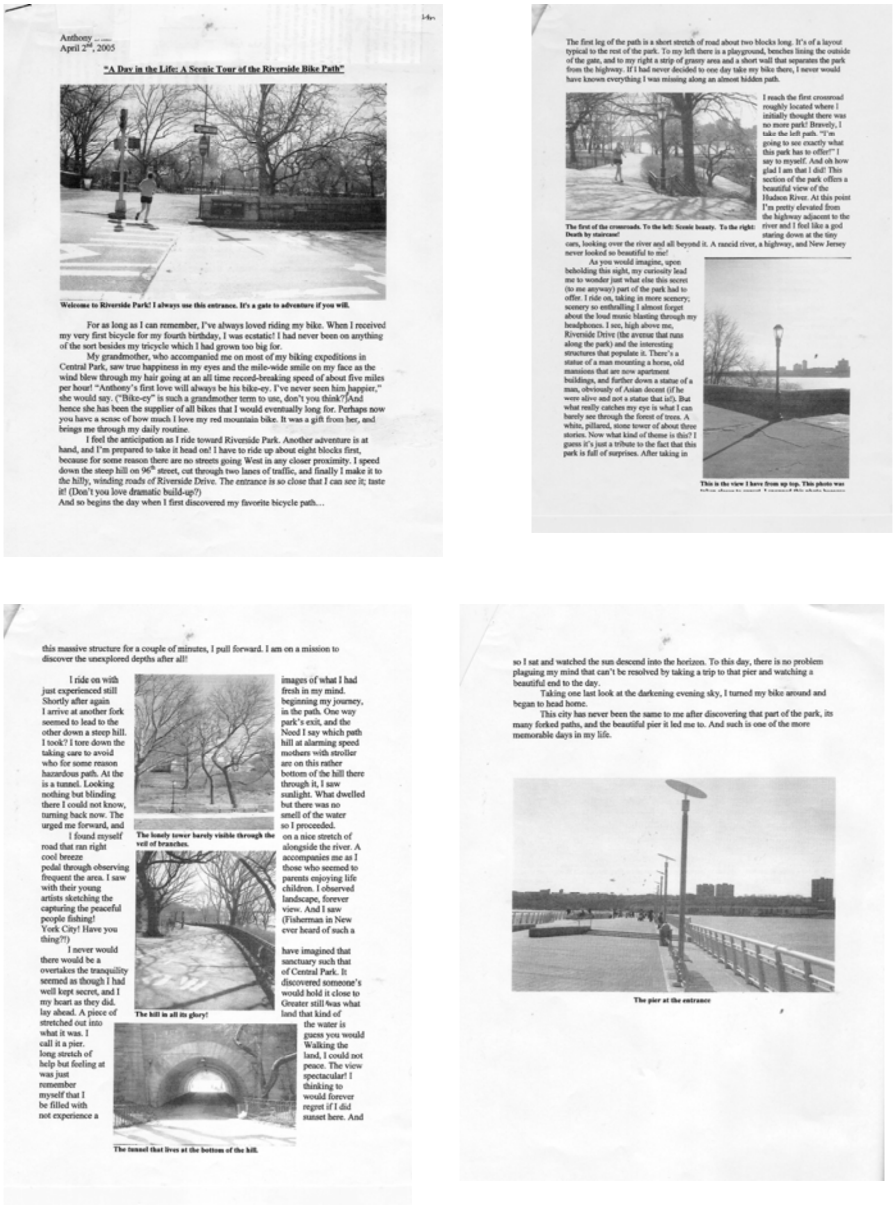
Reading her journey across the river, her thoughts of Manhattan, I can’t help but think of Whitman’s “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry” written 150 years earlier depicting the poet’s thoughts while crossing the same river at the same location. Cassie successfully writes of her experience as a commuting student from Brooklyn, straddling two different worlds. She explores her return commute:

> I happily go back home to my Flatbush community in Brooklyn, where I am welcomed back to the fighting children in the streets, fifty-cent sodas, Chinese

> stores on each block as well as two or three delis, and the annoying screaming voices of my niece and nephew coming home from their day at school.

Cassie ends her paper with the comments that “sometimes I feel like a foreigner, in which Brooklyn is a separate country from New York.” She illustrates her paper with so many images, and so many specific references, that the reader can understand the divide she feels between her home in Flatbush and school in Manhattan, and how the long commute bridges this divide. Earlier in the paper she writes that “being on the train and looking at the tall buildings and massive blue waters make me see New York in a different way, as if I am a tourist.” I think again of two lines from Pete Hamill’s New York memoir *Downtown*: “Something always surprises me. Something else fills me with wonder” (2004, 15). It is this wonder of the “familiar being new” that Cassie has discovered and successfully communicates with the reader in image and text throughout the paper.

Anthony



Anthony
April 2nd, 2005

"A Day in the Life: A Scenic Tour of the Riverside Bike Path"

Welcome to Riverside Park! I always use this entrance. It's a gate to adventure if you will.

For as long as I can remember, I've always loved riding my bike. When I received my very first bicycle for my fourth birthday, I was ecstatic! I had never been on anything of the sort besides my tricycle which I had grown too big for.

My grandmother, who accompanied me on most of my biking expeditions in Central Park, saw true happiness in my eyes and the mile-wide smile on my face as the wind blew through my hair going at an all time record-breaking speed of about five miles per hour! "Anthony's first love will always be his bike-ey. I've never seen him happier," she would say. ("Bike-ey" is such a grandmother term to use, don't you think?) And hence she has been the supplier of all bikes that I would eventually long for. Perhaps now you have a sense of how much I love my red mountain bike. It was a gift from her, and brings me through my daily routine.

I feel the anticipation as I ride toward Riverside Park. Another adventure is at hand, and I'm prepared to take it head on! I have to ride up about eight blocks first, because for some reason there are no streets going West in any closer proximity. I speed down the steep hill on 96th street, cut through two lanes of traffic, and finally I make it to the hilly, winding roads of Riverside Drive. The entrance is so close that I can see it; taste it! (Don't you love dramatic build-up?)
And so begins the day when I first discovered my favorite bicycle path…

The first leg of the path is a short stretch of road about two blocks long. It's of a layout typical to the rest of the park. To my left there is a playground, benches lining the outside of the gate, and to my right a strip of grassy area and a short wall that separates the park from the highway. If I had never decided to one day take my bike there, I never would have known everything I was missing along an almost hidden path.

The first of the crossroads. To the left: Scenic beauty. To the right: Death by staircase!

I reach the first crossroad roughly located where I initially thought there was no more park! Bravely, I take the left path. "I'm going to see exactly what this park has to offer!" I say to myself. And oh how glad I am that I did! This section of the park offers a beautiful view of the Hudson River. At this point I'm pretty elevated from the highway adjacent to the river and I feel like a god staring down at the tiny cars, looking over the river and all beyond it. A rancid river, a highway, and New Jersey never looked so beautiful to me!

As you would imagine, upon beholding this sight, my curiosity lead me to wonder just what else this secret (to me anyway) part of the park had to offer. I ride on, taking in more scenery; scenery so enthralling I almost forget about the loud music blasting through my headphones. I see, high above me, Riverside Drive (the avenue that runs along the park) and the interesting structures that populate it. There's a statue of a man mounting a horse, old mansions that are now apartment buildings, and further down a statue of a man, obviously of Asian decent (if he were alive and not a statue that is!). But what really catches my eye is what I can barely see through the forest of trees. A white, pillared, stone tower of about three stories. Now what kind of theme is this? I guess it's just a tribute to the fact that this park is full of surprises. After taking in

This is the view I have from up top. This photo was

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this massive structure for a couple of minutes, I pull forward. I am on a mission to discover the unexplored depths after all!

I ride on with
just experienced still
Shortly after again
I arrive at another fork
seemed to lead to the
other down a steep hill.
I took? I tore down the
taking care to avoid
who for some reason
hazardous path. At the
is a tunnel. Looking
nothing but blinding
there I could not know,
turning back now. The
urged me forward, and
I found myself
road that ran right
cool breeze
pedal through observing
frequent the area. I saw
with their young
artists sketching the
capturing the peaceful
people fishing!
York City! Have you
thing?!)
I never would
there would be a
overtakes the tranquility
seemed as though I had
well kept secret, and I
my heart as they did.
lay ahead. A piece of
stretched out into
what it was. I
call it a pier.
long stretch of
help but feeling at
was just
remember
myself that I
be filled with
not experience a

The lonely tower barely visible through the veil of branches.

The hill in all its glory!

The tunnel that lives at the bottom of the hill.

images of what I had
fresh in my mind.
beginning my journey,
in the path. One way
park's exit, and the
Need I say which path
hill at alarming speed
mothers with stroller
are on this rather
bottom of the hill there
through it, I saw
sunlight. What dwelled
but there was no
smell of the water
so I proceeded.
on a nice stretch of
alongside the river. A
accompanies me as I
those who seemed to
parents enjoying life
children. I observed
landscape, forever
view. And I saw
(Fisherman in New
ever heard of such a

have imagined that
sanctuary such that
of Central Park. It
discovered someone's
would hold it close to
Greater still was what
land that kind of
the water is
guess you would
Walking the
land, I could not
peace. The view
spectacular! I
thinking to
would forever
regret if I did
sunset here. And

---

so I sat and watched the sun descend into the horizon. To this day, there is no problem plaguing my mind that can't be resolved by taking a trip to that pier and watching a beautiful end to the day.

Taking one last look at the darkening evening sky, I turned my bike around and began to head home.

This city has never been the same to me after discovering that part of the park, its many forked paths, and the beautiful pier it led me to. And such is one of the more memorable days in my life.

The pier at the entrance

Figure 5.9. Anthony's final draft of *A Day in the Life*.

In this essay illustrated with seven images, Anthony successfully composes an essay of a bike ride on Manhattan's Riverside Park bike path (figure 5.9). His prose is exciting, and the paper is rich in description. Anthony takes the reader on the journey along with him, revisiting turns, tunnels and the impressive panoramic views of the Hudson River that overwhelm him on his pedaling journey. In the text, he explains that though he's been on the bike path before, he wants to try to experience it all as if for the first time. His layout is visually inviting; all of the included images have been taken on a bright sunny early spring day, when the foliage has yet to bloom on the still wintry-looking trees.

Anthony composes from the vantage point of his handlebars. He begins his paper with a large photograph of the entrance to Riverside Park, and his subsequent photographs that illustrate the paper are all taken from his bike as he pedals his way through the park. The textual component of the paper is also immediate, fueled by the images he has captured. He writes:

> The first leg of the path is a short stretch of road about two blocks long. It's of a layout typical to the rest of the park. To my left there is a playground, benches lining the outside of the gate, and to my right a strip of grassy area and a short wall that separates the park from the highway. If I had never decided to one day take my bike there, I never would have known everything I was missing along an almost hidden path.

Later in the paper, along with an accompanying photo of the view, Anthony writes,

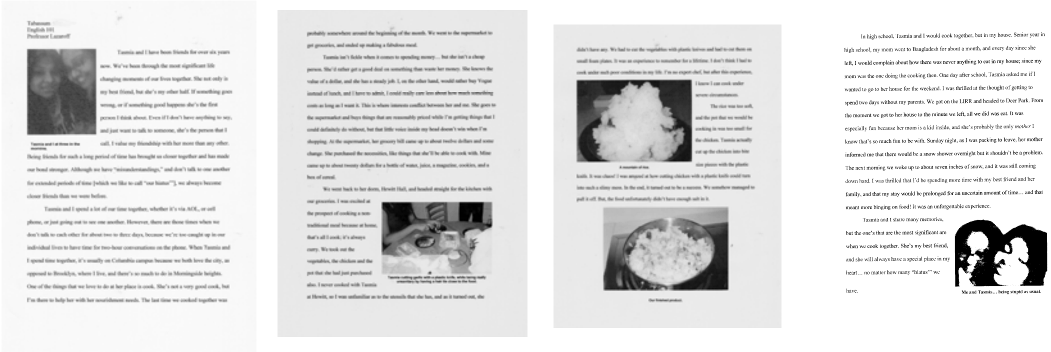
> This section of the park offers a beautiful view of the Hudson River. At this point I'm pretty elevated from the highway adjacent to the river, and I feel like a god staring down at the tiny cars, looking over the river and all beyond it. A rancid river, a highway, and New Jersey never looked so beautiful to me!

He continues on his journey:

> I find myself on a nice stretch of road that runs right alongside the river. A cool breeze accompanies me as I pedal through observing those who seem to frequent the area. I see parents enjoying life with their young children. I see artists sketching the landscape, forever capturing the peaceful view. And I see people fishing! In New York City! Have you ever heard of such a thing?

Anthony concludes the richly-illustrated paper about the meaning of the day's journey: "It seems as though I have discovered someone's well-kept secret, and I will hold it close to my heart as they did." In reading the paper, I am immersed in his bike ride; I am reading his thoughts and experiencing his vision. I feel as if I am there.

Tabassum



In high school, Tasmia and I would cook together, but in my house. Senior year in high school, my mom went to Bangladesh for about a month, and every day since she left, I would complain about how there was never anything to eat in my house; since my mom was the one doing the cooking then. One day after school, Tasmia asked me if I wanted to go to her house for the weekend. I was thrilled at the thought of getting to spend two days without my parents. We got on the LIRR and headed to Deer Park. From the moment we got to her house to the minute we left, all we did was eat. It was especially fun because her mom is a kid inside, and she's probably the only *mother* I know that's so much fun to be with. Sunday night, as I was packing to leave, her mother informed me that there would be a snow shower overnight but it shouldn't be a problem. The next morning we woke up to about seven inches of snow, and it was still coming down hard. I was thrilled that I'd be spending more time with my best friend and her family, and that my stay would be prolonged for an uncertain amount of time… and that meant more binging on food! It was an unforgettable experience.

Tasmia and I share many memories, but the one's that are the most significant are when we cook together. She's my best friend, and she will always have a special place in my heart… no matter how many "hiatus'" we have.

Me and Tasmia… being stupid as usual.

Figure 5.10. Tabassum's final draft of *A Day in the Life.*

From meeting with her and discussing her rough draft, I knew that Tabassum wanted to write of her relationship with her best friend Tasmia. Tabassum explained to her workshop group that the two had been friends since childhood. The bond began because they both were from Bangladeshi households, but there is a big difference now. Tabassum still lives at home and commutes to John Jay College, while Tasmia is a freshman at Columbia University living in a dorm. Tabassum explained that she did not have a preconceived notion of what she would photograph and write about for the assignment, so she brought her camera along for a weekend visit with Tasmia and photographed all their activities together. It was through the picture-taking that the topic and organization of the paper crystallized: Tabassum decided she would compose an essay in image and text about their challenge of cooking a home-cooked meal in Tasmia's dorm room (figure 5.10).

Tabassum writes of the food shopping expedition, and how different the two of them are at determining what necessities to buy. Back at the dorm, Tabassum writes she "was excited at the prospect of cooking a non-traditional meal because at home a traditional meal is all I cook, and it's always curry." But a dorm room is not stocked with the necessary cooking items that a kitchen might have. Tabassum writes, "We had to cut the vegetables with plastic knives and had to cut them on small foam plates. There was hardly any room to put the already cut vegetables and the vegetable that we were cutting on the same plate. It was an experience to remember for a lifetime."

Tabassum writes that their cooking causes the two of them to think back on previous experiences they shared: "While we were cooking, we reminisced about how we used to cook at my house, and about the time we went to her house during high school. It was senior year, my mom went to Bangladesh and there was no food in the house . . . ." Tabassum writes of the "non-stop binge" that occurred at Tasmia's, then makes the transition back to the cooking occurring in the dorm room.

> While we were talking we forgot about the food on the stove, and disappointingly, the rice turned too soft and we realized that the pot that we would be cooking in was too small for the chicken. Tasmia actually cut up the chicken into bite-sized pieces with a plastic knife. It was chaos! I was amazed at how cutting chicken with a plastic knife could turn into a slimy mess. She grabbed onto the chicken with one hand, and cut it with the other.

The paper concludes with comments about eternal friendship with the focus on food.

The images in the paper correspond to both the preparation/cooking process and the textual discussion. An image of Tabassum and Tasmia together is inserted in the textual introduction, another portrait of them inserted in the conclusion. Tabassum writes, “We share the most cherished memories when we cook,” and both images strongly reinforce the personal bond that connects the two friends.

New Visions Shared

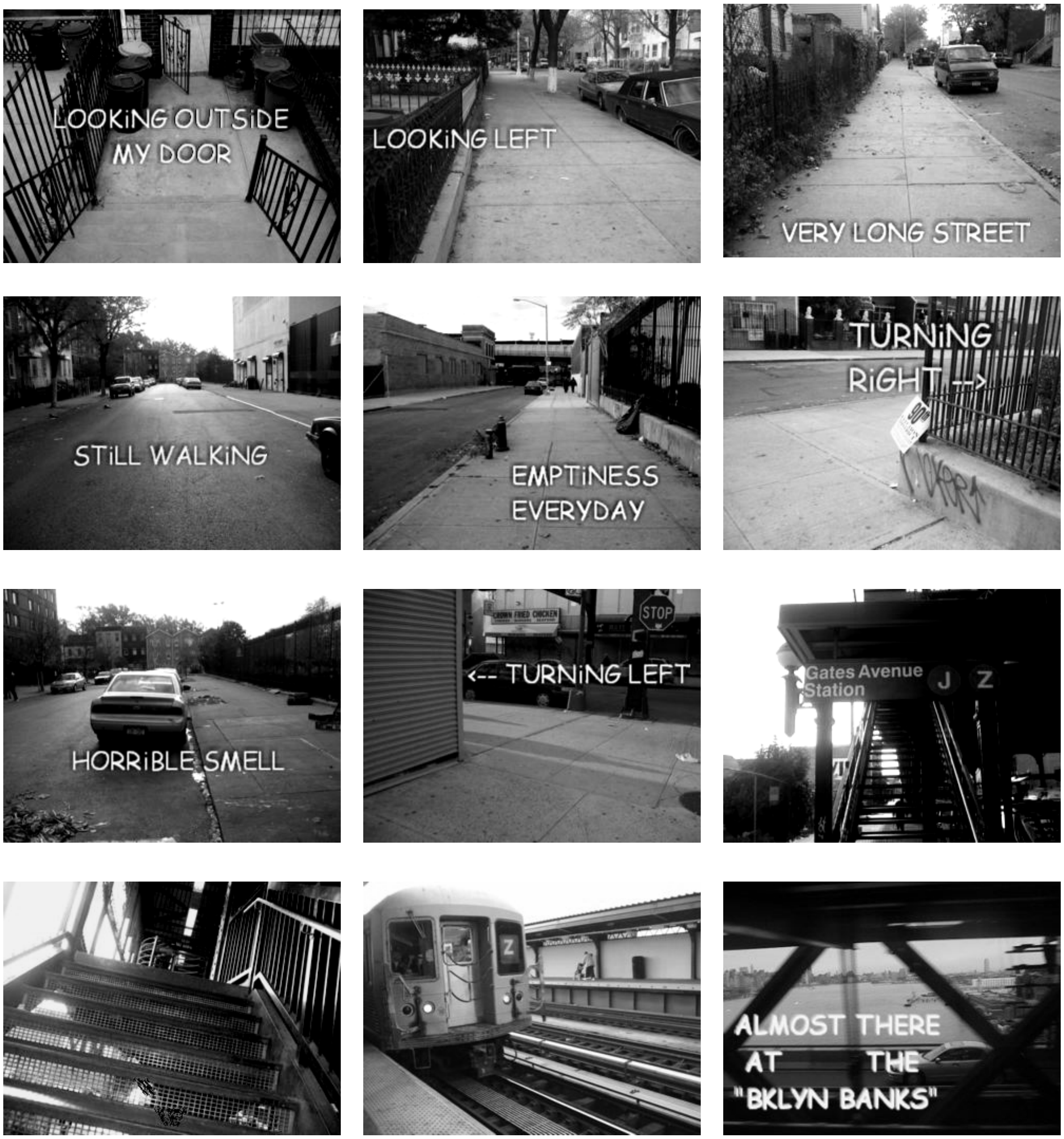

LOOKiNG OUTSiDE
MY DOOR
LOOKiNG LEFT
VERY LONG STREET
STiLL WALKiNG
EMPTiNESS
EVERYDAY
TURNiNG
RiGHT -->
HORRiBLE SMELL
STOP
<-- TURNiNG LEFT
Gates Avenue
Station
J
Z
Z
ALMOST THERE
AT THE
"BKLYN BANKS"

Figure 5.11. Stills from the opening of Will’s video presentation on *A Day in the Life*.

Will, a quiet but conscientious student, comes up to me after class a week before the rough drafts and images of *A Day in the Life* are due to be read/looked at in workshop groups and asks me if he could create “something different.” I had been discussing combining words and images together on the printed page, but Will wants to combine word and image together on a video. He tells me his passion is BMX bike racing and shooting/editing video, and explains that he would like to bring his digital camcorder with him to record *A Day in the Life*. It seems like an intriguing idea, and I give him the go-ahead. A week later Will hands me a CD, telling me it is his rough draft and asks if I would watch it and give him feedback.

Two days later when the class meets again, Will is waiting outside the classroom door when I arrive and asks if I watched his film. I have to admit to him that I completely forgot about it. When I had read through student papers the night before, I had not noticed the CD sitting in the bottom of my bag. Will seems disappointed when I tell him; he's obviously eager for me to see his work. I consider his reaction: when you are working on a project that you have personal investment in, one that you truly care about, you want to know your audience's response. Will seems to have a lot invested in this work; he is hungry for feedback. I promise him that I will watch the video that night.

Nighttime finds me sitting at my desk, a cup of hot black coffee at my side as I have another night of reading student work ahead of me. But before I begin, I turn away from the paper chase and insert Will's CD into my computer. The media program launches to play the video. The screen turns dark. Opening credits flash on the screen: "English 101 . . . Will Rivera . . . Enjoy Bob . . . ." Then a selection of still shots are presented as a slide show (figure 5.11): Will traces his steps as he leaves his Brooklyn apartment, walks the grim streets to the Z train, waits for the train on the platform, then boards and rides the elevated subway to where the world of BMX stunt riding awaits him at "Brooklyn Banks." Will has inserted written captions throughout the beginning scenes of the film, almost like a classic silent film, so the end effect is that the viewer is reading where Will is going as he's walking and riding to his destination. Will's voice supplies fuller narration over the images as well.

Over the first nine images of his commute from his doorstep through his neighborhood streets to the subway, Will narrates: "This is my routine, whether it's going to school or riding on the weekend. I've been doing this for about seven years, riding skateboards, traveling, looking for what we call 'ride-able spots'." As the image with the caption "Emptiness Everyday" appears, he continues, stating, "To most people this can mean nothing, but to me it can mean everything." When he arrives at the Gates Avenue subway entrance and the accompanying image flashes on the screen, Will's voiceover signs-off, "I hope you like it."

Once the subway pulls into the station the still images give way to moving ones. The viewer hears the rumble of the train, and when the first biker crashes down a ramp at "The Brooklyn Banks," a raging rock soundtrack kicks in as Will films a selection of bikers doing 360s, frontflips, heel clickers, and wallrides. Beginning with the opening narration and slide show, the four minute film offers so much potential: it truly captures the process of commuting to the Brooklyn Banks and the stunt riding that takes place there (figure 5.12). The visuals are complex, the soundtrack is pounding.

I am, quite simply, very impressed.

I watch it again.

And again.

Will, a student I really did not know before, has completely enveloped me in his world, his life, in this four minute film. I feel the urge to show this to people. I call out for my two sons, ages fourteen and eleven, to come to my computer monitor and watch what my student has done. I play it again for my new audience. “This is the work of my *student*,” I proudly tell them.

It is about 8:00 at night, and I find Will’s phone number on the index card he filled out on the first day of class. I have so much enthusiasm to share with him about his project; I don’t want to wait for the next day. Will answers the phone and we talk about his video, about his compositional vision, about his process. We discuss the excitement he showcases in the film. Will explains to me that BMX riding is his passion, as is filming. In creating this video he wanted to document what for him is the most vital aspect of his day, when he gets to ride. I ask him if he could show the film to our class and my other section, and he immediately agrees.

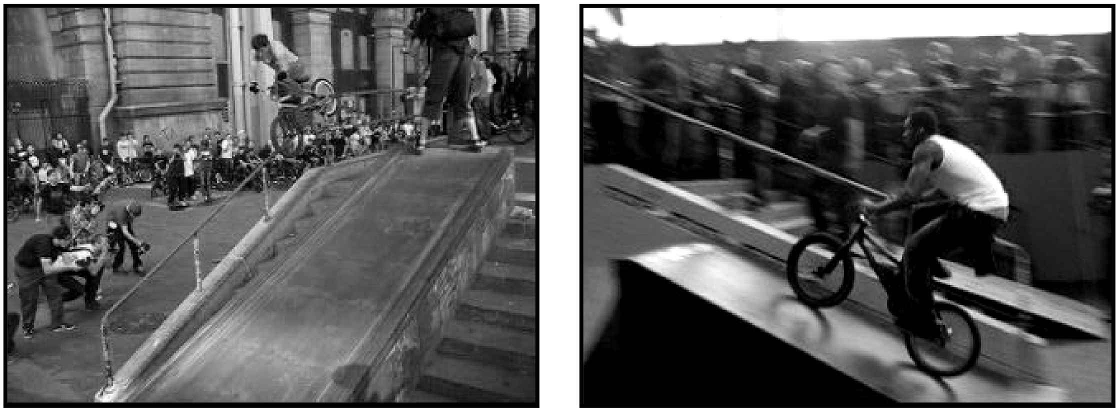


Figure 5.12. Stills from Will’s video presentation on *A Day in the Life.*

The next week is show time. Will stands in front of the class and describes the process that he went through to make the video: the idea, the shooting, the film-editing, the music, the music-editing, the use of text. I then shut the lights, and Will presses play.

The class watches as the film begins with Will’s trek from home to the subway and then kicks in with bike action and loud music. The class breaks out in a big round of applause at its conclusion. His classmates have many questions about what they’ve seen. “Where do you live?” “Where is the Brooklyn Banks?” “How long have you been doing this?” “Any broken bones?” He answers their questions and also explains his creative goals in doing this project: he loves filmmaking and finds that it is his natural form of expression, of composition.

After class he tells me that I am the first teacher who has ever known of his interests in film making and editing, let alone who has let him compose this way. In Will’s diagnostic essay in the beginning of the semester he wrote that “filming and editing are hobbies of mine which, just like writing, can express. You have a piece of work which you make and create your masterpiece.” Will is technically savvy, and I realize that a traditionally-based writing pedagogy would have never touched the nerve that produced this version of his “passion.” Perhaps the skills Will used in composing this video won’t help him on a writing proficiency test, but by evidence of his video, I see that Will knows as much about communicating process and narration as any purely textual writer.

When Will presented his video to the class in the Fall 2004 semester, students become particularly energized by his work. In the break between the fall and the spring semesters I consider how I could utilize visual presentations, presentations of *all* the students in the class. If all students could present examples of their work, then everyone would have the knowledge of the important work that each of his classmates was doing. I imagine the students learning about and informing each other and relating to the individual and varied narratives. I think of James Britton, who writes, “Our enjoyment of the stories of other men’s lives cannot be explained simply in terms of *knowing*, but must always have a strong element of feeling – including, ‘How would I have felt if that had been me?’” (1972, 118).

After considering the application of Will’s presentation, and realizing the possibilities of conducting class in a smart classroom, as introduced in Chapter Two, I plan to have my spring semester students present their images via a slide show, PowerPoint demonstration, even a short film on the projection screen, while also reading aloud either complete papers or select passages of texts. Students can choose to present projects they have been working on throughout the semester, either *Pictures on my Wall*, *My New York*, or *A Day in the Life,* and if they choose to they can present additional pictures, even films. The point is to blend even further the pictorial and the textual in a classroom presentation.

In the planning between semesters, I also realize that the presentations can beget a writing assignment. When I had assigned class presentations in a Business Writing class I had previously taught, I had also assigned letters in which students wrote to the presenter in response to the presentation. I can have my composition students engage in a similar writing activity in the spring classes. Audience members would write letters in which they critically respond to two of their classmates’ presentations. I would spend part of a class leading up to the presentations discussing how to construct such letters. I have been writing comments on their papers, now students would have the chance to write in response to each other. Students would respond to presentations given on the day that they were not presenting, guaranteeing student attendance and hopefully making sure that the students pay critical attention to each others' work. In their responses, I would also ask them to write of the general experience of participating in visual presentations in the writing class.

When I make this announcement during the Spring 2005 semester, the students are interested. Some have created slide shows and used PowerPoint before, but many have not (though for the most part all are aware of PowerPoint). I want the students to make presentations that will highlight their words *and* their images, and I think of how Walter J. Ong uses the word "media" to discuss "writing, print, and electronic devices." Ong writes that "[media] makes possible thought processes inconceivable before" (1977, 46), and I want my students to utilize the available technology to create new media that is completely theirs, in which they successfully highlight their own authorship in word and in image.

The presentations are held over three days in the Spring 2005 semester. The day of the first presentations I walk into class and there is energy in the air. Today's class is completely led by the students. Instead of putting my papers and jacket down on the teacher's desk at the front of the classroom, I take a seat with the students. Today I am a member of the audience; it is they who are going to teach me. The presentations begin, and the students are all immersed in the class, in each other's lives. I am watching, and I am marveling. I am thinking of bell hooks writing about engaged pedagogy, "Excitement is generated through collective effort" (1994, 8).

See Who We Are – Part II

Anthony: Responses by Ashley, Candace, and Jenny

Throughout the semester, Anthony has created sophisticated texts, photographing and writing about a punk rock band in which he plays bass guitar, photographing and writing about Union Square in Manhattan where he spends a lot of his free time, and photographing and writing about riding his bike in Riverside Park (figure 5.9). He comes to my office after we had watched Will's video from the previous semester in class; Anthony was very familiar with the band *Thrice* that Will had chosen for the soundtrack (he had recognized the song from the introductory bars), and he thought that the video was "awesome." Anthony has an idea. In addition to playing in *Subvercity*, his punk rock band, he tells me he also plays bass with a Dominican *bachata* band. They have a gig the following weekend, and he'd like to film a song to present to the class. Anthony tells me "no one in the class will guess that I, a goth-looking white guy, am in a band playing this kind of music." He wants to confront the class on stereotypes they might have on people based on dress; he wants to surprise them, to help them realize that he's not what he seems.

The next week for his presentation, Anthony plays the video. It is a live performance set in Rumba, a dimly-lit Bronx nightclub, in front of a raucous audience. On stage is "Grupo Generacion," a group of middle-aged Hispanic men dressed in bright purple outfits playing various instruments, and Anthony himself, dressed in black, playing bass, "sticking out like a sore thumb" as one student responds. And the class loves it. At the end of the film, there are lots of questions; his classmates want to know about his role in the band and his interest in the music.

In his diagnostic essay in the beginning of the semester, Anthony wrote, **“**Though I put up a façade that I don’t care what other people think about my writing and myself in general, my frustration lies in a want (a need if you will) for others to be affected by what I write.” I see the truth in what he wrote now over two months later, and I think he is delighted with their questions. He tells the class he was introduced to the other musicians through the doorman in his building. “What nationality are you?” a classmate asks. Anthony explains that he is half Puerto Rican, a quarter Russian, and a quarter Italian.

His classmates are fascinated with the side of Anthony they never knew existed. When they write letters in response to the presentations, some choose to respond to Anthony’s. Ashley writes, “One reason why I really enjoyed this presentation is because I had learned something new about Anthony. . . . Because Anthony dresses really punkish, I never thought that he was Puerto Rican.”

Candace writes of being “shocked,” because “Anthony does not dress, talk, or for that matter even act like a Spanish descendent.” She ends her response stating, “I not only loved these presentations, but I also got to know a little more about my classmates outside of class. Whoever said ‘looks are deceiving’ definitely knows what they are talking about when it comes to Anthony.”

Jenny writes:

> Anthony’s presentation was very intriguing. It surprised me a lot. I was surprised for the simple fact that when I look at Anthony I would never in a million years think that he listens to *bachata* and is in a *bachata* band. I totally felt connected to him in a way because I am also Spanish, and I listen to a lot of *bachata* music. He was also playing one of my favorite songs in the video, so he

> really got my attention and kept me interested throughout the whole presentation. I see him in a very different way now. I have learned a different side of him, not just what I see on the outside.

Jenny states in the end of her letter that, “I learned something from one of my classmates that might help me to further understand him and know that although we might not dress the same or talk the same we all have something in common.”

Anthony’s original hopes have been met. Because of his presentation, his classmates look at him now as a much more complex individual than the “goth-looking white guy” he imagined many took him to be. Though Anthony dresses completely in black, has long dyed black hair and wears black eye liner, through his *bachata* video and discussion of his background, he has proved to his classmates that, yes, looks can be deceiving.

Luisa: Responses by Charmaine, Leilani, and Sharon

Before showing her images, Luisa introduces her project. She had met her friend Carlos three years ago after she moved to New Jersey from New York. They had high school classes in common and lived a block away from each other. But the high school memories are not what Luisa is focusing on in this presentation. Carlos is now in the Marines, stationed in Parris Island, South Carolina. The pictures she shows are ones that Carlos has sent her of life in Parris Island while waiting for his deployment orders to the battlefields of Iraq.

The pictures she presents to her classmates show Carlos and other soldiers in military maneuvers and relaxing. But the tone of the essay she reads is anything but relaxing; it is fraught with worry. She reads, “I get really preoccupied sometimes when I think of how dangerous the situation is out in Iraq. I fear for my best friend’s safety.”

Her classmates are very moved by Luisa’s presentation. In the beginning of the semester, Charmaine told me she is serving in the Marines, and Luisa’s project touched her deeply. In her response to Luisa, she explains how Luisa’s evocation of Carlos’s exhaustion in being forced to exercise in hundred-degree heat, “made me reflect on my memories of being on Parris Island.” She continues:

> Luisa went on and spoke about the harsh treatment that her friend Carlos not only witnessed but received as well. Here was something else that I was able to relate to. I’ve never been treated the way I was on Parris Island before in my life. I had no idea that an individual that signed up for the service could be treated in such a degrading way. However, in the end you realize that their harsh treatment was part of your mental, physical, and emotional training. This was one of my favorite presentations. Luisa provided plenty of pictures and explained not only who was in the picture, but where they were taken as well.

Other students write of relating to Luisa’s work because they knew others also affected by the war. Leilani writes:

> The reason I like her paper so much is because I have my boyfriend, my two best friends, and my other friends who are all in the military, who have to go to Iraq. I am scared beyond belief because I lost my cousin already over in Iraq not so long ago, and I fear that I may lose them as well. Once the paper was being read, I automatically connected to it because of the situation I am in. To me this is a very

> special and deep essay that only people who are going through a similar situation can truly understand.

The war is Iraq is a situation that is at the forefront of many current political conversations. When it entered our writing classroom, the situation became personal. The students who chose to respond to Luisa's presentation seemed to understand and respect Luisa's concern for her friend. As Sharon states, "she talked about how this friend was truly an inspiration to her. I thought that was really touching. Every man and woman in the Marines or Armed Forces is an inspiration to all of us. . . . Her essay that she read along with the pictures was very moving and emotional."

Sharon ends her response to Luisa by discussing her feelings about the assignment. She writes:

> Overall, I think the presentations were excellent. It was so interesting for me to watch these presentations. In most college classes, students never really get the chance to get to know their classmates. However, I feel that because of this assignment, we all got to learn a bit about each others' lives. . . . Everyone in the class has such different experiences and stories to tell. The visual aids in the presentations really added to the effectiveness of the presentations. I enjoyed doing this presentation as well as watching the others and learning more about my classmates.

Sharon's own presentation examined life at SUNY Binghamton where she began as a freshman in the fall term. Since she is a transfer student, when she writes that "in most college classes, students never really get the chance to get to know their classmates," she is basing it on her experiences at two different colleges. And I read that as reflection of her having been part of a worthwhile experience in this classroom.

Genny: Responses by Yi and Karen

On the overhead screen is an image of an apartment's front door. Genny, a bit nervous, begins to explain her *A Day in the Life* essay. Genny tells the class that as a young teenager she was forced to stay in her apartment at night by her strict Haitian parents, so she started sneaking out in high school. This is the ritual that she develops in the paper. She writes of the first time sneaking out of the house, making sure her parents were asleep, putting a "dummy" in the bed in case her parents came in to check on her, exiting through three different doors, until she was outside and free. Then she writes of the reverse procedure, sneaking back in. She includes three images in the presentation, and all three are reenactments of her sneaking out (one picture has her putting the key in the front door's lock, as if she were sneaking back in).

The class enjoys Genny's presentation and laughs at appropriate parts. Here is Yi's response:

> Genny's presentation cracked the class up because her writing contained use of extended details that described her first experience of sneaking out at midnight to attend a party. With detailed lines that portrayed her emotions, "I was nervous, scared, excited, and hesitant, all at once," the audience could sense her feelings and feel like they were sneaking out of the house first hand. Because I've never had to sneak out of my house for anything, Genny's writing made me able to feel what she felt, and her details spiced up the essay to make it feel really

> exciting. What I especially liked in the writing was that she mentioned that she hasn't experienced anything close to this encounter because it was her first time. Anything that is done multiple times won't match up to the first experience.

Karen also responds to Genny, writing that she has "grown up with Dominican parents who are very similar to Haitian parents." She explains:

> When Genny read her story, I could feel the tension she was talking about when she described to us the journey she had to go through to get back into her house. I could almost picture myself in that situation, and how my heart would have been beating out of control. In addition, the pictures with her paper were very good. Since there was no one in the pictures, it made it possible for me to actually see myself walking through those doors. Genny's paper was very good, and the way she read it captured my attention to a point where I felt I was in the story.

Jhoanna: Responses by Huguenesso, Sophia, and Yi

Jhoanna walks up to the workstation, looks out at her classmates and simply says, "It's personal. . . ." Then she pauses before delivering the rest of her opening statement, "but I know that a majority of you guys can relate to it." With a blurry image of her and her old boyfriend Keenan as a visual on the overhead screen (Jhoanna says the haziness of the image can be read as "foreshadowing"), Jhoanna starts reading: "The heart is a delicate thing. It can only take so much, yet we take it so much for granted. It is not something that is to be played or toyed with under any circumstances. It is a Pandora's Box of wonder that we may never understand." With this heady introduction, Jhoanna then continues narrating about a whirlwind romance involving Keenan, and how she felt used and manipulated by him. As she is reading, the audience is rapt. Huguenesso is especially engaged, and she is vocal in disgust of what Jhoanna's boyfriend put her through, offering a response to a particularly upsetting example saying, "Girl, I feel you." When Jhoanna finishes reading, many in the class are involved, and all are condemning the boyfriend. There is lots of empathy for Jhoanna voiced from her classmates, and there is much give and take in response to her presentation. At one point in the class dialogue, Genny, sitting at the desk next to mine leans over and says to me "This whole thing is great because it gets us to learn about people in the class more."

In her response to Jhoanna, Huguenesso explains her reaction to the presentation

> My reaction to that was the loudest in the class. I felt for her because I know how it feels for someone to play with my feelings. I knew this was hard for Jhoanna to talk about and reveal to us, because when I broke up with my boyfriend, I couldn't speak to anybody for days, let alone write an essay about it. I truly appreciated her essay because it made me see her differently, and I knew something about her that I could relate to.

Other students write of how they can relate to Jhoanna's presentation. Sophia writes that Jhoanna's paper "really stuck a chord with me because it brought me back in time a couple of months to when I was in the same situation." Sophia is impressed how Jhoanna has the "ability to take you in to the actual events and how she described everything as if it were yesterday. Also, she wasn't shy about going into details about what happened, yet you could tell she was hurt by it. She wrote it and read it as if she was talking to a close friend with whom she was confiding her story."

Sophia writes that because Jhoanna’s essay was read aloud, “it is as if you’re sharing part of your life or feelings with others just like you.” She likes Jhoanna’s and others’ visual presentations, “because the pictures took you in and kind of made you part of it.” For Sophia., the assignment, “helped me get to know better my classmates and their different styles of writing and presenting, but it also helped me find mine.”

In her opening diagnostic, Jhoanna wrote, “I enjoy writing poetry . . . . The success I’ve gained from writing my poetry is the fact that people who have read my poetry feel that they can relate to it, and if one of my poems can touch and affect a person, then I feel successful.” This idea of "success" seems crucial. Jhoanna didn’t read a poem to her classmates, but presented a paper and image. Her classmates certainly related to her work, so for Jhoanna, and the class as a whole, the presentation was a success.

Chang: Responses by Diego and Carolina

Just as with Anthony’s presentation, I was very pleased with Chang’s because I felt his classmates saw a part of him that most didn’t know. Chang had constructed his *A Day in the Life* paper about the successes he has had recording and playing music in his church. For his presentation he wanted to add to the discussion of that topic and show a video that was made of his church group “Beats ‘N Blessings (BNB) Angelz,” performing at a retreat the previous weekend. He gets up in front of the class and introduces his project, explaining his *A Day in the Life* paper, and then discussing the work he does in “BNB Angelz.” This class seems eager to see it; when Chang explains that the song is long, that maybe he should just play the opening minutes, many of his classmates speak out, imploring him to play the entire song.

During the playing of the tape, I watch Chang in front of the class, behind the console of the computer work station, smiling, dancing, and singing. I am smiling as well. I have learned about Chang from his earlier *Pictures on My Wall* essay that he was born in Korea and moved to New York when he was in elementary school. In that essay he wrote of attending school “without speaking any English,” eventually becoming “filled with anger and hate,” joining a gang and hanging out with the wrong crowd. At the end of that paper he writes, “Therefore, don’t think that you know me because of my outside appearances. If you want to know who I am you need to walk in my shoes.”

With the presentation of his video, Chang’s classmates have the chance to understand a side of him that they might not have seen before. Diego begins his response to Chang’s presentation by writing, “This past week in class were some of the most interesting days of this semester. I got to see how creative the rest of the class was.” He writes of being “shocked” by Chang’s video: “Who would have known that one of my fellow classmates rapped?”

Diego ends his response:

> These presentations were an experience that I have never gone through in my life. It was a fun and interesting way to learn. . . . There were some things I didn’t know, that I do know now, about my fellow peers. This assignment was a good way to open up to the classroom and to the professor. If you think about it, I don’t believe any of the students would have opened up like they did to just anyone.

Carolina also responds to Chang stating that she "absolutely loved" his presentation, that in it he shows a "passion" for life:

> "Beats 'N Blessings" is such an inspirational group for teens. This organization motivates young people to be peaceful in all aspects of life, and uses music as a safe source of entertainment…. Upon watching Chang's short film, I got the feeling of wanting to be part of his organization. To me his short film was excellent, and I just hope "Beats 'N Blessings" keeps inspiring and providing such a positive source of fun for teenagers.

The enthusiasm Carolina feels shines through all the presentations she witnessed. She writes, "I really enjoyed the class project, and I am thankful for being able to learn the simplest things about my classmates."

Critical Reflections

Through the use of technology, through images and text (and the sharing of image and text) I witnessed my students becoming more interested and confident in the composition classroom. They became keenly aware of audience and aware of their audience's reaction. As I have expressed, many students seemed to strongly relate to one another's work; it was almost as if some were living vicariously through another during the few moments of the presentation. My students were responding to each other's personal lives in a critical way. They were learning to see their classmates as individual thinkers and individual composers, all part of a community of writers and composers creating works that mattered to the writer and resonated with fellow classmates. I, in turn, was aware of the *vitality* of the classroom, something that one cannot quantify. Through their presentations, students had expanded their horizons of essay composing and reader response. They were realizing that the world of the composition classroom could be a world that mattered: a world where they could celebrate their identities, their home communities, their knowledge that they were gaining every day.

***

My students were able to compose their projects using their own cameras, scanners, and computers, or with inexpensive tools I brought to the classroom (disposable cameras, scanners) and the computers available at the college. The end result was that students could design sophisticated-looking texts and lead in-class presentations that included their texts and images. Of the forty-two students who submitted *My New York* essays in the spring semester, forty of them were able to create interplays of texts and images on their pages (95.3%); of the forty-three students who submitted *A Day in the Life* essays in the spring semester, thirty-nine of them were able to do the same (90.6%). As an educator, I was heartened to see that over 90% of my students succeeded in working within a digital environment, because electronic literacy plays an increasingly important role “in determining if students will be able to participate and succeed in school, work, and community” (Hawisher et al. 2004, 142-143).

Susan Sontag, writing years before the advent of desktop publishing, tells us that a photograph’s “moral and emotional weight depends on where it is inserted. A photograph changes according to the context in which it is seen” ([1977] 1989, 106). As designers, my students had to select the final images to illustrate their texts and place their snapshots (using tools such as size, layout, cropping, contrast, and lighting featured in word processing programs such as *Microsoft Word*) in a layout that was visually appealing to them and hopefully to the reader. This student practice is a twenty-first century adaptation of Burke's "terministic screens" (1990), where the students' attention is being directed to multiple fields (textual, pictorial) where meaning is reinforced through the transaction between image and word.

In having students consider the design of their work, I asked them to become critical of the way their papers look. In his essay "Thinking out of the Pro-Verbal Box," Sean D. Williams states that to be "literate in the twenty-first century" means, among other things, "to use multiple expressive technologies including those offered by print, visual, and digital tools" (2001, 22). Jefferson Hunter, looking at examples from the past, uses the term "collaborative forms" to describe the combining of image and text in examples that have peppered the twentieth century:

> Commercially successful photographic albums, best-selling news magazines like *Life*, large-format documentary books, short-story volumes or travel literature accompanied by photogravures, illustrated government reports, and poems and photographs published together are all technical developments of the last ninety years, are all testimony to a modern liking for collaborative forms. And they are all expressions of a peculiarly modern need for a good memory (1987, 3).

Our responsibilities as twenty-first century writing instructors are inspired by Hunter's "collaborative forms." We need to encourage our students to design documents that combine image and text to help prepare them for a textual reality that is much more sophisticated than words alone on a page. Peter Smagorinsky advocates a change in terminology, suggesting that our profession replace "*writing* across the curriculum with *composing* across the curriculum, in which composing encompasses the production . . . of images as well as words” (Fleckenstein 2004, 615). We need to make such opportunities available in the writing classroom that will encourage students to come up with new forms of composing.

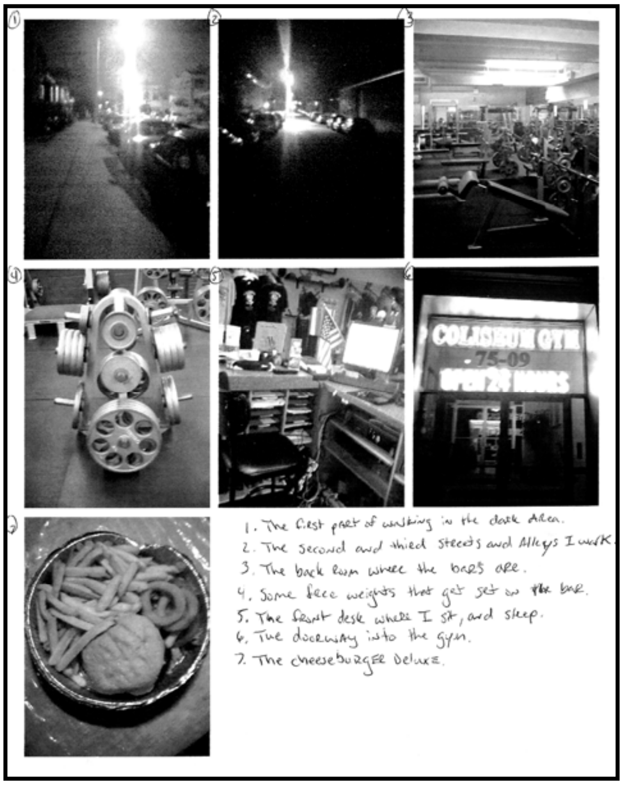
The typical university writing assignment in many disciplines still requires no design element beyond discrete paragraphs and a centered title. However, with the increasing availability of digital imaging technology, this situation is changing and will continue to change. Outside the academy, non-visual texts are becoming increasingly rare. Ignoring graphics and visual design elements in writing classes, even in first-year composition, is quickly becoming anachronistic (Hill 2004, 127).

Chapter Six
Final Frames: Reflections of a Study

> [College English] should be the study of the mixing and remixing of connections: those connections that move from popular culture to the university, from geography to politics, from literature to film, from theory to theory, from celebrity to noncelebrity, from city to classroom, from the Web into our daily lives, from writing to writing.
>
> — Jeff Rice, “Networks and New Media”

> This, to me, is what the college experience is all about. Creative freedom and imaginative teaching methods are the fuel for my honest motivation.
>
> Seeing photos I took and using them for inspiration made the paper writing process that much easier and enjoyable. And now I have more than just graded essays to remind me of my first year in college, but tangible expressions of myself.
>
> — Anthony, Student in English 101, John Jay College, Spring 2005

Twenty-First Century Composers



1. The first part of walking in the dark Area.
2. The second and thied streets and Alleys I work.
3. The back Room where the bars are.
4. Some free weights that get set on the bar.
5. The front desk where I sit, and sleep.
6. The doorway into the gym.
7. The cheeseburger Deluxe.

Figure 6.1. Larry's digital outline of *A Day in the Life*.

The data collected during “The Picturing Year” ended in May 2005. However, my teaching, linking student writing and student photography, continued. During the 2005/2006 and 2006/2007 academic years, while writing this dissertation, I have continued to give assignments calling for students to use their own photographs and picture-taking experiences to inspire writing, using successful student models from “The Picturing Year” as examples to help guide classes on idea-generating, picture-taking, writing, and graphic design, both at John Jay in 2005/2006 and at Nassau Community College where I have taught since Fall 2006.

In the two years since the study ended, advances in image-making technology have helped digital cameras and cellphone cameras become almost ubiquitous. As even a cursory look at advertisements for current cell phones shows, the camera is now considered to be a standard feature on most new cell phones, and the purchase prices of all digital cameras continue to drop as features and optical clarity continue to rise. In a February 2006 *New York Times* article, “Here I Am Taking My Own Picture,” Alex Williams writes:

> The era of cheap, lightweight digital cameras – in cellphones, in computers, in hip pockets, even on key chains – has meant that people who did not consider themselves photography buffs as recently as five years ago are filling ever-larger hard drives with thousands of images from their lives. (1)

I see how this availability has affected the picturing work my students have been doing. In the two years since “The Picturing Year,” nearly all my students have been shooting digitally, whether on cellphone cameras or digital cameras. Because of this digital turn, my students have been able to take many photos and have had many images from which to choose. While with film cameras one could shoot from twelve to thirty-six images per roll of film, with digital technology, one can shoot hundreds of frames depending on the camera's available memory. In the two years following the study, the propensity to keep photographing (and subsequently printing digital images on a home or school computer) has enabled my students to bring an abundance of images to class.

Charles A. Hill writes that the "new electronic technologies are making [the] melding of media easier and more common, requiring readers and writers to have a richer understanding of how words and images work together to produce meaning" (2004, 109). I see this demonstrated in the work of Larry, a student in my English 101 class Spring 2006, the year following this study. Like many of his classmates, Larry considered his cellphone camera a necessity. For Larry, this small technological marvel enabled him to compose where ever he was and to think about his composition at times when an English assignment might have been the furthest idea in his mind.

In response to *A Day in the Life*, Larry wanted to photograph his working experience. With his cellphone camera, he photographed his late night walk from home to his place of work, then photographed during his graveyard shift at the Coliseum Gym. He emailed the images to himself, then back home at his computer downloaded the images and began the process of selecting, editing, and arranging until he organized the seven images that he felt best represented his working experience. He printed out the layout of the seven color images, then handwrote the identifying captions. Larry composed this digital outline (figure 6.1) as an aid in the construction of an eventual written draft and brought it in for his groupmates to see when groups met to discuss photos for the assignment.

Larry explained to his group that he works every night from midnight until six in the morning at a twenty-four hour gym in his Queens neighborhood. After working all night, he goes home, showers, then comes straight to school for a full day of classes. Presenting his digital outline, Larry told his groupmates that the order of the pictures on the sheet will be the order he will present each example in the draft of his paper. He explained his photographing/brainstorming process: he began by photographing as he walked down the darkened industrial streets that take him from his home to the gym, then he photographed the entrance and the interior of the gym, the desk where “I sit and sleep,” and finally, as shown in the seventh picture, “the cheeseburger deluxe.” The display of the photos indicated the direction that Larry wanted the eventual paper to follow, and the photos inspired questions from his groupmates, questions that helped Larry consider the development of his eventual paper.

Most interest surrounded the cheeseburger. Of the seven images, six were of streetscape, buildings, and gym equipment, but his seventh snapshot was a close-up of his favorite meal in all its takeout glory. He photographed, before eating, his cheeseburger, fries, onion rings, lettuce and tomato, nestled in an aluminum takeout container. The amusing questions of his groupmates egged Larry to talk about the meal’s importance to him. He explained that he has a cheeseburger with fries every morning at five am, getting it delivered from the deli around the corner from the gym, and it is his favorite meal of the day. His groupmates were amused by the photo, but transfixed by reality of the daily morning menu as well as Larry’s twenty-four-hour school, home, work, cheeseburger schedule.

Though the final draft that Larry eventually submitted was a disappointment (his final text, without any pictures inserted, seemed to be written in a hurry with overused colloquialisms, though his organizational structure matched the digital outline tacked on the back of his two-page paper as a form of appendix), his creation of a digital outline points the way that other students can succeed in organizing their photographs as a prewriting activity in a writing class. His digital outline reminds me of the early twentieth-century Kodak advertising of which I wrote in Chapter One. The promise of the early Kodak camera was that the snapshot photographer could take pictures to tell stories, to help the photographer remember stories. Nearly ninety years has passed, yet a composer like Larry is still building on Kodak's promise that collections of personal snapshots can be narrative.

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Much of the content of the November 2006 issue of *College English* was devoted to writers responding to the question, "What Should College English Be?" In her response "Why English?" Shirley Wilson Logan writes that college English should provide students with the opportunity to produce "rhetorically effective texts," whose definition also includes those "to be viewed as images" as well as to be "read" (107). Jeff Rice cites Marshall McLuhan in stating that "The age of writing has passed," and then charges, "We must invent a new metaphor because, on its own, 'writing' feels too limited in an age of total information delivery and connectivity" (2006, 129). In the creation of his digital outline, inspired by a night of lived experience and much visual evidence, Larry, unwittingly, answered Rice's charge. Larry narrowed his selection to the visual evidence that he wanted to use and visually organized the points he wanted to make.

Larry’s digital outline is an exciting idea and a model that shows the compositional promise of combining picture-taking technology and writing assignments.

Larry’s digital outline was composed the year following this study, but it was created in many ways as a result of this study. One important factor I discovered during “The Picturing Year” was the role that digital media could play in creating “vivid information,” which Hill describes as the combination of “imagistic language, personal narrative, or a representational picture” and has much greater impact than “nonvivid information” (2004, 120). Though some students used the traditional photographic tools of film and film-developing in photographing and sharing images, when students used digital images, or scanned their prints to create digital images, and then designed a page where they combined image and text, the final results had the potential to become stunning. As shown by selected students examples from the Spring 2005 semester (Chapter Five), students could compose texts of “vivid information” that truly combined the visual and the verbal.

These Spring 2005 texts were borne of work done the previous semester. Both Beatriz’s *My New York* essay of Fort Tryon Park and Will’s *A Day in the Life* digital documentary of commuting and stunt-bike riding, composed during the Fall 2005 semester, enlightened me and challenged my way of thinking between the fall and spring semester of the study. Beatriz’s *My New York* was a graphically sophisticated composition that inspired me to challenge all of my students the following semester to create texts in which they consider the layout of the page as well as write and photograph. Will’s documentary, and subsequent presentation to his classmates, showed me that I could require visual presentations of all my students. In considering my own positive response, as well as responses from Will’s peers, I decided to require a visual presentation in my spring classes. Using the computer, projector, and overhead screen in my classroom, students presented selections of photographs, or like Will, created a short film that related to one of their papers that they had previously composed.

I was inspired by the work of Beatriz and Will, and in the spring semester my students created projects, whether on the page or on the overhead screen, that were an assemblage of personal digital imaging and writing. At the beginning of the Fall 2004 semester, I introduced student photography and picture-taking to my writing classes; by the following semester, I was witnessing the merging of the student-created visual and the verbal in the classroom.

In designing this dissertation study, I wanted to see what happened when students used important photos and picture-taking experiences to inform their writing. In Chapter One, I discussed foundational work in both photography and in composition that connected my classroom practice to the visual and the verbal, but I had not considered that graphic design would play a role in the work that my students would create. One reason for not considering graphic design was my own sensitivity to student economics; I did not want to require students to use technology that they could not access. As I discussed in Chapter Five, I did not want to separate my classes into the “haves” and the “have nots.”

Another reason I had not considered requiring students to submit texts with their own inserted images was based on my training as an English teacher. Scholars in composition note that there is a lack of practical theory, pedagogy, or even consensus in instructing beginning composition students in how to work with visuals and incorporate page design (Hill 2004, Schauf 2001). To effectively understand how words and images exist together, compositionists need to learn how they work and relate on the page (Allen 2002, 2), but there is disagreement on how this could happen since scholarship and research related to elements of visual communication are largely being conducted outside of English, in the fields of art, communication, political science and anthropology (Hill 2004, 128). Hill writes that traditional writing courses pay little attention to page design. He writes how instructors control the design of their students' papers by mandating margins and font (usually Times New Roman, the default font in most word processing programs), and by doing so make design elements a "nonissue" in their courses, implicitly sending their students the message that there is no graphic freedom in the creation of the layout of their work (2004, 122).

However, after reading Beatriz's *My New York* and seeing the potential of what a student could do combining text and image on the page, I asked her permission to use her work as a model the following semester, tapping into my student's "experience, expertise, and interest…to build a new paradigm" (Hill 2004, 128). With her essay on Fort Tryon Park as a template, and using the computer workstation in the classroom, I instructed my spring students in a step-by-step manner in which they could insert their own photographs into their texts and design pages where images and writing are combined. To make sure all Spring 2005 students would have the necessary technology available to create such texts, I purchased a small scanner that I kept in my office or brought to class, which enabled my instruction to bridge any digital divide that existed and helped make the necessary digital technology accessible to all of my students. The end result, based on figures given in Chapter Five, was of the eighty-five *My New York* and *A Day in the Life* essays submitted in the Spring semester, seventy-nine of them (92.9%) had the students' own photography and text successful combined as layout on the page.

Space and Place in the Writing Classroom

I began this chapter with a discussion of Larry's digital outline (figure 6.1). In using digital technology to record and organize his experiences, Larry also exemplified another important factor that occurred during "The Picturing Year" when students ventured away from the desk and began composing outside the traditional site of composition: their participation in picture-taking experiences can inspire vital personal work. In most scenes of writing, students compose in traditional places of textual production, behind computer screens or at desks with paper and pen. But as illustrated in chapters Four and Five, my students left traditional sites of composition behind to compose photographically in places and spaces that had meaning for them, and the physical act of not just *being* in these spaces and places but *lingering* and *photographing* impacted their textual composing process. As I have written, students brought their cameras with them into their chosen surroundings, and they photographed before composing any written text. Their resulting photographs and picture-taking experiences then inspired the resulting essays where visits to physical spaces and places fueled narratives of identity and critical awareness.

In Chapter Four I wrote of a class discussion involving picture-taking experiences for *My New York*. Kyle had said, "When I was taking pictures of my block and the park, I was getting flashbacks of all the times I used to play outside and act up." I can imagine

Kyle on his block and in the park with camera in hand, looking around with a specific purpose: to photograph. And by photographing he is looking more critically at the block and park where he had spent so much time growing up. There is magic in this sense of composition, the magic of ideas coming to a student with camera in hand. He is not trying to write; that will come later. Now, in the picture-taking present, he is standing outside on his familiar street in his familiar neighborhood. He is stopping, pausing, photographing, and *composing* as memories of the past flash back at him. In his *My New York* paper, discussed in Chapter Four, Kyle wrote of many past experiences on his block of 197th Street and University Avenue: in the warm weather playing manhunt, then later in the evening sitting outside and playing dominoes; in the colder weather sledding on broken-down cardboard boxes remade as sleds in the park next to his block; as an older teen talking with the older men about sports and girls; and as a college freshman now considered one of the "older men" by the youngsters of the neighborhood. "The pictures aren't just some kind of image; they provide me with a connection between myself and my environment," Kyle writes in the final paragraph of his *My New York* essay. His photographs are meaningful because the places depicted have meaning to him. For Kyle, and for others, the time spent *being* in the space or place during the picture-taking aspect of the assignment was vital for the success of the essay.

In its essence, picture-taking forces us to confront the reality around us, not to just blindly pass through. Consciousness and purpose occur in the act of pausing, looking, and bringing the camera up to our eye to photograph.

Susan Sontag interprets picture taking in two very different ways, "either as a lucid and precise act of knowing, of conscious intelligence," or as being a "preintellectual, intuitive mode of encounter” (1989, 116). The photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson’s oft-referred to phrase “decisive moment” is the simultaneous moment when all aspects of composition come together and the photographer captures the moment (1952). For my students, in physically pausing and looking, necessary for Cartier-Bresson’s decisive picture-taking moment, I imagine trace memories being discovered in the arc of time necessary for pictorial composing.

“Being there,” the students’ physical presence on the streets of their neighborhoods and communities, in the places and spaces that they had chosen, has been a vital component in this work. The concept of space has also been an important construct. Nedra Reynolds writes, “As we try to prepare our students for work and life that are saturated by both images and technology . . . we need to look both to the screen and to the street for an understanding of how space matters” (2004, 69). Reynolds goes on to say that “learning to see takes place at street level, through walking. While other ways of moving through the world might also teach us to see, only walking embraces so many senses and has the ‘hands on’ (or feet first) materiality of place” (2004, 69).

In their *My New York* projects, most students chose to photograph outside the confines of the interior spaces and venture into their neighborhoods and communities. Students submitted ninety essays in response to *My New York*, forty-eight in the fall semester and forty-two in the spring. For these students, twenty-three (25.6%) chose to photograph in their homes, focusing on kitchens, bedrooms, dens, living rooms, or balconies. But sixty-seven of the ninety essays (74.4%) brought the photographer/author out of the home and into the neighborhood and beyond. Besides the sidewalks, parks, sports fields, old schools, old neighborhoods, and playgrounds, students photographed and wrote about video stores, pastry shops, clothing stores, tourist attractions, churches, beaches, shopping malls, housing projects, barbershops, subways, firehouses, highways, and movie theaters. Even if they selected interior locations, they were still composing away from traditional composing sites and into places and spaces that had chosen.

In *A Day in the Life* students considered homes much more, usually as rhetorical devices; homes were where their days started. Of the eighty-seven *A Day in the Life* papers that were submitted during “The Picturing Year,” thirty-nine of them (44.8%) focused on the home at some point, though for most it was a place to begin before more important events happened. Thirteen of these essays were of weekdays; students photographed and wrote of their day from pillow to crowded subway to classroom. Other students wrote of weekend days; in these essays, home was where the student started before a day of shopping, cleaning, cooking, grooming, or watching football. Some wrote of experiences that were bracketed by leaving from, and returning to, home. Over half the students (55.1%) did not focus on the home at all in their *A Day in the Life* papers; they photographed and wrote of working, babysitting, socializing outside the home, bowling, going to barbershops/hair salons/tanning salons, snooker clubs, and art galleries, riding trains and subways, working out in gyms, walking dogs, riding bikes, driving, taking driving lessons, spending time in the hospital, hanging out at the school cafeteria or hallway lounge, or shopping. But whether or not they chose to include the home, most developed a critical/reflective voice throughout the paper in response to the visiting and picture-taking experiences of being in spaces where their events, experiences, and rituals took place.

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I find the portrait of Nabokov composing at his desk (figure 1.1) intriguing, but as I have pointed out, the inspiration for most of my students' papers did not take place in traditional scenes of writing. Whether the students were photographing an alarm clock by the bed, a cluttered kitchen, a busy sidewalk or a train pulling into a station, they were stopping, seeing, experiencing, and pictorially composing in places of their own choosing that were important to them. Linda Brodkey asks us to reconsider the scene of writing. She writes of the vision of "the solitary writer alone in a cold garret working into the small hours of the morning by the thin light of a candle," which she recognizes as a "romantic representation of the production of canonical literature, music, painting, sculpture," as outdated (1996, 59). Brodkey's argument is that the "success of curriculum reform movements initiated in the field of composition will depend on disrupting the scene of writing through acts of the imagination that revise the scene to accommodate our students and ourselves – as writers and as readers" (1996, 60). I reflect on the work my students did in response to *My New York* and *A Day in the Life* and see complex and variegated sites of successful composing, far removed from conventional sites of authorship.

If the traditional compositional space of any college student is the environment of the college or the home desk, then my students have successfully worked in what Jonathan Mauk considers the academic third space. He defines the meaning of this space in arguing that "students need to conceive the space outside of the campus, outside of the classroom, as academic" (2003, 380). He continues, "Academic space must extend itself, not merely outward, but in all the directions of being which constitute the lives of students" (2003, 380). He brings up theorist Edward Soja and his ideas of a "third space" where “things and thought are on equal terms - always working and reworking the relationship between consciousness and space” (2003, 378). He goes on to say, “Academic third space is born of the juncture between academic space and student ontology, the region where academic space is dispersed throughout students’ daily lives, a dimension emergent from the generative collision of academic, domestic, and work spatialities” (2003, 380).

Mauk discusses an assignment where students interview people in the outside world (or students in other classes) as a purposeful project to take students outside the space of their classroom, but he only hints at the practical potential of changing the geography for composition. He quickly jumps from writing situations to a call to action for colleges to better serve their students’ needs, something important, but his conclusion is not forceful. All educators want their colleges to continue to find ways to better serve their students’ needs. However, Mauk raises important ideas that I connect with my pedagogy: we must work in examining the potential of the academic third space as a place for composition for our urban commuting students.

Mauk discusses how academia has a marginal place in the lives of the students of his college (especially composition students). They all wish to be elsewhere.

> They were already being pulled away from academia, from the composition class, before they even entered the door. The *other* places, which drew students away from college, the would-be intellectual center of their lives, had already crystallized their identities as mothers, fathers, laborers, managers, business owners, skater punks, farmers, and fulltime slackers – all of which seemed contrary to traditional student subjectivity (2003, 372-373).

Mauk asks the question, “What happens to writing pedagogy, and the practices of learning to write, in the absence of traditional university geography?” (2003, 369). It is this “absence,” and in its place a vital “presence” of places and spaces not dictated or even known by the instructor, that has intrigued me during “The Picturing Year.” Students sat in my class for two and a half hours a week. Even though the school offers a cafeteria, a gym, and some lounges in its three Manhattan buildings, for these students the city and their own responsibilities and interests beckoned as soon as their classes were over. It was *outside* the space of the college, in the presence of their own homes, neighborhoods, and communities, that these students photographed their worlds, which then inspired writing about their worlds. It was in these other places, first through picture-taking and then through writing, that these urban, commuting students crafted work that defined who they were. The students chose the places and spaces that mattered; by picture-taking and writing about their presence in their world, their own identities became vital in our classroom.

In the Middle

The academic 2004/2005 year has ended, but in the writing of this dissertation those fall and spring semesters continue to exist. Four large file boxes have been filled with pages of notes and copies of student work, and the notes and work have been read, reread, organized, and reorganized as the dissertation has been slowly crafted into this document. My pedagogy, the students’ work, and my responses to their work have been living with me, through me, and in me; I have been breathing this in, breathing this out. The two semesters had a calendar, there was a beginning point and an ending. However, for the past two years I have continued to reflect on the work that took place. I have learned a great deal from the dissertation study about my own teaching strategies, about the potential for students to create important texts and about the possibilities that exist when students use their own photographs and design their own texts in writing courses. I am at the conclusion of the dissertation, but I still see myself in the middle because "no writing ever says the last word" (Perl 1994, 78). Clandinin and Connelly write, "We begin with telling our researcher stories of experience. Other beginnings, other stories, were possible. We began in the midst. We end in the midst" (2000, 187). It is here in these final concluding pages that I find myself not at the end, but very much in the midst, in the thick of things.

Deleuze and Guattari write about the "rhizome", a term they borrow from biology and relate to a system without beginning or end, "always in the middle, between things" (1987, 25). They state:

> The middle is by no means an average: on the contrary it is where things pick up speed. *Between* things does not designate a localizable relation going from one thing to the other and back again, but a perpendicular direction, a transversal movement that sweeps one *and* the other away, a stream without beginning or end that undermines its banks and picks up speed in the middle (25).

Yes, the middle. The calendar of a study ends, but the middle of it is where the work breathes the strongest, the middle is where I desire my work to remain; *it is where things pick up speed*. In the middle is where I find myself. I am crafting a conclusion to this dissertation, but the conclusion has an element of artifice because the work continues; it is recursive. The 2004/2005 academic year begets the 2005/2006 academic year, then the 2006/2007, and so on. I continue to give assignments asking students to integrate photography and picture-taking experiences with their writing. I do not distribute disposable cameras to students any longer; as I have discussed, the telephone, re-imagined as the *cell*phone, re-imagined again as the *cell*phone *camera*, is what has currency in my writing classrooms now. As I hear the compositional stories of my 2005/2006 and 2006/2007 students going outside to photograph with their cellphone cameras, then sending the snapshots to their email accounts to use in their classwork, I don't just sense but *live* the point that our composition students must include the visual "not as not as attendant to the verbal but as complex communication intricately related to the world around them" (D. George 2002, 32). My students' own visuals continue to be an integral part of their composing processes in my classes and my own pedagogy of combining student photography with student writing continues to grow.

In "The Picturing Year," photography and picture-taking experiences were tools students used to critically understand and share their own sense of identity in a commuter college setting. Through photography, picture-taking, and publication/presentation in the classroom, their work became vital. Brodkey writes that, "The quality of my teaching is ultimately in the writing students do. If any of them write to be read, after years of being graded but not necessarily read, then I consider myself to have done well by that class" (ix). Looking back on the year's worth of student work, I have read essays that were important for students to have written and interesting to other readers. During the 2004/2005 academic year, these students' compositions, fueled by their own photography and picture-taking experiences, became important visual/verbal testaments to who they were and are. As Anthony had written at the end of the spring semester, "now I have more than just graded essays to remind me of my first your in college, but tangible expressions of myself." The work that occurred in my classes became vital for my students and became vital to me. To allow our students to engage in photography, picture-taking, and graphic design in our composition courses is to allow them to grow as twenty-first-century communicators.

If our writing students seem uninspired, we as instructors need to help them discover what is important to them. Inspiration comes not from regurgitating stale assignments from textbooks, but in allowing our students to tap into their interests and desires and letting them explore in whatever nascent form they choose. We cannot afford to simply bemoan our students as "uninvolved, uninterested, and unmotivated" (Mauk 2003, 371); we need to recognize the complexity of their lives and the rich personal history that each student brings into the classroom. We need to rethink the nature of the work we are asking our students to create in our twenty-first-century classrooms. And, importantly, we as compositionists, need to celebrate our students. We need to celebrate our students because the work that they do in our classrooms is the work that we do as compositionists. We need to celebrate our students by giving them opportunities to explore and search out their interests. We need to celebrate our students by giving them the opportunities to be listened to and read by others and to be published in the classroom.

By celebrating our students we celebrate ourselves. When their work is vital, our work is vital. We learn from each other. We become responsive and supportive to each other. We become a community.

The students that I taught during “The Picturing Year” all commuted to the same urban campus, but they entered the classroom representing completely different worlds geographically, financially, racially, and culturally. The work that they did both in and out of the classroom was a celebration of their identity in images and words. As a teacher, and as a researcher, I witnessed photography and picture-taking becoming important meaning-making tools in the writing classroom; I witnessed personal photography helping in the building of a community; I witnessed a classroom community flourishing when students continually shared their work with each other; I witnessed students learning about design and layout by combining their own pictures with their own texts. And, importantly, I realized that students can compose vital texts if we give them the opportunity to do so, and if we respect that their worlds and outside identities truly matter in our classrooms.

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