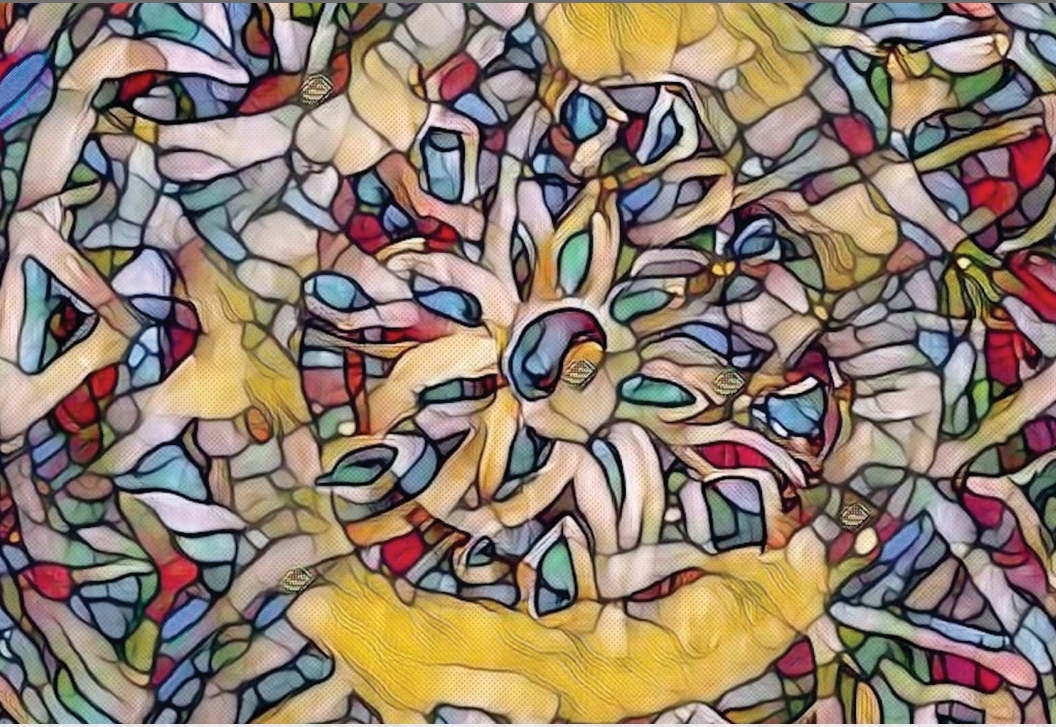


Recollections from Our Common Places

4C21–23 DOCUMENTARIAN TALES



Edited by
Bump Halbritter, Julie Lindquist, and Bree Straayer

SWR
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RECOLLECTIONS FROM OUR COMMON PLACES

4C21-23 DOCUMENTARIAN
TALES

Edited by Bump Halbritter, Julie
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Michigan State University



Conference on College
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Introduction

Bump Halbritter, Julie Lindquist, and Bree Straayer

THE DOCUMENTARIAN PROJECT: FROM OPPORTUNITY TO CRISIS TO OPPORTUNITY

When we began the Documentarian project in 2020, we started with a question: What *is* a Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) conference experience—specifically, to those members of our community for whom it is designed? Now, five years later, and after working with Documentarians and their stories, we’re still learning the answer—or rather, answers—to that question. And, perhaps more importantly, we’re discovering further questions very much worth pursuing—about our organization, our profession, and our working lives.

The Tales you’ll encounter in this book will give you access to diverse perspectives not only on how the CCCC conference might be experienced, but also on what it’s like to be a participant (in a given professional role) in our field. In their afterwords to this collection, two leaders of the organization, speaking from their roles as CCCC Program Chairs, reflect on what they’ve learned from the range of conference experiences—some virtual, and some in-person—rendered in these Tales. 2023 Program Chair Frankie Condon is provoked, and therefore provokes us, to (re)consider not only the function of our conference, but also our conduct as professionals, asking, “Could we be and do something else, something quite different altogether? Could we care differently and more for one another? Could we create and learn to sustain an organization and a conference grounded in kindness?” Not unrelatedly, 2024 Program Chair Jen Sano-Franchini invites us to consider what the Tales have to teach us from the perspective of those who think (as she does) about user experience, indicating that she found herself “reading these tales as user experience (UX) narratives that speak to the form, structure, and feelings associated with large academic conferences, and CCCC in particular, as well as with academia as an industry and line of work.” Taken together, these reflections on the Documentarian Tales included here invite us to consider, in particular, who the conference serves, what forms this service can take, and how CCCC can best accomplish them. They also call us to reflect, by way of the collected Tales, the historical moment we’re

in—and our responsibilities to it—with respect to our field of practice and higher education more generally.

At its heart, the Documentarian project—a bespoke initiative for professionals in writing studies of the Conference on College Composition and Communication—is a method for helping its participants to learn from their experiences and to teach the rest of us. It invites Documentarians to name and attribute meaning to their experiences by eliciting the materials for stories that *might* be told—that is, by inviting them to name their expectations prior to an experience, and then by directing their attention during that experience via a set of prompts that ask them to document what they have observed or experienced. It supplies participants with a means for archiving the products of their documentation so that they might become available and productive for later reflection.

Now (2024) in its fifth year, the Documentarian role was created in 2019 as a new option for participation for attendees at the 2020 CCCC Convention in Milwaukee (and we know how the story of CCCC in Milwaukee ended). But the Documentarian project began, really, as an idea some ten years prior to its planned launch in March of 2020. Its immediate inspiration was the First-Year Writing Curriculum (developed by Bump and Julie, and created in its initial form by Nancy DeJoy, all of whom served as WPAs) at Michigan State University. That curriculum asks students to narrate experiences (of learning, of cultural participation, of coming to understand the literacies of their chosen or projected disciplines and/or professions), and to document, archive, and reflect on their learning as writers. The storytelling orientation of that curriculum, along with the writing experience at its center, the “Experiential Learning Documentary” (see Halbritter and Lindquist, “Witness Learning”) drew inspiration from a prior research project Bump and Julie had designed and undertaken, the Literacy-Corps Michigan Project, which sought to enlist diverse research participants in the project of co-constructing experiences relevant to their educational histories and literacies via facilitated and documented stories of past, present, and future selves (see Halbritter and Lindquist, “Time, Lives, and Videotape”).

When Julie became Program Chair for the Conference on College Composition and Communication in 2019, she carried this idea of a reflective practice grounded in documented experiences into her conference planning, and, with her collaborators Bump Halbritter

and then-graduate assistant and co-planner Bree Straayer, created and planned a new program role for the 2020 Convention: CCCC Documentarian, a non-speaking (and non-space-dependent) role that has persisted at the conference in years since. Julie, Bump, and Bree imagined that the role could be a form of conference participation that would allow diverse conference-goers not only to learn from their conference experiences and to find points of access into a professional community, but also to help conference organizers (and those working within the field of writing studies) to learn from the stories of those diverse experiences.

The written products of those who chose to participate in the Documentarian role—"Documentarian Tales"—would be collected and published in a living digital archive via the MSU Cube. A subset of the narratives (chosen for their potential to surface less-visible, and represent a range of, experiences) submitted by CCCC 2020 Documentarians would appear in an edited (print, open-access) collection published by NCTE/SWR, originally to be named *Recollections from Our Common Place*. As we wrote in the introduction to the eventual collection *Recollections from an Uncommon Time: 4C20 Documentarian Tales*, our goal all along with the Documentarians project has been to surface a story of our field of practice via the stories of individuals working within it. Originally, when we conceived the project entitled *Recollections from a Common Place*, the experience of the conference itself was the means for this larger view of who we are as a community of professional practitioners, and how we do our work. (2)

When the 2020 Convention in Milwaukee was canceled just weeks prior to the event in deference to declaration by the World Health Organization on March 11, 2020, that COVID-19 was, indeed, a global pandemic, we found ourselves first lamenting, and then reinventing, the idea for the CCCC Documentarian opportunity and planned collection of Tales. As we wrote in the introduction to the reconceived and renamed 2020 collection,

When the 2020 conference was canceled, one of the things we felt as a loss was the new Documentarian piece. How would we document an experience that ... wasn't? When the three of us (Julie, Bree, and Bump) met for our planning meeting immediately following the decision to cancel CCCC 2020, we began commiserating about the loss of the Documentarian

opportunity: [B]ut we quickly realized that the project did not *have* to be lost—that it could be just as relevant, in some of the same ways, but also, perhaps, in different ones, in this time of COVID-19 and the profound, wide-scale disruptions to our everyday working lives. (3)

We didn't know what the reinvented Documentarian project would produce, but we predicted that these Tales of professional (and everyday) life under lockdown would have things to teach us about the commonplaces of our profession. It produced exactly that result, and it even opened a window into the underlife (and also, perhaps, the unconscious) of the field of writing studies.

What we didn't predict in 2020 was that the Documentarian practice, as it was taken up by CCCC Documentarians writing alone, and yet together, during the early days of COVID-19 lockdown, would become a kind of provisional community constituted by the common experience of Documentarianing during the days of what would have been the 2020 conference. As we learned, there can be a felt connection and sense of common purpose in the experience of writing alone, together.

Even as catastrophic damage to public health, along with social unrest motivated by the irrefutable inequalities revealed by the pandemic, exploded around the globe (See Table 1 of the "Introduction" to the 2020 Documentarian Tales collection, 11–13), Tales in the 2020 collection describe a world around us that had become infinitely smaller, seemingly overnight. We went into lockdown. We did far more than shelter in place: we worked there; we taught our classes there; we attended our meetings there; we learned how to cut our own hair (or not) there; we lived there; we adapted (or not) there; we witnessed the events of the world around us by way of our screens there; we sheltered alone or with our immediate family members and/or partners; we sanitized our groceries there; we found new ways to connect with those from whom we had become isolated there. No matter the size of the spaces we called home, they all became smaller—or rather, they all felt smaller because we now stuffed each and every aspect of our lives into those spaces.

And then, little by little, things began to change. First came the assurances that COVID-19 was an airborne virus, so we kept wearing our masks, but we stopped sanitizing every surface with which we

came into contact. Then came the vaccines, and slowly we set about returning to a life among others. Then came year two—a year of reintegration filled with new and often hotly contested expectations and protocols for how we could safely (if not always, or even often, peacefully) be together. The 2021 CCCC Convention was being planned for Spokane: the call for proposals had been published, and submissions had been reviewed, and invitations to claim a place on the 2021 Convention Program had been sent and received. In late fall of 2020, however, the spread of COVID-19 continued to menace communities around the globe. As it had become clear that the threat of COVID-19 had persisted, CCCC Program Chair Holly Hassel and the CCCC leadership team were again faced with a decision: to go ahead with the planned in-person Convention, or to reinvent it as the (first-ever) virtual conference experience. The program, which had already been planned, had to be reduced, and participants notified: some of those who had been accepted for the 2021 program learned that, given the limitations of the online platform, they could not—after all—be accommodated. And, yet, to accommodate anyone at all, CCCC 2021 convened virtually.

On the national front, year three saw us now anticipating and repeating actions that had been reactions in the prior year. We were now in season three of *M*A*S*H*: we knew the characters, we anticipated the plotlines; we expected to hear a laugh track; we understood the presence of a fully functioning still in the tent of the lead surgeons; we no longer batted an eye at Klinger's sartorial selections; we had come to expect an operating room with a mud floor. *Triage* had become *de rigueur*.

And we were growing increasingly weary of it all. Many of us felt that the boundaries between our professional and personal lives that had been obliterated by the pandemic remained obliterated even as the pandemic had loosened its deadly grip on us. We were, after all, contracting and surviving COVID-19. We now lived with COVID-19 as a fact *of* life, not so much as a threat *to* life. And yet, we were still Zooming, and Hi-Flexing, and working remotely. As had been the case in 2021, the 2022 Convention, originally planned to take place in Chicago, had to be redesigned as an online experience. This time, however, CCCC leadership were aware in an earlier moment that the conference would be a virtual one: CCCC 2022 was the first-ever CCCC Convention that was realized as a fully virtual conference,

and participants expected, and were prepared, to participate in that modality. As presenters and attendees in 2022, we were “at the conference” as we were teaching our classes and attending our meetings and carrying out each and every one of our usual professional and personal tasks. We didn’t go away to a conference; we squeezed a conference into our workweek.

By 2023, the immediate threat of COVID began to abate as an effect of widespread vaccination. CCCC leadership planned a return to in-person conferencing, and the Convention was to be held at the original site of the 2022 event, in Chicago. Attendees tentatively ventured out into conference spaces, albeit wearing masks and seeking shelter in hotel rooms. The Convention was back, in a way that felt both celebratory, on one hand, and sadder and wiser, on the other.

THE DOCUMENTARIAN PROCESS: FROM DAILY SURVEYS TO DOCUMENTARIAN TALES

Whether Documentarians were working to document and reflect on their experiences at home (as was the case for the 2020 collection), participating in a virtual conference, or attending an in-person conference, they did so by way of a daily set of prompts, delivered to them via email in the form of Google surveys (see Fig. I.1). These prompts asked Documentarians to “preflect” (to prepare to reflect) on their plans and expectations prior to the experience, to record their surroundings and review their plans first thing in the morning, reflect on these plans and report on their experience in an evening, and then, in the week following the conference, to return to their archived survey responses to reflect on the experience from a later point of view, and to look across their writings via their responses to the prelective and twice-daily surveys to identify themes and patterns.

In so doing, Documentarians were recording expectations, plans, and strategies; plans followed and reinvented; emergent opportunities; surprises and serendipitous moments; scenic details; forms of access (moments and places of inclusion/exclusion); affective responses to experiences and emotional states—all in preparation for reflection and sense-making in a later moment.

To facilitate the process of reflecting on documented experiences, Bump, Julie, and Bree collected keywords, shared excerpts from survey responses, and reflected emerging themes back to the Documentarians in the form of lists and visual representations (see Fig. I.2).

Documentarian Morning Daily Survey

Dear Documentarians:

In the following survey, you'll be asked to respond to some questions asking you to "reflect" on your day.

These questions are intended to serve YOU in your own reflective process (that is, to help you articulate your plans and expectations for the day) and to help you build an archive for later reference.

We thank you, again, for your contributions as a CCCC 2024 Documentarian!

CCCC 2024 Documentarian Team

documentarianscccc@gmail.com [Switch account](#)

🔒 Not shared

Describe the scene around you right now. Where are you now, as you complete this survey? What do you see and hear around you? What other sensory inputs are there?

Your answer

How are you feeling now, as you look forward to your day? Excited? Apprehensive? Hopeful? Anxious? Uncertain?

Your answer

What do you hope will happen today? What are you looking forward to doing? What do you hope to avoid?

Your answer

Figure I.1. Excerpt from morning daily survey.



Figure I.2. Word clouds from 2021, 2022, and 2023 Tales.

Finally, Julie, Bump, and Bree created a Call for Papers that identified some possible narrative directions for Documentarian Tales, and supplied a kind of heuristic designed to help Documentarians move from the narrative data of survey responses to, well, a story. Even so, *how* the authors moved from survey responses to story—that is, how they enlisted their narrative data from surveys as a “rough draft” of a story, and to what extent the authors built their stories around texts generated via surveys in an earlier moment, varied considerably from Tale to Tale. In our “Introduction” to the 2020 collection, we wrote:

We find, in reading these collected Documentarian Tales (ELDs), that there is a diverse range of ways acts of documentation show up in the finished narratives: some make specific reference to survey texts—jottings of the moment—and some are more mediated, operating at a greater remove from the original acts of documentation that informed them. We suspect that, were the authors collected here to return to the writing produced by the

original surveys *now*, rather different stories would emerge from reflections on those same survey responses. (20)

This remains true for the current collection, *Recollections from Our Common Places*. Some Tales more directly reference daily survey responses; others seem to position these archived pieces further behind what emerges as the crafted Tale. That is to say, some Documentarians treated the survey responses as data not only to be collected and interpreted, but also directly referenced them in their resulting Tales, while others used them primarily as meaning-making heuristics that worked “behind the scenes” of the finished Tales themselves.

THE WIDER LANDSCAPE: PRECARIETY AND BELONGING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

What we learn from the Tales in the 2021–2023 Documentarians collection can only be considered in the context of trends and disruptions in the conduct of higher education during those years. In the 2020 Introduction to *Recollections from an Uncommon Time*, we wrote:

Since we put out the call, and since the time during which 4C20 was scheduled to happen, much has happened—and continues to happen—in the world. When we put out the revised CFP in early spring 2020, the over-determining national event was the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. By the beginning of summer 2020, we were witnessing a historic shift in the national conversation about race relations. (10)

And in fact, many of the 2020 authors addressed those events—the national and global predicament of the pandemic, and the increasingly urgent need for racial redress following the murder of George Floyd. These Tales, situated as they are in the bounded time and place of a professional convention, focus on other things—but even as they are about conference experiences in particular, they are also about external forces very much present in the wider context of higher education.

How could it be otherwise?

If these Tales have taught us anything about reflection, it is that reflections are, each and all, about people—persons—who are coming to know a specific set of events by way of all of the other events of their lives. The authors of these Tales are learning on the fringe of what they know: of what they have experienced prior to the events under consideration, of what they experienced during the events, of what they

have experienced and what has occurred to them since the events, and of what they expect may yet follow from these events. In other words, conferences, such as CCCC, don't just happen; they happen with, for, and by way of persons who participate in them for a host of reasons that are situated within the larger contexts of their professional and personal lives.

How could it be otherwise?

QUESTIONING WHERE AND HOW WE BELONG

An overdetermining professional context of these three conference years (2021–23) was virtual participation: its effects, affordances, and liabilities. And while 2023 was *not* held virtually, Chicago's conference stood very much in contrast to the preceding two virtual conferences and the canceled 2020 conference. It had been four years since there had been an in-person conference. That absence emerges as the most present determiner for 2021–23. In each of these sets of Tales, authors consider where they *are*—physically and metaphysically. These Tales duck, weave, dance with, and face head on the realities of the terms of conference participation. In 2021 and 2022, these authors span space and time to commune with others while sitting in their kitchens and home offices and on-campus workspaces. They lament the loss of physical movement, the novelty of new places, and encountering familiar, three-dimensional faces and the rest of their corporeal counterparts. The 2023 Tales celebrate the return of these losses from 2020, 2021, and 2022 even as they regret the new losses: e.g., no longer being able to, instantly, pop in and out of virtual presentation rooms and being able to attend prerecorded sessions at their leisure. The 2023 Documentarians reveled in convening in Chicago even as they carved out alone time to recover from sensory overload.

In none of these three years did authors express feeling settled—fully present in the spaces where they found themselves. How could they? How could we—any of us? These years were infused with participatory precarity: Where did we need to be? What were the terms of our participation? How could we be there on *those* terms? What/where else did we need to be prior, following, simultaneously? Who else needed us? How on earth could we do any of it, let alone all of it?

Consequently, the Tales from 2021–23 begin to cluster around a theme of belonging—of questioning where and how each author could identify as being fully present—fully realized within so much professional

and personal simultaneity. Where, in all of the everything, was the conference? Where, in all of the everything, *wasn't* the conference?

PRECARITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION: SYSTEMIC IMPOSTER SYNDROME

A sense of belonging seems to be a perfect subject for personal reflection. After all, a sense of belonging is a *sense*, something that is the purview of an individual. Who is to say if it is right or wrong? The only person to say anything about it, in fact, is the person whose sense of belonging is in question: i.e., the person saying something about it.

And yet, the question remains, why are so many people sharing concerns about belonging? How can such a thing be “common”? These authors certainly have a few things in common: they each volunteered to serve as Documentarians; they each had completed or were in the process of completing graduate degrees at the times of their reflective writings; and they each had some experience with seeking employment in higher education. The authors of these Documentarian Tales brought all of those experiences with them to the conferences they attended. They were not merely reflecting on their conference experiences, but also on *their* experiences of the conferences they attended: not only what happened, but also what motivated them to go, how their attendance fit into their larger professional and personal goals, how they balanced their other personal and professional duties, how they justified this particular use of their time and attention within the larger contexts of their lives, and how confident they were in the validity of the decisions they were making and the goals that were motivating those decisions.

What we have noticed in our reading of these Tales from 2021–23 is that conference participation was not the *only* sense of precarity shaping the Documentarians’ reflections. Another overdetermining professional context of these three conference years was precarity within the context of higher education itself. From responses to COVID-19 to dwindling enrollments (see, for example, National Student Clearinghouse; Marcus; Binkley; Blake; Conley; Lohman and Wilkinson) to faculty and staff “burnout” and turnover (see, for example, Boyd; “Why Do Faculty Leave or Stay?”; Kyaw; Fried; Zahneis; Bichsel et al.) to dwindling availability of tenure-line jobs (see, for example, Stein; Berlinerblau) to marked increases in mental health concerns among ... seemingly everyone—students, staff, faculty (see, for example,

“Higher Education Is Struggling”; Mininsohn) to the precarious state of higher education in general (see, for example, Mallach; “Higher Education Is Struggling”; Brink; Rosenberg), the working conditions that were shaping both the conference experiences of Documentarians and their reflections about those conference experiences in 2021–23 were anything but stable.

How could it be otherwise?

Academics are often quick to name what seems to be a condition common among academics: imposter syndrome. It’s so common, in each of our own experiences, that we each have had our mentors discuss and attempt to console our feelings of self-doubt as imposter syndrome, the inevitable by-product of seeking, earning, and professionally exercising a terminal degree (PhD or MFA). “Ah, that’s just imposter syndrome. We all experience that.” We, ourselves, have found ourselves saying the same to students and faculty we have mentored. Imposter syndrome, in such uses, seems to serve as a catch-all for feelings of being underprepared and unaccomplished in spite of ample evidence to the contrary. As such, it seems, also, to suggest that imposter syndrome is a personal affectation to address.

The National Institutes of Health’s National Library of Medicine (NIHNLM) describes imposter syndrome as “a behavioral health phenomenon described as self-doubt of intellect, skills, or accomplishments among high-achieving individuals. These individuals cannot internalize their success and subsequently experience pervasive feelings of self-doubt, anxiety, depression, and/or apprehension of being exposed as a fraud in their work, despite verifiable and objective evidence of their successfulness” (Huecker et al.). According to the NIHNLML, anxiety, depression, burnout, and low self-esteem are among the symptoms commonly associated with imposter syndrome.

Sound familiar?

These same symptoms are among those discussed in literature about staff and faculty resignations and turnover—especially faculty and staff “burnout.” It’s not hard to see how (1) changing employment opportunities for those graduating with terminal degrees and (2) changing job expectations for veteran professionals in higher education due to faculty and staff attrition can result in feelings of burnout and a compromised sense of belonging. And those feelings are surfacing as being consequential. According to the *CUPA-HR 2023 Higher Education Employee Retention Survey*:

Job satisfaction/well-being is the strongest predictor of retention by far. Although employees are most likely to *say* they're looking for other opportunities to receive a pay increase, it turns out that receiving recognition for one's contributions, *being valued by others at work, and having a sense of belonging are far more important than fair pay in predicting whether employees will look for other job opportunities.* (Bichsel et al., emphasis added)

What we see emerging across these Documentarian Tales is a picture of a kind of systemic imposter syndrome: a cocktail of environmental conditions within the profession that make it not unlikely that individuals within the system will find themselves feeling symptoms of imposter syndrome—that they will long for and search for a sense of belonging in a professional scene where evidence of success and accomplishment (e.g., earning a terminal degree at a research institution and earning a faculty position in an increasingly competitive job market) is increasingly distributed among evidence to the contrary (e.g., the loss of tenure-line, research positions, and increased duties at work due to unmitigated attrition within the workforce).

Given the emerging picture of the precarities of higher education, how could it be otherwise?

TALES OF CCCC 2021–2023: SHIFTS IN MODALITIES OF ATTENDANCE, TERMS OF BELONGING

With each year unfolding distinct contexts and modalities of attendance, we decided to place the tales in chronological order as the societal shifts played a role not only in the conference experience but also in writers' personal and work lives. Whereas the 2020 tales felt more global and existential, this collection of tales has a different affective valence. As the effects of COVID lingered on into years, at times, the Tales carry an air of weariness. As the writers wrestle with precarity, their stories emerge as “nervous” artifacts of that experience.

The collection of Tales from 2020–2023 represents an arc of modalities of attendance and experiences from shelter in place and a canceled conference to two years of online conferencing to 2023's return to in-person conferencing in Chicago. Each year brought new experiences as the modalities of attendance and dynamics changed. In 2021 and 2022, writers talk about dynamics of attending an online conference while also navigating being physically set in their home spaces with all the domestic and professional attending needs still present. With the

in-person conference in 2023, the Tales describe not only moments of returning but also the first-time experiences of being face to face in a collective field gathering.

We saw many themes, both distinctive and common, across the Tales. Some of the shared themes that emerged as the years progressed discussed modalities of attendance, accessibility, cultural identity, professional identity, and belonging. Each Tale, in one way or another, addressed complexities in experiences of modality, and how the online or in-person experience shifted their expectations or surprised them. With modality shifts, the idea of accessibility takes on interesting dimensions, with some writers finding the online experience more suited to their lives and the return to in-person bringing new access dynamics in the wake of COVID-19. Writers discuss the ways their cultural and professional identities overdetermine their experience, with some wrestling with feelings of precarity as graduate students or new faculty.

Perhaps, in and across all the themes, one concept that emerges in various forms again and again is the idea of belonging—as we have identified above. The writers of these Tales wonder if and how they belong in the field. They look for indicators that they are a part of a whole within conference moments. With the conference’s and field’s attention to inclusion, these narratives become acutely vital to pay attention to and learn from. How does—how *should*—the field address crises of belonging? What does it mean not just to be included but also to *belong*—to *feel* a sense of belonging—within a group of people, an organization, a whole?

As you read through these Tales, you will find that the shifts in modalities of attendance bring new discussions, but also the Tales across years surface shared themes across the years. You can read them in the order they appear in the book, or you can sample the Tales thematically throughout the years. Below, we offer brief descriptions of each Tale to help you further navigate through the book. We do so with hope that a general sense of the landscape of the collection will help you to direct the path of your reading accordingly.

THE 2021–2023 TALES

2021

In “Learning Stewardship,” **Adrienne Jankens** reflects on not only the online conference experience but also the overall state of life

and education as people grow weary of the longevity of COVID-19 dynamics. She notes:

[I]n the spring of 2021, my best-laid plans for preserving time for myself, my scholarship, and my family, were noticeably falling apart. Something about a shift from the 2020 lockdown state (all family, all the time) to a return to the regular pace of academic life (but at home) highlighted where there were cracks in my careful curation of distributed time, talent, and treasures. I could sense where sand was falling through the hourglass faster than I expected, where the supports I thought I had in place were weakening, and where I did not have my attention always on where it was most needed.

Jankens's Tale reveals ways the pandemic causes us to question our curated lives and subsequently to reimagine and reconfigure the priorities in that curation between work and family life.

In "Toward an Academic Made Whole: Navigating the Work-Life Balance in Times of Crisis," **Joel Bergholtz** addresses the difficulties of balancing personal commitments as a graduate student during the virtual conference. He writes:

In this digitally mediated academy, it is easier to take on more tasks while balancing academic commitments—to say "yes" when my partner invites me to her family reunion. Before the pandemic, I wouldn't have had to make this decision. I would have been in a different city, trying new foods covered by a travel grant (thanks, University!), filling out my *C's the Day* booklet, attending a wide variety of presentations, and fanboying my favorite scholars.

At the same time, using his conference experiences as a lens to engage with larger questions of work-life balance in the field and academia generally, he asks, "Do I lack the necessary discipline to stay afloat in the academy, or does the academy demand too much of me?" His exploration asks us to attend to questions about how we maintain our commitments to the academy even at the cost of personal experiences.

In "Running on Empty: Documenting the Oscillating Continuum from My Virtual Common Place," **Swan Kim** considers the affordances of an online conference in relation to the limitations of her physical space: "I am tied to my laptop all day long. Since I cannot afford to

have more physical space, I am spending almost all of my time in virtual space. So even before the virtual conference, my life has been virtual.” In describing her commitment to attending up to ten virtual conference sessions a day while having to contort her body to accommodate the limitations of her physical Zoom space, Kim’s Tale points to ongoing tensions between virtual and physical worlds in scenes of work.

In “CCCC 2021: Storytelling and Surprises,” **Jennifer Marlow** shares her perspective on the affordances of an online conference for introverted persons. She describes her experience:

In-person conferences always cause so much anxiety for me because I’m socially awkward. I’ve always known that I’m a quiet introvert who needs tons of alone time and in general avoids interactions with other humans, but this whole pandemic has made this all the more clear to me. As someone with extreme social anxiety, the virtual conference experience ended up being a nearly perfect one in some ways.

Her Tale calls readers to reflect on the ways we consider the experiences of introverted persons as we engage in larger conferences, both virtual and in-person.

Victoria L. Braegger, in “Reflective Writing and Pedagogy: Processing Loss and Grief During 4C21,” shares her reflections on the ways grief intertwines with her work in her experience of the 2021 virtual conference. Braegger writes, “I was not confronting my grief, but when I look at the things I created during the period and my reflections from 4C21, it is clear I was sitting in my grief the entire time, processing and reflecting on loss and considering what moving forward would look like.” Braegger’s essay concludes with a reflection on how her grief has informed her teaching and her relationship to students: “Centering compassion and transparency within my pedagogy costs me nothing but may make a difference for the student whose grief outlived the days given to them by the institution.”

In “CCCC 2021: My Academic Rite of Passage,” **Thir Budhathoki** shares his experience as an international student attending the (virtual) conference for the first time. He reflects on the ways the conference is a means for indicating or creating belonging for the field, “a sense of assurance that I too was doing the same things as others, and they mattered to the field.” As a Scholars for the Dream Award winner, he says of the presentation ceremony, “Sitting among the first-time presenters

selected for the award, learning about each other's works, and being recognized for the work I was doing gave me the much-needed sense of belongingness I had long been looking for." Budhathoki's work illuminates questions of how to find belonging and what moments in the field bring about the assurance and feeling of belonging.

Analeigh Horton's Tale, "Dear Analeigh," addresses navigating a virtual conference while also experiencing a response to trauma. She observes:

I will still be carrying my burdens and some other obligation will step in to take CCCC's place and I'll feel guilty all over again about not working hard enough. Stress, at least for me, is riddled with a bunch of emotions. I am constantly bouncing back and forth between throwing myself into my work, panicking, staring at the ceiling, and fielding the next crisis.

Her work reveals the surprising ways the impact of trauma affects our work and our sense of self.

In "The New Harriet Tubmans of the Same Beloved Underground Railroad: Notes for Future Essays Needed in the Present," **Shelagh Patterson** puts the idea of Barthes's punctum to work in exploring her shifting former, present, and future selves. Her essay disturbs commonplaces about the movement of time, inviting us to consider that, in the act of reflection just as in the arc of history, time does not behave in a linear fashion. Patterson writes that the problem with linear time is revealed by the fact of Jim Crow, which code of state-sanctioned violence functioned as "a way to write to horrors of slavery into the functions of our democracy." Patterson situates her Documentarian practice in 2021 within this understanding of temporal difficulty: "When I reflect on my surveys from April 2021, I am looking at a future self—but I would say the self in the surveys from April 2021 is in a different dimension because of the punctum of state violence."

2022

Jennifer Grouling's "Neurodiversity, New Networks, and Conference Commonplaces" describes a timeline of conference experience from 2020 to 2022. Grouling describes the affordances of online attendance for neurodivergent persons and the dynamics of returning to an in-person world. She writes, "Yet, I now found myself split between my confident online self and an anxious, awkward, in-person self. And I

found myself continually inundated with messages, like the one from the president of my university, telling me my face-to-face self was the real one, that this life was the ‘normal’ one.” Grouling’s Tale asks us to question our assumptions about normalcy and to look at the ways diverse perspectives might define and experience “normal.”

In “Angst, Agency, and Longing: On (Re)Turning to Our Virtual Profession,” **Kimberly Thomas** takes up the idea of belonging after a time away from the field and returning by way of participation in the virtual conference. She writes:

In attending the all-virtual 2022 CCCC Convention, I felt this lack of belonging to my field, my profession. I thought about the disconnectedness of being unable to engage more with scholars face-to-face—being able to mingle in the hallways and courtyards with experts or have impromptu calls and responses during lively presentations and seeing old graduate school classmates and friends from previous conferences, reconnecting, reevaluating, and reconsidering.

Her work, like others in this collection, asks us to consider what factors may contribute to (or work against) a sense of belonging in the field, and how these are related to diversity and inclusion.

Nitya Pandey, in “Recollections: The Experience of Documentation as a Form of Evidence for Reflective Practice,” uses the framework of Gibbs’s reflective cycle to structure her observations from the 2022 online conference. She notes:

I enjoyed attending [the conference] from the comfort of my home where I got the information, but I did not have to plan an expensive trip to a new city. Nonetheless, I missed the chance to actually meet people and socialize with like-minded individuals from the field and spend time networking and conversing about life, academics, and everything else. And finally, as someone who loves to travel, I missed the opportunity to visit a new city.

Pandey’s Tale explores both the affordances and limitations of online conferencing while also offering readers an opportunity to engage with the reflective practices she herself uses.

In “There Is Something to Be Said for Asynchronicity,” **Emily Plummer Catena** shares her experiences with the virtual conference, highlighting concepts and experiences of time and accessibility. She

notes: “Through my asynchronous attendance, I felt less pressure to ‘perform’ networking, and a positive impact is that I have had and continue to have a conference experience that is much extended, that has given me time to revisit and reconsider anew ideas that were already new.” Catena’s Tale asks us to consider the ways diverse experiences offer affordances for learning in online spaces.

2023

In “Among My People: Trying to Pierce the Veil of the Writing Studies Discourse Community,” **Quang Ly** explores questions of belonging and effects of imposter syndrome at the conference via the lens of discourse communities. He describes:

What I did not count on happening, however, was the imposter feeling lingering long after I finished my program and had already entered the profession. My foot was in the door, but my body had not made it through. I was in, but somehow, I felt out. Though Swales had identified several criteria that make up a discourse community, I would argue that another criterion is necessary: a feeling of belongingness.

His Tale asks readers to consider ways scholars find belonging and ways to work through imposter syndrome occasioned by conference experiences.

In “Assembling the Conference Experience: A Quasi-Materialist’s Reflection,” **Jason Tham** considers the role of embodiment, materiality, and memory in conference experiences. Tham contrasts online experiences of years prior with the physical return to the conference in 2023, noting:

The surroundings and ambiance contribute to the overall atmosphere and shape the nature of my engagement. Through this introspection, I gain a profound appreciation for the multifaceted aspects that *assemble* a conference experience, extending beyond mere content. I recognize the importance of considering the material, social, and personal elements intertwined within the conference realm.

Tham’s Tale asks us to consider the role our physical selves play in our day-to-day experiences, and calls us to consider the affordances and limitations of online connecting, engagement, and learning.

In the collection's only collaboratively authored essay, "Documenting a Documentarian Friendship," **Adrienne Jankens and Jennifer Grouling** write together about their in-person conference and Documentarian experiences. Jankens and Grouling explore belonging from a more senior scholarly perspective, considering the ways the conference has changed and might yet continue to change. Jankens speaks for both authors in writing:

I hope that conferences, with the spoken emphasis on inclusivity, which includes a lot of different things, but it seems like the point should be giving younger scholars in the field an opportunity to talk about their ideas or talk with other people [A]nd the only way that can happen is if the people who are reading their proposals are open to hearing new things and new ideas. That's a good shift.

This Tale by Jankens and Grouling encourages established scholars to make room for and welcome newer scholars to the field.

Karen R. Tellez-Chaires's Tale, "Together, in Chicago," offers an optimistic perspective on returning to an in-person conference after years of virtual conferencing. She writes:

In-person conference attendance is about many things for me. It's about presenting, but also about sitting in the role of student once again, learning from the presenters in chosen panels. Being on location at a conference is also about meeting new people, eating food that nourishes the soul, seeing the sights in the conference city, and about reconnecting with the people who inform my scholarship and my heart, and a combination of all the above.

Tellez-Chaires's story weaves together experiences of family, home, and conference participation to illustrate how time and relational connections influence our academic work—and more important, our lived experiences of work.

Afterwords

In "Kindness and Kith," 2023 CCCC Program Chair **Frankie Condon** reflects, through the particulars of her experience, on the importance of human relationships at a time, in the years following the pandemic, when the world of professional academics was embarking on what would become something of an existential crisis. In recalling her experience of

pandemic-related isolation from family even as she carried out her leadership responsibilities for CCCC, Condon writes, “Very often I find myself stretched uncomfortably between the social norms of professional institutions (like the university) and organizations (like CCCC) and the pressing human needs of folks whose lives those institutions and organizations impact for good or ill.” She goes on to remark that she is “struck by the propensity of such entities to abstract the value of human—and humane—relations from the material conditions and lived experiences of workers, students, staff, or members.” Motivated by the disruptions of 2020 and the years to follow, Condon invites us to consider what our professional spaces really are, what they do, and whom they serve: “One of the great challenges for program chairs of conferences like CCCC is to think carefully and critically about whether or how one’s own experiences and ways of being might not be generalizable or serve the needs and interests of other folks.”

In “Making Academic Conferencing Meaningful across Modalities: Lessons from Documentarians,” **Jennifer Sano-Franchini** similarly invites us, as members of the CCCC community, to consider—and to reimagine—what CCCC, as an example of an academic conference—should do for its constituents. In her dual roles as CCCC Program Chair (2024) and as a scholar of digital rhetoric and technical communication, Sano-Franchini found herself “reading these tales as user experience (UX) narratives that speak to the form, structure, and feelings associated with large academic conferences, and Cs in particular, as well as with academia as an industry and line of work.” From this perspective, Sano-Franchini takes up questions of shifting modalities and technological engagements with respect to conference planning and experiences, and invites to us to consider other, more existential questions:

What do large academic conferences like CCCC do and enable for attendees, in all of its iterations? What are the values that inform and shape them? How might these values be fraught and informed by inequitable power structures? What aspects of traditional in-person academic conferences do attendees feel are important to maintain?

**LOOKING BACK, LOOKING FORWARD: FUTURES FOR
THE DOCUMENTARIAN PRACTICE**

Recollections from Our Common Places will be the last of the Documentarian collections published by NCTE/SWR from the products of

Documentarian surveys at the CCCC Convention. And yet, we hope to turn its powerful method of creating narratives of individual experience within a community of practice to inquiries into other sites and scenes of practice. For us so far, it has served both as a form of professional participation and also as a curriculum for reflective writing. As such, it is a means for learning about the embodied experiences of less visible members of a community over a bounded period of time. We imagine that the Documentarian practice will continue to be useful not only within the field of writing studies but also in other locations, at other times, and for other purposes. As it began as a reflective practice to support students' learning in a FYW curriculum (Halbritter and Lindquist, "Witness Learning"), we imagine that it might be useful to other writing teachers as a way to make their students' learning visible, and to shift the objects of assessment from written performances to ongoing learning. At MSU, it has served us well in this regard.

We hope you enjoy the Tales collected in this volume, and that they invite you to reflect on your own experiences and your position as a member of the CCCC community and field of writing studies. We hope, as well, that you find your own ways to put the Documentarian practice to work in your own teaching, your own institution, and in your own life.

Happy Documentarianing!

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2021 DOCUMENTARIAN TALES

Learning Stewardship

Adrienne Jankens

It was sunny and warm in parts of Metro Detroit during the week of Cs, in April 2021. I called it “fake summer” in my notes. In the survey I completed on the first day of the conference, I wrote that my path that day included “trips to the front porch to see my four-year-old work on his little projects in the sun.”

While I remarked on them often in my notes that week, finding those quiet, joyful moments was its own kind of work in a season filled with tasks to do and emotions to manage. The week of the conference was my children’s spring break; it was also a magical quarantine week during which all the plans we had—to go to the zoo, to hang out at Grandma’s house, to give Mom space to think and work and attend the conference—were canceled. I was thankful none of us were sick, but in those days of uncertain exposures, we just followed protocols, staying home while still getting as much “done” as possible. I worked while everyone else tried to stay busy; when I was done working, I tried to get them off their screens for “family time.” They would want me when I couldn’t get away from my computer and I would want them when they were zombie-faced in front of their own machines. We hunkered down that week, sometimes getting out for a short walk, but with mainly divergent intentions for how we would spend our time and attention. I wrote Wednesday evening, in my Documentarian survey,

I took a nice long walk with my sister. It was almost 80 degrees ... It felt amazing. I breathed. I had hoped to spend a lot more time outside, and I had hoped to also work on a puzzle or read a book with my 8-year-old, but everyone in the house had their own agenda today.

Beginning each day with hope to find family time at the end of it, I pushed through my teaching and advising work, I checked in to conference sessions, I texted friends, I coordinated upcoming events with my stepmom. And then, each evening, I would see what scraps of everyone’s energy and attention, mine included, were left.

I remember a seasonal church stewardship campaign from my childhood. The campaign—complete with a banner that hung in the back of the church—focused on the theme *Time, Talent, and Treasures*: where tithing seems challenging, church members can also contribute through their time (volunteering in the nursery during services, serving as greeters) or through their talents (singing in the choir, cooking for a Lenten supper). I have often used the “time, talent, and treasures” mantra from this childhood memory to remind myself, in especially tight budget seasons of adulthood, that I might find, perhaps, other ways to give to my congregation and the local community. Over time, as I have become a little less strained financially, I have used the mantra to assess a balance in my community contributions, identifying when I have the capacity to give funds and where my *time* and *talents*, instead, are gifts to others.

Sorting stewardship out in the larger sphere of my work/life balance, however, is something I am still learning. And in the spring of 2021, my best-laid plans for preserving time for myself, my scholarship, and my family, were noticeably falling apart. Something about a shift from the 2020 lockdown state (all family, all the time) to a return to the regular pace of academic life (but at home) highlighted where there were cracks in my careful curation of distributed time, talent, and treasures. I could sense where sand was falling through the hourglass faster than I expected, where the supports I thought I had in place were weakening, and where I did not have my attention always on where it was most needed.

The “remote” academic year of 2020–21 had marked a significant change in my working and parenting time. In summer of 2020, I applied for and received a one-year stop on my tenure clock, not knowing what the school year would bring for my children. Would they even go back to school in person in the fall? How much time would we spend in quarantines? When would everything shut down again? I forged ahead through every day, because any afternoon email could bring the news that they’d be home for two weeks or more. Each day, I worked efficiently from nine to five as if we’d start a new quarantine in the evening. In the evening, I would spend as much time as possible with my kids because, for the first time as a mom, I didn’t have to spend ten hours a week driving around Metro Detroit for work. I could enjoy being home with them—and not just in the home with them, *being with them*. Even though they were blessed with almost a

full school year *at school* with masks and all the protocols possible, I regularly had one or more of them out during grade-level quarantines for safety. Managing life across my school and their school—synchronous and asynchronous—was a new venture.

My attention to finally crafting a nine-to-five life twenty-one years into a teaching career was reflected in a very full day planner. This planner was no less full the week of CCCC 2021, though I had tried for months to preserve the long weekend as a kind of respite. In what used to be a regular year of attending the conference, I would prepare months in advance how best to pause class plans and schedule child-care. My time in some distant city would often be split between a couple sessions a day, meals with my friends, and long, rambling walks around that city. In this planned remote week, however, I crammed conference attendance into my regular work week. While I had tried to save time for the conference by writing “CCCC” in big letters in the center of the boxes in my planner, I was not able to hold that space. I was recruiting for two research studies, coding for another, and working on curriculum development with my colleagues. I was also taking a month-long professional development course and doing extra writing about my Cs experience for graduate credits to renew my high school teaching license. In my Wednesday Documentarian notes, I remarked that I was hopeful that the slightly extended online access would support my plan to “fit” the conference in. This possibility was necessary, because by Friday of that week, I was feeling the pressure of everything happening at once:

Today I feel like the conference has to be an afterthought in my day, but I also want to be able to tick off my to-do list for work, family, and conference, and just let it all be just enough and manageable. No reason why this week should feel “extra” even though looking toward it, I felt like ... ohhhh it’s gonna be so much.

I had hoped for deep attending, for the conference experience to be more than something I was trying to cross off in my planner. And at moments, I managed it. Watching other *teachers* present, specifically, I learned about new reflective writing genres worth investigating, about practicum assignments worth trying, and about rethinking the ways some of the texts I have used in my undergraduate and graduate classes in the past might be more critically interrogated. I learned

about strategies for supporting graduate teaching assistants through the even more difficult teaching of this pandemic, and I listened to teachers who had to do work that year that I never did from my home-bound dining room location: teaching in person, in masks, and helping other teachers teach this way.

On Friday of conference week, I reported a happy teacher moment:

Read a paper from a first-year student in my intermediate comp class, and she's got direction for future research and a career in law supporting children. The energy is so cool. She got this from her OWN WORK in a gen ed comp class, in an online class, during a pandemic. Thrilling. And it has nothing to do with me. I just gave her feedback on her work and responded to all of her emails.

My workday included sitting at home in front of the computer for eight hours a day, doing laundry and housework at intervals to get up and move. This strategy allowed my already responsive work nature to reach peak performance. An email inquiry came in, I answered it. Student needed feedback? Done. Meeting requested? Sure, how's tomorrow? Responding to my students helped them move along and feel connected. This didn't make me somehow the best rhetcomp professor, though. It just meant I was responsive. What I wasn't doing was stewing over my research. I was collecting data, writing grant proposals, making plans, but not always processing the work I was doing—that processing was being mentally scheduled for some future imaginary time. Similarly, my newfound ability to regularly cook meals for my kids and help them with their homework didn't make me a better mom. A more responsive mom, yes, but sometimes one who, while she could check off the to-do list for the day, was not always good at attending. Spread the professor over two new preps and research and service and advising and she's not the best at any one thing; spread the mom over four kids and housework and meal planning and shopping and yard clean-up and bath time and bills, and something important might go by the wayside.

In a kickboxing class, I watched my teacher gently redirect newcomers to place their left foot in front instead of their right; I watched him lessen the tension of getting the moves “right” by sometimes being silly; I watched him adjust his plans in real time—“We're skipping number 3 today”—to better serve the group's momentum.

This responsiveness is something I both practice and am always trying to improve. It's something I learn just as much about teaching from watching other people teach as I do from practicing it myself, especially after two decades in education. Watching conference sessions, I listen to descriptions of member checking and collaboration in qualitative studies, researchers describing how they ensure they're most appropriately responsive to participants' contexts and contributions. During the conference week, the conference sessions I attended and the regular work of my days kept me humble. I was reminded of what I have always known: I am not the center of this teacher-mom life and forgetting that could have big consequences for how I spent my time.

A year of pandemic life alongside the continual changes of being a parent in a divorced family had stirred in me a constant readiness for everything to change or get bad. This potential energy meant learning how to provide a new kind of mental health support not just for myself but also for my children. For myself, I took to midday walks, learning how to step away from a research problem to ambulatory thinking, how to use the fresh air and movement to kick my brain up a notch when I could sense a low on the horizon. Sometimes the kids would come with me, and we would choose a short or long circuit around the neighborhood. In quarantine weeks, these walks were necessary medicine. We didn't have the stamina for weeks of solitude like we did at the beginning of the pandemic.

In my conference journal, I wrote on Thursday,

Third walk in before the storms come. My second oldest child, who seems to be suffering from depression, wailed the entire time we were on the walk. Her sister was frustrated. I was tired. She has her fourth therapy session this evening, online. I don't know what to do.

In the springtime, my younger daughter seemed gripped by a despair that would begin in solitary hours in her room when she was transfixed by her tablet games. Sometimes, this despair was only noticeable because, when she was pulled away from that terrible, magical box, she would wail for an hour, inconsolable, never able to tell us what was wrong, only able to say, "I don't know." An easy answer was that too much screen time is bad for kids. There were scary answers too. Her sister and I thought we knew what little communication was happening in the bits of chat time she had, but what if we didn't? What if, when

the wailing manifested, it wasn't because of the brain jolt of rejoining the world after being transfixed by an alternate reality, but because of something worse *in* that world that I didn't know about? When I couldn't get her to talk, when her grandparents couldn't get her to talk, when her sister couldn't get her to talk, I knew all I could do was just hold her. I also knew that somehow, she needed to talk to someone. So, we began therapy, online—more time staring into screens.

She was so angry at me for a while, dutifully attending her meetings, but if I sat there with her, making me do all the talking while she said, on repeat, “I don't know.” But when I stepped out of the room, and did laundry and washed dishes, while I could not hear *what* she was saying, I heard her talking—whole sentences! She hated it, but she did it. Every other week for months I held steadfast to the appointments; every other week she'd sigh—“dangit!”—and slump her shoulders when I reminded her she had an appointment coming in the afternoon. Then, privately, in early summer, in a moment of her deepest sadness, we shared a moment where I asked the right question. She let me in, and I understood what had been happening, and I held her and told her I love her no matter what and always.

While my daughter pushed through a season of therapy appointments, my youngest son, Moses, bided his time building a boat out of trash for one of my best friends, who he got to interact with during many of our weekly Zoom calls throughout the year. It was an inspiration that seized my son in spring, around the time of the conference, and I was happy to let him keep his preschool imagination busy with scraps of cardboard and toilet paper rolls. He intended to build an entire “scene” for our friend, and each week would cobble together designs while I supplied the essential skill of gluing. Hoping for an end to separated pandemic living, my friend and I had chatted about our families spending time together over the summer, about going fishing and playing games and sharing meals. My son's perseverance demonstrated the same hopeful spirit for connecting with others outside of our home.

During the conference week, when I missed my friend after several lapsed Zoom appointments, I found he filled my thoughts on those afternoon walks. On Thursday morning of the conference, I wrote in my journal,

My walk was killer. Reached out to send uplifting words. Hate missing my friend. Learning how to distantly ride out stress

and highs and lows and family life, while never being able to be nearby to lift each other up, to sense how it's going. That's hard. Meanwhile, birdsong in Rochester Hills is amazing this morning.

I'd push through missing him, returning to my computer to work, and when my son came home with new ideas about the boat, I'd remember again. Moses built the boat for months, and when my Zoom calls with my friend waned again in the summer, like they annually do, I found my son's persistence with construction admirable and heart-breaking. Every scrap held potential as he built the scene he dreamed of and waited for a day when my friend would come see it. He found things that wanted use and put them to use—a true steward of not only his time and talents but also the treasures of the kitchen recycling bin. Instead of building, I'd sometimes find myself just sitting and staring and wanting grown-up connection. My son was confident and patient; I was trying to learn to trust that people stick around.

It was a season of deepest anxiety that hoped for peace. One hurdle after another appeared: quarantine, family court, animals living in the walls of my house. In weekly summer research meetings, my team connected over Zoom, sharing our family challenges and offering support before shifting to sorting out our problems with analyzing interviews. I tired of having something new and crummy to share each week, but in the weeks we could share even some little triumph—about children, about coding—things felt a little more possible. And the persistent effort of the choice to push through therapy with my daughter meant that in August, I got to tell her, for lack of a better word, that for now, pending her ability to keep talking to me or to anyone about her feelings, she had “graduated,” her therapist felt she could take a break.

My daughter was learning to express her anxieties; alongside her, I was learning to let other people handle their jobs and not try to do their work for them. The season had already been full of family life changes and many unknowns were on the horizon. I had found my divorced-mom fortitude for securing my children's time with me where they were doing well, happy, rested, clean, and getting good grades, choosing to no longer bend at someone else's whims. However, I had also exercised some notion that the lawyer I hired to help me do this securing needed my assistance not only in compiling information for my case but also in crafting the rhetoric to get the job done.

I often ignored that her award-winning expertise was at work beyond my sight. I would spin my wheels late into the night composing written rationales that never needed to be employed. When I finally let go and let her do her job, trusted her knowledge and intuition and experience, all was settled, more simply than I had expected.

When I put my attention into my actual job, and not into what others should be doing, or how they are doing it, I find a little more value in how I spend my time. I arrived at the conference week with significant concern about managing my writing schedule for the four days to follow. I noted in my conference journal that I was caught up on grading, had a few meetings with graduate students and colleagues, had to monitor consent and scheduling for an interview and focus group portion of the research team study, and had to work through final revisions on an article revise and resubmit, “revisions that become *more* every time I think I am close to being done.” I worked to set myself up with confidence, writing,

This will all get done. I realized recently I write things really big in my planner and that makes it look like they’re bigger responsibilities than they are. Daunting, but then, I get through them. So not a bad strategy after all.

My oldest daughter, who is on the fifth revision or so of her legitimately good novel, and who is becoming the teenager version of herself, has remarked to me several times that the stuff I write about is wholly uninteresting to her. “You’re cool, mom, but your work is so ... boring.” She smiles, standing over me—she grew four inches last summer—waiting for me to respond. “All that matters is that I love it,” I tell her. When I am scrambling to get a project moving, though, I do not love it. My affection arises when I get over the hill of the rough outline and suddenly my reading and analysis makes sense, and I can move back and forth across a document weaving an argument, leaving myself notes for what to pick up later.

Wanting to “avoid feeling too spread out mentally” as I worked to manage a few collaborative projects during the conference week, I remarked in my survey that I wanted to make “a few small gains in each project.” I also explained how happy I was to be working from my dining room at home and not “sitting on the floor of a large conference center to eat a carryout lunch ... [n]o patterned blue carpet here.” I didn’t miss being in a conference hall—how would I have found the

time to effect the hyperasynchronous life I had been living for several months while away from my headquarters? Working from my dining room table, and not the conference floor, made making progress on multiple projects more possible. It is the location in each home of my adulthood in which I have coordinated my writing life. From this spot, I can keep writing and do everything else that is required of me.

Toggling¹ and the research hour² get me through the weeks. Sit down and work in the document in front of me and then shift over to another project and work on that one a bit. Clock the time and the writing develops. I wrote the first full draft of this Documentarian tale in eighteen sittings over three weeks while I also took the lead on a collaborative research article, wrote orientation plans and course syllabi, and composed recommendation letters upon recommendation letters. But twenty-one years into this teaching life, I am pleased to acknowledge that writing is the central part of my workday. I am a writer. I wrote in my post-conference survey,

I love writing about teaching and learning—that’s evident to me. I have joy in mentoring and advising. . . . I just want to do good work and be good to those I come into contact with.

What it often means to “do good work” and to “be good” to my students and colleagues is showing up and listening, saving time for someone and letting them talk through problem solving. As in our isolated, asynchronous conference week, in our work lives that year my colleagues and students and I often stewed alone in our own home/work spaces all over Metro Detroit. Any moment to come together to talk was good work in action. Any sentence or paragraph written was a job well done. I just had to show up to the day, and then the next one, and then the next one.

I find a kind of resilience and acceptance persists across my writing life, letting a manuscript go to readers, trying again, sometimes waiting for years for its publication. This resilience and acceptance are both

1. In an interview with Christine E. Tulley in Tulley’s *How Writing Faculty Write: Strategies for Process, Product, and Productivity* (2018), Dànielle DeVoss says, “I have usually fifteen, sixteen apps open on my computer, and I just toggle all day” (p. 51). Since I read that sentence, I can’t forget it.

2. I am indebted to my mentor Ellen Barton for impressing upon me the importance of identifying my research hour (and my goals for that hour) and keeping that writing time each day.

evident in this final note in my journal for the week, a reflection on my book project:

I think it's not untidy. Just have to be persistent. Things will look a lot different next year. I will have more to say.

It was a hopeful note, one that probably represents the resilience my friend tells me he admires most in me, the resilience my mentor Ellen said was one of my greatest strengths. It was necessary that I identified and rested on that resilience to push through the dichotomous loneliness and busyness of that conference week in 2021, the rest of the winter semester in sight. Advising meetings and research meetings persisted across every month and past the end of the school year. Summertime came as punctuation marks but not in the long paragraphs it used to—a staccato relief with no long, quiet family solitude. I wrote my way through the summertime, and we took vacations. Moses built his boat, and then another, and then another. We made a background with palm trees and set up the scene in anticipation of its eventual presentation.

One of the synonyms that pops up for *stewardship* in a Google search is *management*, a word with a significantly different connotation, a word that represents what I am trying to unlearn as I work to responsibly care for the people and tasks entrusted to me. Management is important—my paper planner is necessary for coordinating all the university and grade school events that my family works through each week. It is necessary for making sure grandparents get grandchildren time. It is necessary for making sure that the kids will be with me on certain weekends and with their dad on others. Management means that I pay the bills on time, that I schedule and hold meetings with students, and that I only need to make one trip to the grocery store every week. But stewardship of the time and emotion and brains it takes to do all of this work? That's a different thing.

I remember a conversation with a dear friend several years ago. I had gone to him because the feeling of burnout was traveling down from my tired brain and up from my clenched heart to somewhere in my neck and shoulders. I had gone to him because I needed to pause. I needed to check in with someone and say, "This is all too much right now." He reminded me in that conversation that probably not everything I was doing that month was mine to do. "But ...," I remember trying to protest. He put out his hand to stop me talking. "I know you

can do it the best,” he said, “but not all of this requires you doing that.”

Attention to stewardship means I consider not only the task to be done but how the benefits of that *doing* fall on everyone involved. A mom in management mode puts all the school bags by the front door the night before. A mom practicing stewardship reminds her children to get their school bags ready, so they learn how to be stewards of their own time. A professor in stewardship mode is mindful of the balance between work and rest, and how rest fuels the work. She is mindful of this not only for herself, but for her students. She might align due dates for projects with the reality of students’ weeks, shunning the former Sunday night deadline for a weeknight instead, so students have time with their families and jobs. She might practice more grace. And she might find she is happy to not spend her own Sundays fielding panicked deadline emails anymore.

It’s a lot for me to learn how to give my time and talents and treasures and to trust that others will give theirs in their own time. But I’m learning how to take what I know is true in my writing life and let it work its way into the rest of my living. Maybe it took two decades to learn how to have a work-life balance, and maybe I almost do. Maybe I can like both doing mom stuff and doing my job best of all the things I like doing. Maybe I can still do those things while I learn how to trust that some things—like learning my children and growing with my long-term friendships—persist and function in ways that don’t permit me to check them off in my planner.

Toward an Academic Made Whole: Navigating the Work-Life Balance in Times of Crisis

Joel Bergholtz

I have attended every Cs convention since starting graduate school. Each year, I pack up the same presentation outfit: a once-fitted starched white dress shirt bought in advance of my first Cs presentation, an itchy navy-blue sports coat from Goodwill, khaki slacks, and an old pair of black and brown dress shoes I received from my grandfather. To top it all off, I wear the same Jerry Garcia tie gifted to me by my dad when I was in high school. I don't love professional attire, but I can appreciate this assemblage of materials old and new. I like this outfit in spite of the fact that it doesn't actually look good. It is, after all, in this suit that I have successfully presented at conferences, and so it is in this suit that I feel most comfortable. The attachment I feel to this suit may, in part, be due to my anxiety, ADHD, and OCD. Routine and ritual play a big role in all aspects of my life.

When I am not in control of situations, I tend to have anxiety attacks. With Cs, there is so much out of my control: public transportation, hotels, airport terminals, airplanes, elevators. What if I have an anxiety attack on the airplane? What if someone plants something illegal on my bag at the airport? To offset these concerns, I check my bags endlessly: phone, wallet, plane ticket, ad infinitum. I still lose things. While these types of experiences are not unique to Cs, they are heightened by the conference, which tends to be located in massive conference centers in big cities. Despite all of this, I still enjoy Cs.

When I signed up for the 2021 CCCC Documentarian role, I had envisioned myself walking through the conference, popping into various presentations and events, and reporting on my experience. When I told my partner that the conference officially announced that it would be all virtual, she was overjoyed, reminding me that her family reunion was occurring that week at St. George Island, Florida. This is just an hour and forty-five-minute drive from our home in Tallahassee.

Not only could I meet her parents, who live in Indiana, but also her three siblings and extended family.

I am a people pleaser, and I avoid conflict at all costs. When I am invited or asked to do something, I do it. This, unfortunately, extends beyond the academy and into the personal sphere. As a result, my work-life balance is always in tension—a focus on one comes at the expense of the other. While I may have had reservations, I certainly wasn't going to let them show. And so I packed my bags, being careful to include each component of my signature Cs suit.

On Wednesday evening, around 6:00 p.m., the conference was beginning, and I found myself in my partner's candy apple red Toyota Yaris. It didn't make for a comfortable drive for a 6'1", 230-pound man with back fractures, a realization that hit me just as we began to trek through the winding roads that cut through the Apalachicola National Forest. As dusk approaches, I attempted to log into the conference to watch the Avengers pedagogy performance on my phone, and my spirits were high. The pandemic had signaled the beginning of a bad rut. I was hoping Cs would reinvigorate me a bit. My partner and I had just finished watching all of the Marvel movies for the first time, so I was selling the presentation pretty hard to her—she teaches composition, too, I remind her. There's going to be someone playing Scarlet Witch, I say.

She nods along, juggling my own incessant chatter with calls from family members asking about our ETA. I tell her that I am not getting cell phone service. Five minutes pass by. "Still not getting any," I say aloud. Another five minutes. "We need to find Wi-Fi," I declare. I can feel my anxiety rising. Why did I agree to this trip? Now I am stuck out here. Who goes on vacation in March? This conference is important, but my partner is the most important thing in my life. Still, I ask if we can find somewhere with Wi-Fi to stop. We find a McDonald's. My anxiety is assuaged. But I am not convinced that we are out of the woods just yet.

As we pull into the McDonald's, my partner notes that this will make us late. "Don't worry," I assure her, "this will only take a minute." This is not true, and we both know it. I run inside and take a seat out of sight of the register and attempt to log in. I receive an error message. The site informs me that I need to contact technical support via email to fix the problem. I write an email. My legs are restless. Unsure of what to do, I pull up the Cs Facebook profile and send a message asking if they can provide a link to the Avengers Zoom room. I then quickly text my partner, "can I get you something? McFlurry?" This is

a dumb idea. We are headed to dinner and no McDonald's ice cream machine ever works.

I then resend my original message to whoever is running Cs Facebook. This is rude. I hate to be rude. At that moment, in response to my offer to fetch her a McFlurry, my partner texts, "Yes please :)." "I don't have time for this," I say to myself, hastily walking to the counter. Fortunately, the restaurant is dead. Unfortunately, the ice cream machine is, as always, down. What am I doing here? My partner is understanding, but should she be? The presentations will be recorded after all. The dinner party is, in the grand scheme of things, more important. I glance at the clock. The presentation ends in 17 minutes.

The Cs Facebook messenger writes back. They cannot provide URLs to specific events, they explain. I put my phone away and walk out to the car.

"Did you get the McFlurry?" she asks. We get back in her tiny red car. I try to calm myself, but end up repeatedly analyzing the situation in search of some solution. I made us late for no real reason. "Why is this conference so difficult to access?" I ask rhetorically, in an attempt to replace my guilt with anger. This brings more guilt. I know how hard people have worked to make the conference happen. I am embarrassed when I catch myself in moments like these, where I shirk responsibility and cast blame.

After dinner, my partner's family is talking about their plans for tomorrow. I am reviewing the next day's slate of presentations and recommitting myself to the conference experience. There are so many great panels to choose from. I'm especially excited about online activism, one of my favorite areas of research. I am reminded how lucky I am to be entering this field. "I've just signed us up to go fishing tomorrow afternoon," her father exclaims. "Did you hear that?" my partner asks me with excitement. A fresh opportunity for me to choose life over work suddenly presents itself, just hours after I have made us late for dinner.

The next morning, my partner's family is loading up the car to go to the beach. "Are you sure you can't make it?" her father asks us, referring to the afternoon fishing trip. Later, at lunch, I reflect on how this is probably the best chance at bonding I will get with this important figure, who I have come to see as my future father-in-law, though he does not yet know it. I think, too, about my other commitments. Of all the years to be an active participant at Cs, this year is the most important, because this year I am a Documentarian. I've made a commitment I

don't plan on breaking. I explain my Documentarian tasks to her family, and they are understanding, but it still feels like I am doing something wrong. I think about this on Thursday afternoon, as her family fishes, she shops, and I watch presentations at a local Oyster Shack. It is pleasantly quiet in this restaurant, and I cannot concentrate. The waitress checks on me too often. The elderly man sitting next to me asks too many questions. What would be welcomed scenarios—I love good service and conversation—have transformed into obstacles blocking me from getting my task done in the time I have allotted myself. I make it through two panels of presentations, taking too few notes and remembering very little.

I reflect on this later that night as I read over the Documentarian Evening Survey prompts. “What would be the most valuable outcome from your conference experience?” the prompt asks. Choices include “learning a new theory, concept, and/or heuristic,” “learning from others doing similar research and scholarship,” and “meet with potential publishers.” I am reminded of the opportunities I have missed. I review the notes I've taken in an attempt to reflect and write on things I learned from presentations. Again, I feel like I've done something wrong. Later that night, I tell my partner that I've decided to drive home the next morning.

I get to my house the next day just in time to watch Roxane Gay's keynote. I am a hardcore fanboy. It ends, and I put on my signature Cs suit, including slacks, socks, and shoes, in spite of the fact that only my face will be captured on video. I look in the mirror in search of the comfort that this suit has always brought me. In the past, I would wake up to a clean, cold hotel room with this outfit neatly laid out. I would feel nervous as I put it on but grow into my confidence throughout the day and prior to presenting. I look at this outfit now, laid across my unmade bed, and realize that it is a terrible suit. I put on a simple button-down instead.

This is a common problem for me in graduate school. The scenes shift, but the key stages are always the same: I take on a bunch of commitments, obstacles emerge and things almost fall apart, but I make it out. Each time, I am relieved, but affected. I do not want to keep living under so much stress. But I am torn; on one hand, I want to look out for myself and create a healthy work-life balance. On the other hand, I know I need to work hard to secure a tenure-track professorship and take on the positions that I want to take on.

Do I lack the necessary discipline to stay afloat in the academy, or does the academy demand too much of me? I know of no other persons choosing to go on vacation during a (virtual) conference. Or maybe I do, and they are simply taking these tasks on, struggling in the same ways as I am. I care about my personal relationships deeply. I have determined, at thirty, that the meaning in my life will be defined by the activities and relationships I choose to give attention to. So, sometimes, the academy must take a back seat. I still struggle with believing this. I want to believe that it is okay to not work, but the guilt and shame that comes with not working makes this a difficult task.

These kinds of stories are not uncommon among graduate students, especially toward the end of this journey. Nearing the end of a PhD, one must not only work toward completing a dissertation and securing a job, but also teach, submit to journals, present at conferences, and maintain any administrative and service commitments. On top of this, we have personal lives. I must adequately tend to both of these if I am to ever get a tenure-track position and also build a family. This kind of pressure is worsened in our newly quarantined world, where the boundaries between work and home don't just blur, but fully converge. Often, we must now balance home and work duties simultaneously. In this digitally mediated academy, it is easier to take on more tasks while balancing academic commitments—to say “yes” when my partner invites me to her family reunion. Before the pandemic, I wouldn't have had to make this decision. I would have been in a different city, trying new foods covered by a travel grant (thanks, University!), filling out my *C's the Day* booklet, attending a wide variety of presentations, and fanboying my favorite scholars.

Trying to reenact this experience digitally doesn't *have* to be miserable. It wasn't the technological glitches or Wi-Fi connections that ruined my time at the conference. Those were simply the catalyst for breakdowns. Ultimately, my experience of “going to” Cs was made difficult because I did not look out for myself. I took on too much in an attempt to meet the demands of both my personal and professional lives. The funny thing is, I did not fail. I filled out my Documentarian morning and nightly reflection prompts. I talked into my voice recorder at night in search of genuine insight I could offer. I managed to create and deliver a meaningful presentation on antiracist pedagogies and made good impressions with my partner's family. But I came away from the experience exhausted. That's the most important part of

this story: I got it done. And I can get it done again. And I'll be asked to get it done again. But how can I get it done in ways that lead to less burnout?

Part of the answer is to draw clearer lines for ourselves, to learn when to say no—or, in my case, *how* to say no. Another solution is to recommit ourselves to the habits and rituals that make our work meaningful *to ourselves*. For me, this means finding ways to reconstruct the pleasures of participating in intellectually rigorous communities that exchange ideas and support one another when feelings of self-doubt and burnout arise. I miss sharing readings and pedagogical activities with my academic peers. I miss talking with students after class, as opposed to talking at a digital black wall of muted screens and microphones. I miss driving to meetings and prepping in my head on the way there. Some of these things are out of my control. But important aspects of academic community can be reconstructed. Recently, we had a retirement party for a faculty member, and around fifty colleagues came together in a Zoom room. It was delightful to see so many familiar faces together again. I've had virtual happy hours with colleagues. I also joined a virtual writing group for a while. These happenings cannot fully replicate what occurs in the halls and offices of the academy or the bars and restaurants around town. But they do represent a conscious attempt to make life meaningful again, not by finding new ways to work more, but by reinserting our whole selves into these communities, as opposed to simply doing whatever needs to be done. It is a commitment not to being better scholars, but to returning to the habits and routines that make our work and our personal lives meaningful. In doing so, we might find renewed energy that we can then bring to our classrooms and our research and our relationships, even if those classrooms and home/work spaces look different than they did before the pandemic.

Running on Empty: Documenting the Oscillating Continuum from My Virtual Common Place

Swan Kim

To the north, I can see the George Washington Bridge and the Bronx landscape. To the east, I can trace flights in and out of JFK and LGA. Having unobstructed views on the 38th floor can be deceiving. It feels as though I am unrestricted as far as I can see. Yet the reality is that I am confined to a tiny one-bedroom apartment with windows that do not open. Since I share this space with my 14-year-old daughter, my bedroom is my workspace and sleepspace. I teach, grade, attend meetings, do research, socialize, and sleep all within this room (see Fig. 3.1). I occasionally leave the bedroom to cook in the kitchen and have meals while streaming shows in the living room on our TV-serving monitor. I sometimes do work in the living room, but since my daughter is attending school and doing work in the living room during the day, I try not to interrupt her space.



Figure 3.1. Picture of my bedroom/office.

My workspace needs to be set up strategically. I cannot place my desk chair where it should belong, since that will show my bed in the Zoom background. My almost decade-old laptop restricts me from blurring or changing into a virtual background, so I am obliged to find an angle that looks most professional at the expense of comfort. I squeeze my chair between the air conditioner and the side of the desk, which leaves my legs resting on the paper file cabinet and my left elbow on the humidifier. The angle cannot be shifted too far to the left to show the corner of my bed, nor too far to the right to show the humidifier. After adjusting the blinds to light up my left cheek, voila! my Zoom screen perfectly captures my face framed by an MCM dresser, Escher print, and globe.

The fact that my personal and workspaces are one also reflects that my identity as a writer is ever-present when I am awake. I do almost all of my communications in writing—emailing, texting, posting on blogs, etc. My MacBook tells me my screen time averages thirteen hours a day, which is proof that I am almost always with my laptop except when eating and sleeping. I happen to have a watch that tracks my movement, and it indicates that my “active time” for the conference dates were nine minutes on average daily. These technological gadgets are confirming what I suspected—I am tied to my laptop all day long. Since I cannot afford to have more physical space, I am spending almost all of my time in virtual space. So even before the virtual conference, my life has been virtual.

The week of Cs has been what I have been dreading and anticipating all along. I wanted to attend the Cs after glowing reviews of my colleagues, and finding out about the Documentarian role after the call for regular proposals was already closed. It sounded like an ideal way to get my feet wet. I also found out about the Research Network Forum, which seemed like a perfect way to share and get feedback on my research without participating in the traditional panel format. I wanted to learn from people who do similar research or practice, find out how others are doing innovative research, and expand my network in the field. Soon after I registered, however, I found out I had three conferences all lined up in the same week. As one of the leaders in the professional development workshop series for a group of over one hundred doctoral students, I had to organize and facilitate one of the workshops that week. Also as a member of the College Growth Mindset committee, I was invited to speak for the inaugural Growth Mindset showcase that week. Coincidentally, all of these events were taking place in the same week while I was teaching full-time, taking

the intensive Spanish course at Instituto Cervantes, and attending personnel and budget committee and department meetings. Yet I was eager to make the best out of the week.

Cheerful expectations about the jam-packed week aside, I had been feeling rather anxious and angry that week. I seldom get anxious or lose my temper. Even as I was confident and hopeful about what I wanted to accomplish that week, I was deeply disturbed by what I was seeing on the news—or that this was happening to the people I knew. My colleague living uptown was shoved on the street for no reason. A friend living a block away was ambushed by a maskless stranger while running a quick errand at the corner deli. Living in NYC for more than a decade, I was never really free from these types of unpleasant encounters: a guy with a machete choosing to stand in front of me with his fly open; a subway bum who jumped at me, leaving a bleeding scratch on my arm. While it was true that it was nothing new, the attacks reported on the news seemed to isolate Asian identity as more vulnerable than ever. I used to think that there could have been external factors at play: gender, time of day, location, etc. Yet when race was isolated as a target of hate, it felt much more intentional and powerful.

Being in one of the lucky first groups of people to be fully vaccinated, I thought I would be finally free to take walks with my daughter in the park. However, I became more paranoid about the attacks than about the virus that was ravaging the world. Even with the protection of the vaccine, I felt defenseless in my haven of ten years, now with its back turned against me on the basis of xenophobia and fake news. I was staying indoors more than ever. I would not step outside of the apartment for days ... sometimes weeks. I took my Asian gynecologist's advice to get pepper sprays—she told me she ordered seventeen pepper sprays for herself and her daughter. My daughter and I practiced aiming the sprays after the instruction videos on YouTube. I almost cried when my close colleague teasingly asked why I was not exercising outdoors when it was so beautiful outside. The reality was that I had to shell out \$\$\$ to take the Uber to visit my brother's family in Jersey City because I was so afraid of what could happen in the subway. The *New Yorker* magazine cover with the Asian mother and daughter at a subway station was me. One day, my daughter and I decided to take a walk in the park to see Central Park in bloom. We used oversized caps and masks to erase our racial identifiers as much as possible. My daughter laughed at how ridiculous we looked all covered

up head to toe except our eyes. While we were laughing, we were also crying inside realizing all the trouble we were taking just to get some fresh air out of our nonventilated apartment.

I tried to shake off the anxiety by immersing myself in work. I signed up for the Cs orientation session to get a head start. Even the fact that there was a separate orientation for the conference was reassuring. The session turned out to be helpful. Nonetheless, I felt lost when I started poking around the virtual conference site. I think of myself as far from technologically challenged, but it took me a while to figure out the navigation. Perhaps it was because this was my first time attending a virtual conference. I did not know what to expect. I am not sure if I fully grasped the navigation until the end of the conference. I imagined myself seamlessly going in and out of the conference site like visiting an online shopping mall, but there was some trial and error before I understood how I could get from one place to another. All of this preconference navigation was not something I would normally do at traditional conferences. At most conferences, I would check out the map of the conference site in the conference program booklet to look up the location where I am presenting, but I wouldn't take a pre-tour of the conference site before the conference begins. So I was taking extra steps to make this conference experience work. I looked for some clues on the website. I came across the *C's the Day* challenge (Fig. 3.2). I carefully reviewed how the game worked. The participants would be getting points every time they visited certain parts of the conference site. I decided to use this game as a map for the conference. I started putting the high-score events into my calendar, such as the keynotes and the chair's address. Then I added the schedules for the ones I was involved in, then the ones that had interesting panel titles, and finally the ones with presenters I wanted to meet.

Once I got the knack of navigation, the doors were thrown open. I wanted to explore and see as much as I could of the conference and found out that I had unlimited access to all the sessions. I was eager to make the most out of this infinite privilege. At traditional conferences, I would typically attend three panels a day, perhaps four when I was really ambitious. Yet for this conference, I started stretching what I could do. I attended lots of sessions every day, sometimes up to ten sessions a day. I found it to be addicting. I found myself tuning into sessions while I was eating, taking a break from grading, even as I was unwinding after intense meetings.

The screenshot shows the website for the Conference on College Composition & Communication. The header includes the conference logo and name, a search bar, and navigation links for 'about', 'news', 'grants & awards', 'publications', 'conventions & meetings', 'governance & resolutions', and 'resources'. A secondary navigation bar contains 'Print', 'Enlarge Text', 'Reduce Text', and 'RSS'. The main content area is titled 'Cs the Day Gamification Event' and features a 'Like' button, a 'Share' button, and a 'Sign Up to see what your friends like.' button. Below this, there is a text block inviting attendees to join the event and earn points. A section titled 'Cs the Day Event Challenges:' lists several activities and their corresponding point values: 150 Points for the Keynote Session, 100 Points for the Chair's Address, 100 Points for Sponsor Booths (3 per day max), 50 Points for Exhibitor Booths (6 per day max), 50 Points for Action Hub Booths (3 per day max), 50 Points for Attend Sessions (3 per day max), and 25 Points for the Attendee Workshop Lounge (4 per day max). A note at the bottom of the list instructs attendees to check the event leaderboard in the Action Hub throughout the convention.

Figure 3.2. Screenshot of the C's the Day challenge on the conference website.

If there was a prize for maximizing time during the conference, I think I may have won it. I did not waste a minute—I was attending meetings while eating and took the laptop to the bathroom with me during bathroom breaks. I was glad that I could watch unlimited sessions on-demand without time constraints. And it was great to get reassurance of what I suspected from other panelists and colleagues.

However, while there were infinite opportunities to watch on-demand sessions, that also made me feel trapped in the sea of conversations. I could not realistically watch *all* the sessions available, but I felt like I had to since I had the access to them. It was not until the last day that I gave up on attending every session available. Running non-stop for four consecutive days, I did see a “reward”—I saw myself ranking at the top thirty out of all the conference participants on the *C's the Day* leaderboard (Fig. 3.3). I would have never attempted to attend so many sessions without that game, and I was driven by a sort of competitive spirit and desire to do everything.

And the sessions were certainly worth the energy. But I regretted how I let myself get into the unhealthy addictive aspect of the game and did not allow myself to pause and recharge. As much as I felt invigorated by the new ideas from the sessions, I was also pressuring myself to the extreme and not even allowing myself to feel tired. I was in dire need of a mental cooldown in my hectic schedule.

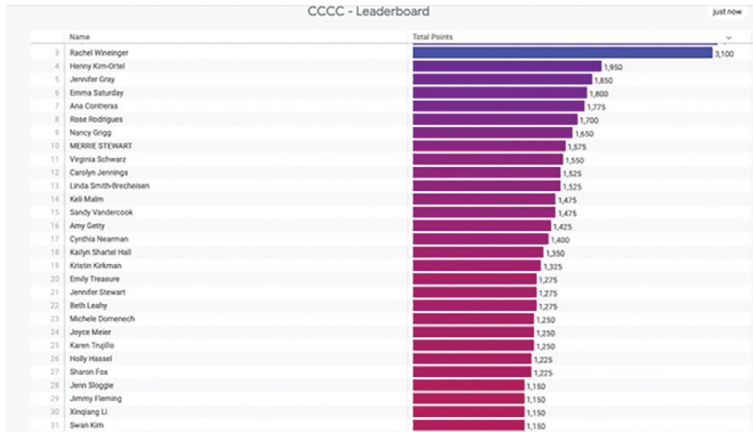


Figure 3.3. Screenshot of the Leaderboard for C's the Day.

Nevertheless, it was liberating to have the freedom to choose whichever session I wanted through a simple click, and on demand. I no longer had to sleuth to find out where the “back door” of the panel room was so that I would not interrupt someone in the middle of the presentation. There was no embarrassment in arriving at a session late or leaving a session in the middle of it if I did not find it engaging. Most people spoke while sharing their screens, so it was much easier to grasp the information. I liked how the speakers on Zoom were highlighted, which allowed me to better focus on the presentations without distractions. Many of the live panels had prerecorded presentations followed by live Q&As. I wondered if there was a reason why the participants were not seen. I could see why the speakers were the only ones seen when they were speaking, but I would have liked to see participants asking the questions live, with their faces. I had no idea how many participants were joining the sessions live, nor who they were. Yet typing my questions on the chat saved me from trying to guess the “right” time to ask the question. So I was participating in almost all of the live Q&A sessions and enjoying the thrill of being answered by the presenters.

I was pleasantly surprised by how much I was enjoying the on-demand sessions and the entirely prerecorded presentations. I could pause if I wanted to or even go back to a point if I wanted to take note of something. I could increase the volume if the speaker was speaking softly and even have the transcriptions on to follow the texts with my

eyes while listening to it. The PDF transcripts of some sessions made the conference very accessible. Many speakers were willing to share Google Doc links of their presentations. Even though I was separated from the speakers by time and space, I felt as though I was making a closer connection with the speakers than when I used to be the anonymous audience at panels. This could have been due to how the conference was set up but also how I was attending the conference. I was participating in professional duties from my most personal space—I spent most of the day in the bedroom corner but ended up watching some on-demand sessions lying down on my bed. Yet the best part about the on-demand sessions was that I could control when I wanted to attend the sessions and did not have to worry about which session to attend when there were multiple interesting sessions competing at the same time. In the past, I sometimes had to calculate when someone would be speaking and split my time between different panels if I really wanted to attend multiple sessions taking place at the same time. With the on-demand sessions, I no longer had to have this dilemma. I wondered if this could be reproduced in some kind of way in the future even if the conferences return to the traditional format.

Besides attending the panels, I ended up visiting all of the publisher and sponsor booths and other organizations, which is something I rarely do at traditional conferences. Nonetheless, I did not find most of these visits engaging. Some of these booths had someone waiting on the site or made it easy for me to reach out to the organizers. And I did watch the videos, read through the available documents, and enter raffles, but I did not feel like taking another step to get involved. For instance, even though I visited the publisher booths daily, I did not end up purchasing any books. I usually purchase a lot of books at conferences because I am drawn by the discounts and the ease of picking them up on the spot. Even though there were samples available online and the publishers sent me sample ebook copies, I do not think they quite matched the experience of talking to a person at the booth and flipping through the books physically. Strangely, I did not miss face-to-face interaction with humans, but I did miss the hard copy books.

I think I generally followed what I planned out even though my plans were impromptu. I started off thinking I would go with the usual flow of my schedule and see where I can fit the Cs. I did end up going to many more sessions than regular conferences, and I do not think I fully realized this potential at the beginning. I really liked the ease

of visiting a session and was generally impressed with the quality of presentations, which is not always the case with conferences. I was happy that I was able to present, meet interesting new people, and get the pulse of the field of composition and rhetoric. I visited as many sessions as I could, and after a prolonged departmental meeting and lengthy exchanges about the future of my course with the department chair, I was Zoom fatigued at the end of the day. Friday was particularly brutal: I (1) organized a university-side professional workshop for 100-plus doctoral students; (2) presented my work to a college showcase; (3) attended talks by Roxane Gay and Vershawn Young; (4) watched a number of on-demand sessions; and (5) attended a number of prerecorded sessions with live Q&As. As excited as I was about all of the materials covered at the Cs, I could not separate myself from the usual duties I needed to do in a regular semester. I thought about how I would usually take a break from usual duties when I am away for a conference. I would arrange something for my classes, not attend meetings, and definitely not present at different functions. Yet I did not drop anything from what I usually do for this virtual conference. I took up more just because I thought I could. This left me with serious Zoom fatigue at the end of the day.

I found that so many of the sessions were discussing antiracist pedagogy (or maybe I chose to attend the ones with these themes), but at the same time, I felt how those ideals were so distant from my own reality. I was glad so many people were discussing diversity and inclusion at the conference, but then I thought about how these discussions are brought up and handled in real life. As one of the few faculty of color in my department, I am usually one of the first to bring up these issues and also often the one asked to lead these initiatives without support. I found the conference sessions to be very proactive about adopting progressive strategies, but I somehow felt embarrassed about how my own institution and program are outdated even when my students probably are in need of these progressive pedagogies more than any others. The disconnect between what should be done and what is done was so wide that I could not even fathom where to start. It led me to question whether these ideals are something only the privileged can afford.

Ideally, diversity and inclusion issues should be integrated into the core of our mission, but the reality is that there are so many other emergencies to be taken care of that these issues stay on the back

burner. Budget cuts, austerity plans, low enrollment, retention, etc. There are always pressing issues to be taken care of before we can discuss inclusive practices for our students.

Yet I was really inspired by these discussions at the conference and continued to follow up with what I was introduced to. After the conference, I ordered the books by Aja Martinez and Staci Perryman-Clark. I was able to finish these books and other articles I was recommended by the panelists after the conference. I wanted to share these interesting ideas with my colleagues, so I volunteered to lead an antiracist pedagogy group over the summer. Overall, I was pleasantly surprised with the unexpected rewards of the conference. I do hope some advantages of the virtual format can be preserved in some way in future Cs. If the conference were to continue in any kind of virtual format, I would really like to see more networking lounges or informal spaces to meet other people. The networking lounges were a very informal but somewhat structured way to meet other people at the conference. I was able to talk to some very well-known scholars this way, which would have never happened at a real conference. I would probably be too shy to schmooze my way to be near these people and strike up a conversation.

As I noted earlier, I had no boundaries between my work and my personal life for being confined in front of my laptop at the corner of the bedroom for a presentable background. I was juggling multiple jobs during the conference (teaching, meetings, conference organizing, conference presentation, etc.). I had many Zoom sessions, emails, and phone calls, as well as texts. I communicated with my students, colleagues, other conference attendees, customer service representative, and my child's cello teacher. Since my daughter was doing her virtual classes in the living room, I stayed mostly in the corner of a bedroom facing the hamper and Jellycat dolls on the bed I share with my daughter. Even though I mainly occupied the bedroom space and my daughter was usually in the living room space, I could hear my her participating in discussions for school, practicing the piano and cello, and helping her friend edit some kind of text over Zoom. So even if the spaces were demarcated for each of us, the sounds were shared over these spaces. Once when I was holding a synchronous class on Zoom, my students asked me about my background music.

Looking back, I appreciate that I was able to attend the Cs this year, and I learned so much all in the span of a few days. On the other hand, I was burned out after an intense week. Even though I did not

step out of the apartment for the entire week, I was exhausted from all the virtual activities. Even after finishing my workday online, my day continued through the same laptop screen. I Zoomed with my husband in Korea, texted with my best friend in Korea who just lost her father-in-law, and typed my survey responses to this project with my fingers reeking of the Philly cheesesteak I had ordered for dinner. And an arm-length away, my daughter was finishing up her homework by the desk. It was fulfilling to successfully complete what I set out to do for the week, but at the same time I do not want to live through another week like this. This is similar to what I have been experiencing since we started to work at home through the pandemic. There were definitely positives—no need to commute, making connections with people without necessarily interacting with them in person, and accelerating my productivity. But there were also drawbacks I never wanted—losing boundaries between work and life and losing time to recharge and recover.

The only thing that was close to recharging and recovering happened to be this project. While participating in the *C's the Day* really pumped me up for the conference, I think participating as a Documentarian also pushed me to fully explore the conference and forced me to stop and reflect on what I was doing. I really appreciated the opportunity to write a reflective journal through the conference dates. It was like a ritual—calming like a meditation session. The writings felt like a yoga or meditation session (while I do not enjoy either in real life). I loved how I had this metacognitive lens thinking and writing about my experience as I was experiencing it. Of course, I often do this in my head, but it was such a gratifying experience to actually put them in writing. The checkbox-style questions in the surveys became stale quickly, though. I found myself checking them off automatically with little thinking. At first, the surveys seemed like an add-on to an already busy week, but I found myself thinking about what I would write in these surveys and looking forward to these morning and evening sessions that framed my day as the conference progressed. When they tell you to empty your mind and just focus on breathing during meditation sessions, that is usually when my mind is the busiest. Yet as a Documentarian, I was told to make my mind busy about how I have been busy, which turned out to have a more meditative effect than I ever imagined.

CCCC 2021: Storytelling and Surprises

Jennifer Marlow

CCCC 2021 was the first (and so far, only) virtual conference I have attended, and I admit I was skeptical (see Figure 4.1). After withdrawing my presentation from my panel session due to lack of preparedness after a year juggling all the pandemic things—working from home with a school-age child, decision fatigue, extreme stress due to fear and uncertainty, etc.—it felt like a lot of money to invest. However, I depend on Cs to help keep me up-to-date with what is happening in the field, and as someone who is “older” and mid-career, I find it easy to fall behind. I will also admit that having Roxane Gay as the keynote was a big draw for me.

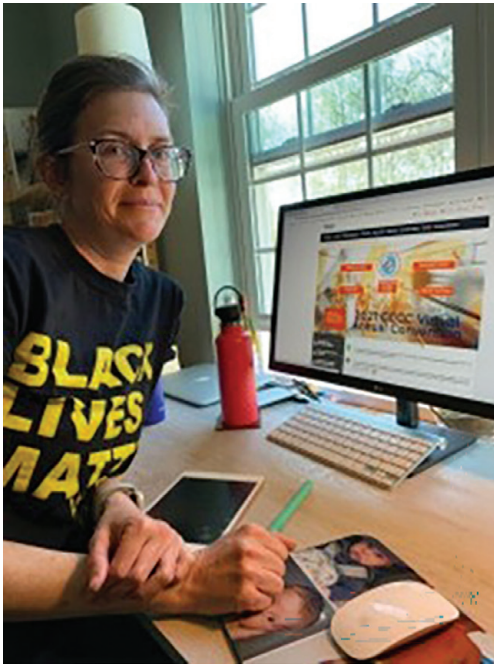


Figure 4.1. Me on day one, feeling skeptical, but ready to enter the virtual conference space. (Photo credit: my son Levi)

My skepticism was over whether I would get much out of a virtual conference. I felt there was no way I'd get out of it what I get from the in-person hallways filled with fellow conference-goers, picking out the best places to eat, and navigating new cities while fitting in sessions between sightseeing. I went into the whole thing with a kind of breezy attitude, thinking I would check in here and there, watch the keynote, and keep up with the rest of my life at the same time. Cs was held during my six-year-old son's spring break, and my wife works outside of the home, so I am a full-time work-at-home mom when he's not in school, which was a lot over the past year and a half. As is often the case in life, my experience attending a virtual conference while also parenting was nothing like my expectations.

Because I had put a good chunk of my own money into registering for the conference, I thought I should put some effort into checking out what it had to offer. Much like what happens when I settle down into my hotel bed with the program and a pen in hand each year, I got pulled right into the array of interesting-sounding presentations and offerings as I spent Wednesday morning perusing the PDF version of the conference program and loading up my online conference planner with on-demand and live sessions that I wanted to experience. I really wanted to attend the feminist caucus workshop as well as a couple of sessions that sparked my professional and creative interests—"Taking Action for Antiracist Workplaces: Developing Bystander Training for Writing Teachers and WPAs" and "Writing Creative Nonfiction: Finding the Extraordinary in the Ordinary"—but quickly found I couldn't attend them without sticking my child on a screen for excessive amounts of time. I did manage to attend one prerecorded session with live Q&A: "'Racism Isn't the Shark in the Ocean; It's the Water': Stumbling through Antiracist Language Pedagogies and Practices." Shawna Shapiro, the presenter, took us through ways to make the practice of engaging difference an explicit learning goal. As such, she discussed compassionate ways to acknowledge harm (call in versus call out culture) and reminded us that "behind every belief is a story."

Later, on a whim, I also jumped in on the Documentarian meet and greet, which I hadn't planned to do since it was at my son's bedtime. He did make a guest appearance as he came looking for his goodnight kiss, but as we all know by now, kids, cats, and dogs have become part of our collective Zoom norm. Additionally, I experienced the poster

session on the 2020 Documentarians Project. I learned about the ways in which this Documentarian work is grounded in story-based learning and live history approaches and draws on the work that Julie Lindquist and Bump Halbritter have done with literacy narratives as reflective narratives or Experiential-Learning Documentaries (ELDs), as they call them. I signed off for the day at 9 p.m. and was surprised to find myself as exhausted (maybe more?) as I am after an in-person conference day.

As I tend to do at conferences, I engaged in live tweeting. I always find conference Twitter a good way to find what others are thinking while also vicariously experiencing other sessions that I might have wanted to attend but that conflict with another session (Fig. 4.2).

On Thursday, I attended (what verb do we use for virtual conference sessions ... experienced? viewed? saw?) three sessions and, on Friday, I attended one live session, one on-demand session, and Roxane Gay's keynote. I also attended the Mothers in Rhet/Comp business meeting on Thursday evening. So, most of my conference days ran from about 6 a.m. to 9 p.m. Friday's keynote was followed by my institution's financial update, and I was deeply impacted by both of them in opposing ways—energized by the keynote, saddened by a dire financial situation that makes implementing some of the calls made in Gay's keynote seem all the more challenging.

Her calls to break down the gatekeeping role of the academy—one in which rhet/comp has historically been complicit—seemed also to reinforce the importance of storytelling—a form traditionally devalued in higher education. We need, she told us, to make space for writing that “sings.” Accessibility means a broadening of audience, not a dumbing down of discourse. And to her students she says, “you're a great writer, and how do we make your greatness more visible?”

When Gay described her conference attending woes as an introverted person, I felt so seen.



Figure 4.2. A tweet from the author re: the On-Demand Poster Presentation Re: the 2020 Documentarian Project.

In-person conferences always cause so much anxiety for me because I'm socially awkward. I've always known that I'm a quiet introvert who needs tons of alone time and in general avoids interactions with other humans, but this whole pandemic has made this all the more clear to me. As someone with extreme social anxiety, I found the virtual conference experience a nearly perfect one in some ways. I went to events/business meetings/SIGs that I never attended during in-person Cs. Breakout rooms made it manageable to actually speak and share with others. For example, on Tuesday evening I attended the CWPA "brekkie" for the first time since it wasn't super early in the morning. I discovered during a breakout room meeting themed around WPA work at SLACs that I desperately needed to talk to WPAs at other small liberal arts colleges, and I hadn't even known it. Part of what made the CWPA brekkie work so well was its clear structure: a facilitator, scheduled speakers who knew what they wanted to say and said it efficiently, and then breakout rooms devoted to specific themes with some guidelines for what attendees might want to address or talk about in these small-group sessions. All of this kept it from being an awkward online social gathering, which can be even worse than an awkward face-to-face social gathering—except for the part where it's easier to find excuses to escape (whoops ... my Wi-Fi just crashed; unstable connection here, gotta go ...). In addition to having the low-stakes feeling brought on by the easy escape of online sessions, much of my social anxiety melted away in the structured Zoom formats of chat boxes and breakout rooms. The SIGs and meetings that I did attend were so well orchestrated and carefully led that it took away all the discomfort from being in a room full of strangers. This surprised me. I was shocked by how many times I willingly un-muted my mic or put a question in the chat box.

During my three conference days, I was in a constant state of motion, moving between my office, yard, apple orchard with baby animals, park/playground, climbing trees, office again, kitchen, soccer practice, office again, bed (exhausted). The constant transitions between kid time (brain draining potty talk and never-ending interest in bugs and strange cartoon characters I know nothing about) and the conference (sociocultural theory of writing for audience, tacit racialization of placement materials, intellectual property and bots, and so on ...) took a ton more energy than I had anticipated. As we've learned in the past couple of decades from research into the science of multitasking, there is an actual cost, known as cost switch, when one engages in

task switching—moving between two unlike activities. It's kind of like the extra energy it takes to start up a car as opposed to leaving it idling. I experienced that cost, and eventually it took its toll.

As I left the apple orchard with my son on Friday afternoon, I felt a twinge in my throat. I cleared it, thinking the cinnamon sugar from the cider donuts had perhaps irritated it, took a swig of cider, and moved on. By the next day, however, the twinge was a full-blown sore throat and my COVID-19 anxiety kicked in.

While it ended up being a cold, not COVID-19, I did not participate in the final day of the conference, and instead took the morning to reflect back on my week. Much of the reflection landed on comparisons between my years of in-person Cs experiences and my first and only virtual one (Fig. 4.3).

Overall, much of my surprise was about how unexpectedly well the whole thing went—especially the way I took advantage of meetings and events that I often miss/can't/or don't attend at Cs in person. I made unexpected connections with folks I've never had the opportunity to meet before online via Zoom and Twitter as well.



Figure 4.3. A tweet from the author re: advantages of attending on-demand sessions.

Reflective Writing and Pedagogy: Processing Loss and Grief during 4C21

Victoria L. Braegger

My tale is short.

Like many, my experiences during the pandemic have been grounded in loss and grieving. During the first months, loss came from the loss of functionality—my body, already disabled by an autoimmune disease, felt the impact of losing medical support. I lost my ability to walk distances as my leg dragged behind me, and I grieved the things I used to do. It was a forced change in perspective, a forced reckoning with what I could do and what I would need assistance with.

Loss came in the form of losing people close to me. One friend died by suicide, the loss caused by the weight of the pandemic much too heavy to bear. I sorted through letters he sent to me when we were both teenagers, his excuse to practice calligraphy and test the efficiency of the postal system's computerized address recognition system. My name and address curled across the envelopes in shades of red, gold, and blue—some I received as many as six months after he sent them. The writing was too beautiful and too adorned with filigree for digital recognition.

In the months before the 2021 Cs, I lost both maternal grandparents—my parental figures who I lived with for much of my youth. My grandmother's death was expected, but I was not prepared for the grief. I saw in my own movements the habits and behaviors I picked up from her. I hunted for videos so that I could hear the sound of her voice somewhere outside my mind. Six months to the day later, my grandfather died in his sleep, the grief too much for his heart to bear. He spent seventy-one years of his life with my grandmother—one moment more without her was too painful to endure.

My grief remained isolated from the place I called home. I did not attend either funeral. It was unsafe for me to travel during the pandemic, my autoimmune disease leaving me immunocompromised and vulnerable to COVID-19. Instead, my husband and I shared memories and stories back and forth, but even that was sometimes too much.

I was actively pushing my grief down into tiny boxes that I stored for *later*. But if I believed I was healing after my grandmother's death, my grandfather's death ripped open any progress I had made, rupturing the stitches I had used to piece myself back together and bursting the seams of those tiny boxes. In this time, I attended and presented at conferences, completed courses toward my doctorate, taught sections of professional writing and first-year composition, and made progress on my own research. I used my calendar to avoid confronting my own grief—the busier, the better.

I believed I was not ready to sit within my grief; I was not ready to process or reflect or endure whatever transformative experience this grief had in store for me. When I look back on the decisions I made in the aftermath of my grandfather's death, they are characterized by using productivity to avoid processing grief. Attending Cs and acting as a Documentarian was one of those decisions. If I could keep myself busy, I could keep myself from drowning in my own grief. I noted in one postconference reflection that I was preplanning my schedule down to the minute, monitoring my movements throughout my house, and scheduling time to attend panels, grade, respond to students, read, and write. My conference days were done at 5 p.m.; my planned movements stretched into the night until I fell asleep, only to wake up and do it again the next day.

I did not have a plan for grief.

During Cs, my grief lurked in the corner of my office and followed me as I walked around my house, waiting for an opportunity to spill out of the tiny boxes I had crafted for it. My carefully planned schedule for the conference was not enough to ward it away. It sunk into the cracks of my plans: the brief breaks between panels, the moments caught zoning out while staring out the window in front of my desk, the presenter's nervous laugh and quiet movements as technology failed to cooperate and they worked to fix it. My grief would take me in those moments, and my entire preplanned schedule—the schedule I used to avoid confronting my grief—would be overridden. It didn't take much; it just took silence.

My reflections for 4C21 show careful plans in the mornings and constant disruptions to my plans by my evening report. On Wednesday, I wrote about several on-demand sessions I wanted to take in and was excited for; that evening, I wrote that I didn't attend any on-demand sessions. When talking about my schedule that day, I wrote, "I didn't

add anything to the plan, but I did take away from it.” This was a common theme throughout the week: I planned and wrote about my excitement—and then I didn’t follow through on the plan. I wrote about being confined to my house (“Forever in my office”), avoiding people (“I am purposefully not seeing anyone; I don’t have the mental bandwidth for it”), and struggling to keep it together (“Today has been rough”).

I was not confronting my grief, but when I look at the things I created during the period and my reflections from the 2021 Cs, it is clear I was sitting in my grief the entire time, processing and reflecting on loss and considering what moving forward would look like. When one of the Documentarian surveys asked, “What was one news item, headline, or event that impacted you today,” I responded with the deaths of Prince Philip, DMX, and Janice Lauer. I wrote that I was “very attuned to death,” though I had no connection to those whose deaths were dominating the news cycle. “Death,” I wrote, “seems constant.” I sat and watched as the internet poured out its grief on public forums while I was pushing mine down.

By Friday night, I was physically sick. My autoimmune disease is triggered by stress, among other things. Shoving grief into tiny boxes for *later* is stressful; filling every moment of the day can only be maintained for so long. I had been maintaining my busy schedule since March 1, 2021, the day after my grandfather died. It is no secret that institutions did not respect virtual conferences and the time required to attend them; I simply added the 2021 Cs to my scheduled teaching, coursework, and projects. When I look back on it, it is unsurprising that my body couldn’t take it. Friday evening, I wrote, “I got a case of the most wicked vertigo I’ve experienced in a long time. It knocked me out . . . As a result, I missed some panels I wanted to attend.” The world was spinning, and my grief lurked.

Grief doesn’t take (nor have) a standard form; what I was expecting—to be wracked by inconsolable waves of tears—isn’t what happened. I didn’t deny my grief so much as I avoided confronting it head-on. Instead, I wrote from within my grief, designing a choose-your-own adventure fiber-arts game that played through my memories, inviting the player to take me home to visit my grandparents’ graves and literally stitch my soul back together as they traveled paths I had traveled. My grief lasted for months and it affected each moment of my day, whether I was ready for it or not. A song on my playlist, a bird visiting a feeder outside my window, a smell from the kitchen, a

brief moment of silence while trying to fall asleep—nothing was truly safe from grief’s long reach.

When my grandmother died, I was teaching a section of asynchronous first-year composition. When my grandfather died, I was teaching two sections of asynchronous professional writing. Both times, I emailed my students and both times, my students sent messages of support and care. Some students shared similar experiences, writing that they had been struggling to keep their lives together as they grieved loved ones, worked, and studied. Their lives had gone on, but their grief had stayed. To the institution, their grief had a time limit: five days for an immediate family member, three for an extended family member or a friend, and only within two weeks of the death.

The time limit sticks with me. How could I place a time limit on my grandparents’ place in my life, on the hole left when they were gone? Could I fit my grief into five days, two weeks after their respective deaths? As an adult, I was lucky to spend a decade living just six miles from their home. I visited every Saturday, the number adding up to at least 520 visits, with the countless times that I would just stop by unaccounted for. When I left to pursue a doctorate, I replaced those visits with phone calls; in the week before my grandfather’s death, I called him four times. I didn’t know he was dying; I just had news I wanted to share with him. Could I take the pieces of me that felt splintered and bruised and fit my grief into five days allotted within two weeks? The simple answer is no. Cs occurred roughly seven months after my grandmother died and roughly one month after my grandfather died. My institutional timeline was up—and I was still caught within my grief.

There were fantastic panels at the 2021 Cs; I have notes from them. Roxane Gay gave an amazing keynote; I have notes from it. But when I think of that Cs, I don’t remember the panels or the keynote. My grief was too heavy, too deep, *too present*. What I take from my experience attending the 2021 Cs is that grief doesn’t have a time limit, nor a timeline. How could I take this experience and expect my students to place a timeline on their grief, on the pain they felt after a loss? The institution wanted me to treat my students’ grief as it had treated mine, as something finite and easily contained, and I could not reconcile that with my experience. The institution can’t show grace or compassion, but I can. As a teacher, I am acutely aware that I never know what experiences my students are carrying with them into my classroom,

and so much of their experiences are mediated by validation from the institution. Grief is an easily overlooked experience that has only become more visible during the pandemic. Centering compassion and transparency within my pedagogy costs me nothing but may make a difference for the student whose grief outlived the days given to them by the institution, the student who found themselves sitting within their grief at the most unexpected (and inopportune) moment.

CCCC 2021: My Academic Rite of Passage

Thir Budhathoki

My first-ever participation in CCCC 2021 as a presenter, a Documentarian, and an awardee has been one of the most remarkable experiences of my life. I had submitted a proposal based on a qualitative case study that I initiated in my first semester as a graduate student in the US in 2017. My journey as an international graduate student and graduate teaching assistant since then has been tumultuous, at least on personal and emotional levels. Although it may sound hyperbolic, the seemingly ordinary work of grad school turned into an extraordinary feat for me. It may be because I was returning to grad school after a long gap and navigating a new discipline and academic culture in a country 8,000 miles from home. In any case, what I went through during those three years and seven months leading to CCCC 2021 shaped my perception of academia and where I stand in it. But I hadn't had the opportunity to reflect on what those experiences meant, why I felt the way I did, and what I could do about them moving ahead.

Being a Documentarian allowed me to reflect not just about the conference experiences but anything and everything leading to that point. In fact, I consider my active participation in CCCC 2021 as an academic rite of passage that has changed my beliefs about scholarship and my self-perception as an emerging scholar of writing studies. For a better context, allow me to share the back story even at the risk of a little digression.

It's quite natural for international students to experience challenges in transitioning to their new institution. But I think mine was relatively longer, even though I came to the US with a long experience of teaching college English in Nepal. I knew that it was not going to be an easy ride, but I wanted to challenge myself because I wasn't happy with the amount of time I was spending on teaching—literally being in the classroom for up to eight hours a day and six days a week. Although there was no “writing course” per se to teach, the undergraduate General English (comparable to required first-year writing here) as well as other literature courses had some academic writing components. But I had no specific pedagogical model or theoretical

framework that would inform it. I was doing what I knew or what and how I was taught. It was a pedagogy that involved more lecturing than actual writing in large-sized classes and a centralized evaluation system with a three-hour final examination at the end of the year.

Besides, academic writing remained a challenge for me even after having written two master's theses, and I found it to be challenging for most students I interacted with. This situation motivated me to specialize in writing studies and go for an advanced research degree. I decided to apply to graduate schools in the US instead of pursuing a PhD in Nepal because I wanted to come to the disciplinary home of writing studies, and I also thought that I wouldn't have enough resources for research nor would I have enough time, especially with the amount of teaching I was doing there, if I had stayed in Nepal. Therefore, after the preparation of about two years, I traveled to Tucson, Arizona, in fall 2017 to join the PhD program in Rhetoric, Composition, and the Teaching of English at the University of Arizona, leaving my wife and children back in Nepal.

As I left for grad school, I thought I was prepared for the challenges it would bring. What I didn't realize is that being mentally prepared for challenges doesn't mean being immune to them. But it didn't take that long. Just a few weeks into a euphoric and disorienting first semester, I began to feel the heat. A major source of discomfort came with a realization that language difference is a much bigger issue than I had ever imagined. Being a speaker of the dominant variety of Nepali and a teacher of English in a society where it enjoys huge socioeconomic capital as an international language, I did not have the experience of being on the margin. But it all changed when I was the only international student in the classroom. No amount of cordiality on the part of the faculty and my classmates was enough to eradicate my sense of insecurity. At times, I even felt paralyzed due to excessive self-censoring. And I grew more insecure when I got to know about the professional development activities that fellow graduate students would frequently talk about because I had very little experience in this area.

But unlike my classmates, I had two master's degrees and more than a decade of experience teaching. Yet I constantly struggled to view myself as a scholar. Like Callie Womble Edwards, I believed that "scholars were always confident, always on-point, always perfect" (28). I always thought I was a student but not a scholar yet. In other words, I was experiencing imposter syndrome, which Pauline Rose Clance and

Suzanne Ament Imes first defined as “an internal experience of intellectual phoniness” (241).

In the next few weeks and months, I experienced almost all the clinical symptoms of imposter syndrome, such as “generalized anxiety, lack of self-confidence, depression, and frustration related to inability to meet self-imposed standards of achievement” (Clance and Imes 242). But I remained determined to work toward my goal, no matter what. In my first graduate seminar, I decided to use the final project as an opportunity to draft a research proposal for a qualitative case study in the hope of gaining some first-hand experience with research. I wanted to do some research work before getting to the dissertation phase, so I continued to work on it. But things did not always go as planned, and the data analysis part took much longer than I had expected.

Eventually, I was able to submit a proposal to CCCC 2021. By now, I was working on other projects in my coursework, but I yearned to be a part of the largest annual convention of rhetoric and writing studies, a discipline that I had joined not so long before. This entire process was my attempt to do what David Bartholomae called inventing the (American) university by “assembling and mimicking its language while finding some compromise between idiosyncrasy, a personal history, on the one hand, and the requirement of convention, the history of discipline, on the other hand” (524). I think I was looking for a sense of belonging to the discipline—reassurance that I, too, was engaging in the same work as others, and that my contribution mattered to the field. Fortunately, it came with my panel presentation and recognition with a Scholars for the Dream Travel Award.

I decided to apply for the Documentarian position as well because I wanted to experience the conference to the fullest. As a first-time attendee, I had no experience with Cs, and it was taking place in an unprecedented time of a global pandemic. In any case, being a Documentarian prepared me better for the conference. Preflecting and reflecting before and after the events of each day made me more organized and deliberate about what I would do every day. The morning survey was useful to identify the goals and select the sessions for the day. I mostly followed the plan with a few exceptions. Although the reflection in the evenings was more productive, it was not always fun because of exhaustion and screen fatigue. But I completed most of them on the same night. One consistent theme that appears in my post-week reflection is the anxiety about technology. Since I relied on the shared internet at

my apartment complex, the connection was sometimes extremely weak because almost everyone was working from home. Also, learning to navigate the virtual conference platform was a new experience for me, and it took some time and effort. I was particularly concerned about the day of my presentation, but fortunately, everything went well, and I didn't have to use the backup internet data I had purchased on my phone.

But still, attending the virtual conference was not significantly different from my regular workdays because every day had been the same for over a year because of the pandemic. I had been doing all my work online as a student and an instructor. Because I was teaching asynchronous classes, I was able to prepare and schedule the lessons in a way that wouldn't require me to be available all the time. Besides, I was living alone in a studio apartment which had become my only living and workspace. So, the four days of the conference were not much different at least at the physical level except for waking up earlier than usual, partly because of the different time zone (the conference would start at 8 a.m. Arizona time), and for getting the drinks and meals ready and dressing fully and formally. Other than that, it was the usual routine during the COVID-19 pandemic—sitting in front of the computer screen. Yet emotionally, it was anything but usual.

Because of my medical condition, I was taking additional precautions against COVID, which means I hadn't had much human interaction for months. Such forced solitude was emotionally challenging in many ways. I experienced conflicting emotions: frustration over the lost freedom and a canceled trip home for the summer, stress over the challenges and complexities of teaching and studying online, and fear and anxiety about my own and my family's health on one hand, and a sense of privilege and gratitude for being able to work and learn safely from home on the other. However, it was not only during the pandemic that I was emotionally challenged; the pandemic just made it worse. As an international graduate teaching assistant (IGTA), I had been experiencing the feeling of being "trapped by invisible forces in difficult pedagogical relationships and the subsequent emotional drain" on many occasions (Zhang 11). But I did not let the challenges and frustrations get the better of me and continued to work at my own pace. What I didn't do, though, was meaningfully reflect on my struggles and hardships and the feelings and emotions associated with them until I served as a Documentarian. It may be the reason why my reflection as a Documentarian is not limited only to the four days of conference.

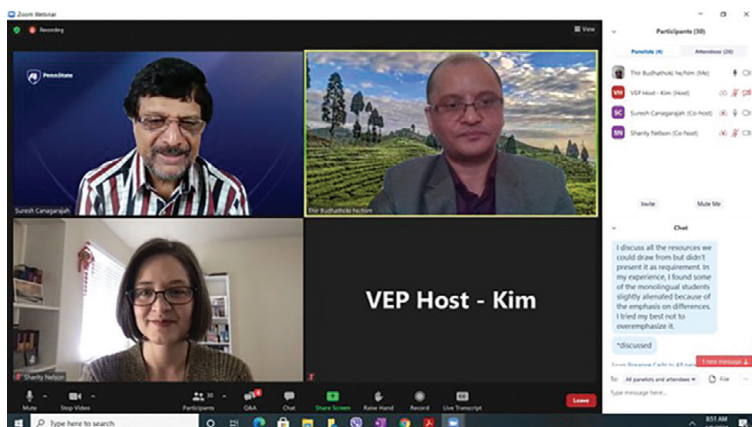


Figure 6.1. Presenting with co-panelists Suresh Canagarajah and Sharity Nelson.

When I sat down to reflect, I couldn't help but go back to my first graduate seminar where I had developed my proposal for the qualitative case study I was presenting. Through this reflection, I was able to connect my experience of the initial days as a grad student navigating a new space with the present moment of presenting at a national conference. First and foremost, my role as a Documentarian gave me a sense of worth as it allowed me to contribute meaningfully to the conference. When I reflected on the day I presented alongside renowned scholars in the field (see Fig. 6.1) and participated in a Q&A session, I realized that the work I was doing mattered to the field and I was in the process of building my scholarship.

Likewise, attending multiple sessions under different themes and categories and reflecting on the overall experience of the day helped me check my rigid and perfectionist notion of *scholar* and *scholarship* that each piece of work we share must be flawless. I developed a more realistic and pragmatic understanding of scholarship, an understanding that we all are creating knowledge from different spaces and positionalities, and it is an ongoing process. Sharing our research projects in whatever stage or form they are at the moment is an act of participating in a conversation and co-constructing knowledge with fellow scholars. My new understanding of scholarship was further strengthened when I reflected on the reception for the Scholars for the Dream Travel Award (see Fig. 6.2).



Figure 6.2. Reception of Scholars for the Dream Travel Award.

Sitting among the first-time presenters selected for the award, learning about each other's works, and being recognized for the work I was doing gave me the much-needed sense of belongingness I had long been looking for.

The more I reflected on the conference experience, the clearer it became that the imposter syndrome I was experiencing came from my faulty notion of who a scholar is. It was my rigid and perfectionist outlook that had created a false binary of student versus scholar. I realized that there is no specific point where a student ends and a scholar begins and that I need to embrace a new definition of scholar. In Callie Womble Edwards's words, a scholar is:

Someone who consistently strives to learn while concurrently educating others. Scholars embody the spirit of the expression "lifting as you climb." They come from a wide variety of socioeconomic backgrounds, including races, ethnicities, cultures, and religions. Scholars can gain their education formally or informally, and engage in a variety of ways of learning and knowing. No matter the concept, some scholars get "it" on the first try, and other scholars need several opportunities to grasp "it." Nevertheless, scholars persist. Scholars think inside, outside, and around the box. Scholars make mistakes, scholars grow, and sometimes failure is a part of the process that brings about a scholar's evolution. Ultimately, scholars decide what success and failure look like for them. (31)

However, this is not to say that these ideas were completely new to me. I was aware of most of them in theory, but the critic inside me was so strong that I was never comfortable putting them into practice. My active participation in CCCC 2021 as a presenter, a Documentarian, and an award recipient allowed me to engage in extensive reflection on my conference experiences and internalize these ideas in a way that is so liberating. It also helped me come to terms with my dual role as an international graduate student and writing instructor navigating a different academic space and culture, and identify the creative tensions it embodies. Now I fully embrace my positionality as one who dwells on what Gloria Anzaldúa would call the “borderlands” where confusion and contradictions give intense pain but offer creative possibilities as well. I have become more accepting of the confusions and contradictions and developed a more positive outlook on my individual and academic lives, thinking that “our greatest disappointments and painful experiences—if we can make meaning out of them—can lead us toward becoming more of who we are” (68).

Although this process of self-actualization was long overdue, I am glad that I was able to attain it in a productive way by means of active participation in CCCC 2021.

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Dear Analeigh

Analeigh Horton

People tend to think that I have my act together. I meet deadlines, serve on committees, hold teaching and administrative graduate assistantships, maintain a 4.0 GPA, and actively participate in the larger scholarly community. My work as a 2021 CCCC Documentarian is a perfect example of my involvement. I originally signed up to be a Documentarian because, after a year of fully online conferences due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I knew that it was harder for me to engage with these conferences in the ways that I used to when we met in person. I felt a bit embarrassed by my online participation's diminished enthusiasm because, as someone who has her act together, I should be able to pay attention in sessions and go to multiple plenaries, right? Imagine us being in person (or, rather, remember what it used to be like). We paid for flights, hotels, meals, and hefty registrations; we canceled our at-home and in-office responsibilities.

Now, imagine someone going through all that effort only to stay mostly in their room and, in the small handful of sessions they did attend, spend more energy managing their inbox than mindfully listening to the presenters. This would not seem like someone who had her act together—it would more likely seem like someone who was wasteful—but this had become my online conference M.O. I would book my calendar like any other week because I wasn't "really gone" and consequently have a pile of work to do in addition to engaging with a conference.

Taking the time to learn yet another online platform with each new conference was exhausting. Dealing with technical glitches and time zone math was annoying. The online spaces were not the same sites of rejuvenation with scholarly friends that in-person conferences had been. All of this is to say, I had a feeling and a hope that serving as a Documentarian would help hold me more accountable to participating in this online conference more deeply and meaningfully than I had been at others. I went into the 2021 CCCC with this mindset: ready, motivated, excited to learn, and anxious to get back to an engaged conference routine.

Five days before the conference began, the spouse of a faculty member found me alone and propositioned me, telling me that they had discussed “consensual nonmonogamy.” I felt shell-shocked. Time stood still. I tried to make sense of what had happened but could barely begin to even look at all the pieces that felt shattered around me. I felt completely betrayed, entirely unsafe, and not at all sure of what was true. You know the part of action movies where the bomb goes off? I felt as though I had become the main character flung to the ground, vision blurred, injuries oozing. The only sounds I could hear were the ringing in my ears and the blood rushing to my head. My fear and vulnerability were palpable as dust swirled in the air. There was no clear indication of which way to move, and I wasn’t even sure if I could. Like a camera spinning around me, adding to my confusion, I felt dizzy and as if every eye was watching to see what I would do next. I asked myself the same question, wondering how to get to safety, how to survive.

All of my energy, including that which was dedicated to the conference, got diverted to just making it through the day. I felt wholly alone; I was not sure who I could talk to or who I could trust. I had been blindsided. I entered into a psychological paralysis. The hour-long session with my therapist and cross-country call to my mentor were not nearly enough to heal my gaping emotional wound. Still, I showed up to meetings. I attended classes. I went to my graduate assistantships and part-time job. My eyes glazed over in disassociation as I staggered through these motions, but trying to return to some sense of normalcy was my method of self-preservation.

Thus, I tried to attend the conference.

My plan for the Documentarian role to be my accountability was foiled as it instead turned into a nuisance of one more thing I had to do when, really, all I wanted to do was to crawl into bed and never wake up. Frightening depression had replaced my normal exuberance. If I were not feeling lousy enough, this sense of dread regarding my Documentarian role was embarrassing. This was not the feeling that I was supposed to have; it was certainly not the feeling that someone who has her act together would have. When I thought about needing to do my twice-daily survey responses describing my conference participation, I considered lying. If the Documentarian organizers had known that *this* was the spirit with which I would fulfill my responsibility, they would have never picked me. If *this* was the spirit that I knew I would bring to the role, I would never have signed up. Even

now, as I write this for the collection, knowing that the editors have asked for authentic stories, my anxiety wails in fear that *this* is not the authentic story they are looking for.

What I realized, though, was that even though this story is not pretty, and it is not the story I was planning to tell, it is still *my* story. I reflected on this messiness in my summative reflection at the end of the Conference:

I don't even need to look back at my survey responses to know that the week of CCCC was one of the worst weeks of my life. The onslaught of one crisis after the next made it incredibly difficult to focus or function. Multiple times, I considered stepping away from this Documentarian position because I felt like I was not doing a very good job with it.

My responses were almost always late (which is highly, highly uncharacteristic of me), and I felt that, because I wasn't attending as many sessions as I possibly could squeeze into a day, I wasn't providing a good reflection of the typical conference experience. I stuck with the role, though, because I realized that what I was experiencing was an authentic experience. Conferences may get planned years in advance, but a lot of the things we experience in a given day (particularly crisis events) aren't planned out. They are unexpected and, all too often, seem to happen at the most inconvenient times. Still, we embrace the capitalist-driven guilt culture in academia of not working hard enough, even when we're pretty much all trying our best.

Personally, I have always tried to make my best *the* best. I have a particularly competitive nature, I joke that "Type A" is named after me, Analeigh, and I use my strong work ethic to reach the high standard to which I hold myself. I did not need anyone else to tell me that I was not working hard enough at Cs because I was already berating myself. On top of that, I was angry that the trauma had happened in the first place. I felt I had done nothing to deserve what had happened to me and it was now negatively impacting every facet of my life. It was not fair. Despite desperately wanting to overcome and move on, I was incapacitated, and I knew that where I was at was not mine or anyone else's best.

But, unfortunately, it was where I was at. I continued my reflection:

I stuck in the role to show that even someone who seems to have it all together all the time can have a really crappy week that can

become debilitating. Even as I write this, I am nowhere close to resolving the issues that have happened over the past couple weeks and they will continue to affect my personal and professional lives. Just because the conference ended doesn't mean that life will end. I will still be carrying my burdens and some other obligation will step in to take CCCC's place and I'll feel guilty all over again about not working hard enough. Stress, at least for me, is riddled with a bunch of emotions. I am constantly bouncing back and forth between throwing myself into my work, panicking, staring at the ceiling, and fielding the next crisis. All the while, I'm trying to heal, and I'm trying to focus so I don't end up terribly behind.

Writing now, knowing that what I write is the reality of life, I still feel hesitant to publish my truths. Sending this to the editors, putting it out there to complete strangers, knowing that peers, coworkers, and advisors may read it is scary, even terrifying. I fear that some future employer might read this and leave with the impression that Analeigh is someone who freaks out and can't do a good job. I worry that I am opening up lines of questioning that I am not ready or willing to answer. At the same time, I am reminded of what my therapist tells me "fear" stands for: False Evidence Appearing Real. I can work myself up into anxiety that all of these hypothetical situations will materialize, or I could channel that energy into writing that life is not perfect. I write from the positionality of a graduate student, recognizing that my status is particularly precarious, but also hope that my admission resonates with people at all stages of their careers because life's perils do not stop once you achieve tenure.

I am therefore going to transition this piece into a letter of compassion. I am going to write to myself as an exercise in bringing myself to believe that the words I write actually do apply to me. I am going to write to you to appeal to your humanity in recognition that we are actual living, breathing people behind our publications and presentations. Because of strenuous review processes, academia has a way of making it seem like the "perfect" version of something is all that exists. In this way, we believe that the commonplace (to invoke the 2021 CCCC theme) is a place of perfection. However, the journal articles that we read, carefully revised, fail to show us the years and tears that went into them. Those beautifully designed conference slides fail to reflect the stress that went into homeschooling three children

online during a pandemic. The glamorous headshots on faculty bio pages do not picture the struggles of mental illness happening inside someone's brain. The commendations for masterful leadership of committees and task forces do not acknowledge the fractured relationships with colleagues I had once called friends. Those glowing teaching evaluations do not uncover the sleepless nights spent listening to imposter syndrome. Academia's reality—our reality—is that, even though we have made the commonplace seem utopian, our common experiences can actually be quite raw. I encountered this bifurcation when I felt a duty to present my most perfected professional self as a representative of CCCC at the same moment that I seemed to be losing my grip on the side of a cliff or fumbling in the pitch blackness at the bottom of a well. I had thought that I understood my identity of scholar and felt confident navigating my role until I realized that even in this “common” place, my sense of safety had been replaced by disorientation and isolation. I therefore wrote that

I guess, to conclude, my role as Documentarian made me confront my own humanity and imperfections. My journey felt bumpy and not good enough, but I'm putting it out there because I think it is real enough.

As I transition to my letter, I'll share with you that when one of my best friends read an earlier draft, her feedback was that it sounded more like someone I wanted to become than someone who I truly believed I am. My response was that it sounded that way because it was true. The author of the letter you're about to read is wise, but most days, I don't feel wise. In truth, in the couple of months since I drafted this letter, I have come back to it, often at night in bed when there are no other noises to overpower the anxious thoughts in my mind, needing to hear these words of assurance. The journey to healing, both personally and as a field centered upon perfection, is not linear and is not easy. I do not claim to have it all figured out and certainly not all resolved, but each day I come closer to fully believing in myself. My hope for this letter is that it sees its reader struggling with the realities of life, from the most mundane to the least expected, and encourages them to keep going.

Dear Analeigh,

Let me start by telling you that I am really proud. Just this morning,

you sat across the table of a coffee shop with tears in your eyes telling your advisor that you should probably drop out of school because you weren't good enough to be here. You're not working hard enough, publishing enough, presenting enough, and maybe it's just been your "womanly wiles" that have gotten you this far anyway, you said.

You didn't feel good enough to be a Documentarian, either. A couple sessions a day were all you could do and even that felt agonizing. But at the same time as the conference, you managed to complete coursework, fulfill your responsibilities for two administrative assistantships, go to your part-time job, and, looking back at your calendar, I see you even attended *two* professional development events! Was this mostly because you were in the denial stage of grief and did not want to alert anyone that anything was wrong? Yes, but you still did it. Even in a moment when you felt you were your worst, you still did what, in that moment, was your best. And guess what? You survived!

Now that we have had some time to distance from the trauma, let's reflect on how being a Documentarian demonstrated that you are an empowered, kickass woman.

You persevere. Even in the most unexpected of circumstances, you do not give up. You faced a situation that was designed to make you feel powerless in its masterful manipulation. When you could have given in or given up, you instead chose to rise to the occasion. No, you did not always turn your Documentarian survey responses in on time or go to every CCCC session that was available, but it would be more productive to focus not on what you didn't do but instead on what you did accomplish. You collaborated with a co-presenter. You recorded a presentation.

You responded to emailed questions about your topic from respected scholars in the field who were interested in what you know. You watched panels about your research topics, and you are going to be a better scholar, teacher, and administrator for it. You completed each of your Documentarian duties. You made a commitment to that role, and you stuck with it. Sometimes, it is okay to quit. Maybe it just isn't the right fit, or you've bitten off more than you can chew. I am not saying that your perseverance locks you into doing all the things all the time. What I am saying, though, is that you are strong, and you can do whatever you set your mind to. You persevere.

You are brave. I know that you did not particularly enjoy writing all of those Documentarian survey responses. Once you decided that you

were going to be honest about how each of your days went, that meant you had to actually be honest, which meant you had to disclose in a Google Form read by strangers that you perceived to be very important authorities that you were not The World's Best Documentarian™. As someone who likes to be really good at things, it was really hard for you not to be good at this. However, something you need to remember is that they did not ask you to be The World's Best Documentarian™. They asked you to share your conference experience, which you did, and that, unexpectedly, ended up being really courageous. It is also important to note that you did not create this Documentarian archive and then seal it away. Although you needed to set it aside for a few months to let the initial shock of trauma die down, here you are now, rereading and thus living again one of the most challenging weeks of your life. Not only are you confronting this account for yourself, but you are also sharing it with an unknown audience. I appreciate you recognizing that this story that feels deeply personal to you is actually one that might resonate with many others, and you are thus putting it out there to be read, even though it feels really tough. You are brave.

You are compassionate. You are telling your story of trauma and imperfection, making a space for others to do the same. You are being kind to yourself by allowing yourself to live authentically and not hide behind a curated mask. Writing this piece feels like a great example of something hurting worse before it feels better, but I promise that by acknowledging the hurt and speaking to yourself with care and acceptance, the hurt will eventually fade into a scar that is beautiful in its reminder of your strength. As you share your story, you demonstrate gentleness by releasing yourself from presenting a perfected persona. You must be willing to forgive yourself for not living up to your expectations, and you should remember that perfection is never an attainable goal. Yes, you have been enculturated to believe that prioritizing your own well-being is hippie, hokey, and self-absorbed, but you know that you would never criticize a friend in the way you lambaste yourself. In spite of others trying to steal your joy and dim your fire, you still have love in your heart that you are capable of giving to others and to yourself. You are compassionate.

You are wise. You have learned from this experience and will carry it with you. Cs was intended to teach you about college composition and communication. Not only did you learn about this but, because of your narrating as a Documentarian, you have also learned so much

more. You entered academia because you wanted to be able to mentor students. Through this opportunity, you have documented that academia is much more than discussing reading in salons whilst wearing tweed with elbow patches. To be in academia means that you still have a ton of reading and discussing to do, but it also means managing complex relationships and external life circumstances. As a Documentarian for an online conference, you clearly articulated how challenging it is to fully participate when there is so much else whirling around you, like the literal obligations of teaching and working as well as the emotional and psychological stress we endure. You have learned more about what you do, who you are, and how you can encourage others. You are not keeping these lessons of life to yourself; you are sharing them with the world that cares about what you have to say. You have been reassured of your motivation to mentor, and you have been galvanized to be kind, honorable, and sincere. You are wise.

You are a writer. You have looked back on your Documentarian reflections and seen that writing them was a space for you to process your pain. Cs was not created to be a therapeutic event but, in a way, it allowed you a space to escape, even if only for a session at a time. The Documentarian surveys were not designed knowing you would use them as a diary for your trauma, but they gave you a reason and a place to write even when you did not want to confront what you were going through. Now, they are a chronicle for you to reflect upon months later and be grateful for the progress you have made. The pen is mightier than the sword and here you have demonstrated the power of words, your writing better analogized by a paintbrush rendering a story of redemption. Your words document. Your words heal. You are a writer.

Dear sister, I hope you believe this narrative that is a testament of your courage. In her 2021 CCCC Chair's Address, Julie Lindquist writes:

Inspired by the disruptions occasioned by the pandemic and the writings of Documentarians, I consider, in my Address, these questions: If we are living in a time characterized primarily by loss, how might the experience of that, and the lessons we can't help but discover, deliver something like gains for the future? And: what is to be gained by understanding learning in terms of loss? ... Trauma and grief have a way of interfering with learning,

of redefining its terms. ... I urge us to consider the losses—of stability, of identity, of enabling narratives, of community relations. (27)

As a Documentarian, you have considered your loss. At the time, you thought what you had lost was your sense of self. Now, what you can realize that you have really lost (or at least made progress toward losing) is a set of unrealistic expectations and the belief that you are not good enough. I hope you will continue to reflect upon this reality that you *are* enough. This will not be easy, so I hope you return to this letter to remember. Remember that you persevere, that you are brave, compassionate, and wise, and that you are a writer. Remember that these qualities transcend any trauma you might face. You may not be The World's Best Documentarian™, but you are awesome. Don't forget that. And, to quote your mentor, "I'm just going to keep telling you until you believe me."

With love,

Me—Analeigh Elizabeth Horton

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The New Harriet Tubmans of the Same Beloved Underground Railroad: Notes for Future Essays Needed in the Present

Shelagh Patterson

REFLECTION ON A PAST SELF IN THE PRESENT

I am sitting in my kitchen. I was supposed to teach in person today. Too tired. Ill. Infected. Not with COVID-19. The root cause is probably the historical knowledge of slavery in my bones activated by state violence. The symptom is a sinus infection that may have just dropped to the chest. This weekend, I hang out with my past self as I try to heal my present self, if we want to approach time as linear.

Last year, I did a whole performance for my Documentarian essay, basking in the gift of time that was the pandemic for some of us. Last year the documentation was the conference so all that josh for the conference went to the essay. This year was so different because life was busy again and going on all around the conference. And that is something to document—what that looked like being at a virtual conference more than a year into lockdown to help curb the spread of a virus during a global pandemic in the time of the teleport. This year I found being a Documentarian while attending the conference hard because I wanted to put the same amount of energy, focus, and discipline into writing the surveys as I had put last year, but the material realities of my life had changed. I couldn't access a place of vulnerability and argument. I could only delay.

And then something else happened that makes linear time challenging:

A PORTAL THE GENRE OF PUNCTUM

The punctum is a process in Roland Barthes's *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments* that Chela Sandoval, in a move some may find controversial, gives us as a framework in *Methodologies of the Oppressed*, her guide for revolutionary action. For Barthes and Sandoval, the problem with love is the Western narrative. The lovers are thought of in a binary relationship controlled by the narrative of falling in love. When love

is reciprocal, you act; when love is not reciprocal, the lover, to remain “healthy,” must renounce. Barthes, a Westerner himself, interrupts the narrative of falling in love with a third way: acceptance of the pine as another mode of action that Barthes refers to as drifting:

Turning thus from narrative’s comforts and limits, from love’s “Western” modes, Barthes searches for the punctum, he finds what is “obtuse,” he gives himself over, he drifts “on the intractable bliss that beckons” in that place of life that survives outside and between narrative forms, where meanings live in some free, yet marked and wounded space, a site of shifting, morphing meanings that transform to let him in. (Sandoval 143)

In Western binaries, the lovers exist in a dialectical relationship. If one is pining, the pined-for is in a place of narrative power. The pine is seen as abject, a subject-position to be avoided. For Barthes, however, the pine has value as it allows us to move beyond a system of freedom and power predicated on the relationship between oppressor and oppressed. When we submit to the pine, we submit to drifting and can learn alternate relationships to power. As Sandoval explains, “[t]he act of falling in love can thus function as a ‘punctum,’ that which breaks through social narratives to permit a bleeding, meanings unanchored and moving away from their traditional moorings . . . It is love that can access and guide our theoretical and political ‘*movidas*’—revolutionary maneuvers toward decolonized being” (Sandoval 141).

I love the punctum, the drifting, as a process of revolutionary decolonial love. Through the punctum, Sandoval offers us a path to freedom. The punctum is a portal that “can make anything possible” (Sandoval 141).

THE PROBLEM IS THE ABUSIVE STATE

I’m in New Jersey. So, if we’re talking child protection services, which we are, the department has its official name and its vernacular. These two different names also signal how hegemony would want time to be linear while the people who live within the bounds of democratic state bureaucracy use language in more dynamic ways.

Once upon a time, child protective services in New Jersey was called the Division of Youth and Family Services . . . DYFS (pronounced dyfus). DYFS was a horror of Candyman proportions and not all that long ago they overhauled the system and changed their name to

Department of Child Protection and Permanency (DCP&P). However, at least here in Newark, we still call them DYFS, which signals that a name change does not necessarily mean system change.

When I became a foster parent, I had heard wonderful things about the transformation and referred to the agency as DCP&P with naïve bureaucratic pride. The state, however, was a force of violence in my home. They created false narratives and ignored protocol because they were scared of the child's family. I had a connection to the child's family, and the state used my transparency against me. Eight months after the child was placed in my home, she was abruptly removed.

**STATE VIOLENCE IS A PUNCTUM THAT ALLOWS ENTRY
TO A PLACE OF FREEDOM**

I tried to accept that the state thought that they were acting in the best interest of the child, even if it meant ignoring the protocol it created to act in the best interest of a child. I did trust that they had a vision that would result in a permanent placement, but something happened, and their vision didn't work. Maybe that something was the pandemic. I do not know. All I know is that this summer I found out that three years later, the child is still not adopted.

And this is a crux of the challenges of this essay. When time is linear, then this past self in the surveys does not yet know that the child hasn't been adopted. But in reflection, time does not feel linear. The self that wrote the surveys is in an alternate dimension living in a false state-mandated reality. The self who is writing in this essay knows that as fact. The dimension that the self who is writing this essay is in is "within, yet beyond" the control of state mandate (Sandoval 44).

In 2018, I wasn't prepared for the state to add a new layer of trauma on a child in service of their vision because they have the power to do so. I was not prepared for them to sabotage a placement because of their fear, but that I know they did.

When I returned to 2018, through a punctum in 2021, I understand the first thing to do is to retain a lawyer to perform in the dialectic state power demands so that I can remain free.

**THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD PREDATES
ALTHUSSER'S BEYOND**

Part of the cooptation of the Underground Railroad is the singularity of Tubman. There are many names who created the Underground Railroad, we remember but one. So, let's say Tubman is a role that anyone

can inhabit and several do—not just as a stop on the railroad but with an understanding of the network as an ever expanding and changing whole.

Not too long ago, my nephew was talking to his friend Money who's inside; my nephew is outside on a bracelet. My nephew told me how his friend Money said how we need a Harriet Tubman—and me (who drove to the jail and picked up and brought my nephew home and plugged in the monitor in the back-upstairs bedroom to give him more freedom of movement in the backyard than on the front stoop) and him both know that my house is a stop on the underground railroad his mother, Harriet Tubman, envisioned for her kids.

The thing about the present and the problem with linear time can be understood with Jim Crow. Michelle Alexander wrote the book that connects the present prison industrial complex as an extension of Jim Crow, and we all know Jim Crow was a way to write the horrors of slavery into the functions of our democracy.

If we follow the news, child protective services is a myth. The phrase is most associated with family separation—its Jim Crow function, the same function of the slave markets (Roberts). Protecting a child I love who is caught up in the system is a priority.

Slavery is our present. Time is not linear.

THE CCCC/NCTE BLACK CAUCUS IS A HARRIET TUBMAN

Wednesday was the first day of the conference. After Zumba powered by Lalita with Usha and Ximena in my bedroom, I went downstairs to my dining room turned pandemic classroom and office to attend “A Black Lives Matter/Critical Race Theory-Based, Culturally Responsive, Antiracist, and Race Radical Literacies LPC Workshop for Black Teachers of Writing and Co-Conspirators.” The workshop was a call to use “This Ain’t Another Statement! This is a DEMAND for Black Linguistic Justice!” to restructure writing assessment. The demand is a beautiful multimodal manifesto. At its heart, the “DEMAND” is a critique on the limits of statements and an acknowledgment of the insufficient impact the decades of statements and resolutions have on “widespread systemic change in curricula, pedagogical practices, disciplinary discourses, research, language policies, professional organizations, programs, and institutions within and beyond academia!” It starts with detailing the current historical and sociopolitical context in “a pandemic that is disproportionately infecting and killing Black people... [and] ongoing

#BlackLivesMatter protests across the United States in response to anti-Black racist violence and murders.” The second paragraph is a “role call” (Medina, Bashir, and Lansana) of previous CCCC/NCTE resolutions and positions related to language variety since the 1974 “Students’ Right to Their Own Language” resolution. The third paragraph quotes and hyperlinks the updated CCCC statement on Ebonics to connect the relationship of valuing Black language to valuing Black life.

The rest of the “DEMAND” lists the demands first as a group, and then each demand is elaborated in its own section. The manifesto ends with a coda that seeks to funnel the energy from the summer’s BLM protest to our academic work. These are the demands of CCCC/NCTE Black Caucus:

1. teachers stop using academic language and standard English as the accepted communicative norm, which reflects White Mainstream English!
2. teachers stop teaching Black students to code-switch! Instead, we must teach Black students about anti-Black linguistic racism and white linguistic supremacy!
3. political discussions and praxis center Black Language as teacher-researcher activism for classrooms and communities!
4. teachers develop and teach Black Linguistic Consciousness that works to decolonize the mind (and/or) language, unlearn white supremacy, and unravel anti-Black linguistic racism!
5. Black dispositions are centered in the research and teaching of Black Language!

I, probably like many of you, was taught racial slavery was a thing of the distant past. But like some of us, I’ve come to realize time is not linear and the historical moment of slavery continues to be a hegemonic force in our own present. Octavia Butler in *Kindred* creates that temporal framework when her protagonist lives two intertwined lives in two different temporal dimensions—one in our contemporary moment and one in our historical moment of slavery. The way time works is that both dimensions are our present, and Butler creates a framework to hold that reality. The moment the state swept in and removed a child from my home suddenly with just a half-hour notice, I felt my ancestral knowledge in my bones of the commonplace of family separation. Similarly, Michelle Alexander helps us see slavery as a present presence in our contemporary prison industrial complex,

which she argues is a new Jim Crow. Jim Crow is a set of legislation to continue the disenfranchisement and economic exploitation of Black workers through systemic anti-Black racial violence. If we accept prisons as Jim Crow, then as we pull out our lenses to see the larger bureaucratic support of Jim Crow, our schools are another location of Jim Crow bureaucracy, where the system is designed for some schools to be a pipeline for prisons. That's what's so important about these demands for Black Linguistic Justice. The demands tackle institutional change on a root level—our language—and exhort us to make our classrooms, programs, and even institutions part of the Underground Railroad that my nephew's friend Money is calling for.

FOLDS

This sense of time's folds, which may be challenging for some to feel in relation to our contemporary moment of racial slavery in the United States, may be more accessible through a discussion of Bump Halbritter's presentation on the prerecorded panel with live Q&A "Uncommon Places: The Recording Studio as Compositional Space" that I attended in my bedroom right after zoomba on Saturday afternoon. Halbritter presented on different performances of the Sting song, "I Burn for You." While Halbritter organized his discussion using a linear chronology of the different performances of the song (starting with the earliest and ending with the most recent), what we begin to understand is that the way we hear the earlier versions changes through a knowledge of all the different temporal folds—so the time of the song, whichever version you hear, contains multiple moments in a linear chronology. The earliest version contains the most recent version and vice versa.

So, if something happened this summer for me that returns me to 2018, then when I reflect on my surveys from April 2021, I am looking at a future self—but I would say the self in the surveys from April 2021 is in a different dimension because of the punctum of state violence.

In the summer of 2018, I surrendered to the power of the state to create peace around a child who I love with all my heart. She called me mommy. In the summer of 2021, I found out the vision the state had for her safety failed.

The dimension of advocating for a child, whom I love as my daughter and who loved me as her mother, against the vision of the state that desires us separated brings the affective history of chattel slavery held in my bones (Henay) to the forefront.

This is how the Jim Crow state functions: to continue the trauma of family separation as an attack on Black life of the magnitude of lynchings by police and a thriving school-to-prison pipeline.

MARY PRINCE DESCRIBES THE SLAVE MARKET

Oh dear! I cannot bear to think of that day,—it is too much.—It recalls the great grief that filled my heart, and the woeful thoughts that passed to and fro through my mind, whilst listening to the pitiful words of my poor mother, weeping for the loss of her children. I wish I could find words to tell you all I then felt and suffered. The great God above alone knows the thoughts of the poor slave's heart, and the bitter pains which follow such separations as these. All that we love taken away from us—Oh, it is sad, sad! and sore to be borne!—I got no sleep that night for thinking of the morrow; and dear Miss Betsey was scarcely less distressed. She could not bear to part with her old playmates, and she cried sore and would not be pacified.

— Mary Prince

In a similar style to Butler's *Kindred*, the television show *Siempre Bruja* also has slavery in the present. The portals are jewelry and sleep. *Westworld* does a similar folding that disrupts linear notions of time, the portal being technology. I have not yet read *The Handmaid's Tale*, but I did see all but the most recent season on streaming television. I appreciate the protagonist as a model for patience and long-game strategy for rescuing her daughter. I feel like I need that level of attention, discipline, and focus—I'm holding a dimensional reality under attack by the slavocracy of the new Jim Crow government that weaves the violence of slavery into bureaucratic praxis.

I know I am parenting differently this summer than I was this past spring because the feeling of doing everything wrong quiets in a reflection on the immense trust I have in processes of love and patience worthy of traveling an underground railroad. Trauma, a punctum, collapses linear time. Love is drifting. I am drifting.

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2022 DOCUMENTARIAN TALES

Neurodiversity, New Networks, and Conference Commonplaces

Jennifer Grouling

I guess I always felt like the world wasn't really designed for me, but before COVID-19, before a more fully virtual life, I thought the issue was *me* and not *the world*. Before that, life took place in person. That's just how it was. Not that there were many other options for me, growing up before the widespread use of the internet.

"In person" can be overwhelming for me. A crowded space is loud, invasive, and often provokes in me a low-level irritability and anxiousness. Even in the absence of people, electricity buzzes, machines hum; there is irritating noise everywhere. (And let's not even talk about the scents.... I still shudder at the thought of the lingering cologne scent a textbook rep once left behind in my WPA office.) Before COVID, I had a profound experience with a quiet room at a (nonacademic) conference. It's hard to describe the *relief* I felt entering that completely quiet space tucked away in the middle of a noisy group gathering. It was profound in a way that took me by surprise.

Likewise, a family cabin in Maine without electricity provoked in me a sense of calm I'd never fully known.

I passed these off as interesting experiences, unsure about their meaning. And then the world went virtual.

In 2020 there was no CCCC Convention, and in 2021, I didn't even try to plan for one. So, by CCCC 2022, I had become quite familiar with a virtual work-life. In both 2020 and 2022, I served in the Documentarian role. In this piece, I use my reflections from those years as touchpoints to explore coming to terms with my own neurodiversity and building new common places in a virtual world.

2020: ADJUSTING TO PANDEMIC LIFE

When the announcement came that classes were moving online, I cried: one of those big, ugly cries. I have difficulty with unexpected change. I also have a good deal of anxiety surrounding medical issues, not to mention second-hand medical trauma that was fresh from 2019

when I spent over a month of the year sleeping on hospital cots near loved ones.

In March 2020, all I knew was that COVID was real, we were going virtual, and I was scared. The CCCC Convention being canceled was on my radar, but certainly not the biggest of my worries. As Documentarians, we were asked to think about what our conference experience would have been like if the pandemic hadn't canceled it.

In-person CCCC was never about the presentations for me. After a couple of sessions, I had to step out of the humming hotel hallways. I never lingered at the parties. But my calendar filled with one-on-one coffees, dinners, and drinks. When completing the Documentarian survey on the opening day of CCCC, I wrote about the day I envisioned:

I'd be at the opening ceremony. I always love the speeches. I'd be presenting this afternoon. This evening I'd be going to the social hour from my PhD school and seeing all my friends. It would be a hugely social day.

That is how I had imagined my first day at CCCC 2020: "hugely social," and at that time "social" meant in person, and "friends" meant people I knew in person from grad school.

Instead, I was at home. My wife was also working from home, and we had to quickly adapt to working together in our open-floor-plan condo. In those early days, I remember huddling in the bathroom (the only room with a door) to take a phone call with my department chair while my wife had team-building games with her co-workers on Zoom.

I was panicked about COVID-19. I had just started high blood pressure medicine, and my doctor wanted me to come in for routine blood work. I did not feel remotely safe going to a doctor's office with a new, mysterious disease in the air. The office assured me that they were taking everyone's temperature, but there were no tests yet to see who actually had COVID-19. I wrote the following in my journal:

Then I get a message from dr. about coming in for routine BP and blood work and panic attack and an hour of crying. I don't feel capable. I'm starting to actually see anxiety as a disability—I can't function in this as well as I see others functioning. Maybe I can't function normally as well as others, and I've just been hiding it. I can't stop crying. I can't do much of anything. Literally

nothing seems safe or in control. That's what the new normal is. And it feels like exposure therapy for my anxiety or something, and maybe I'll come out better, but right now I just want to curl up and cry all day.

Although that day was one of the worst, my journaling from that week is filled with anxious thoughts from feeling responsible for others to being scared of dying alone to describing how I sterilized a grocery order delivered by a younger friend.

So when I say that I'm more comfortable, more productive, even more myself in a virtual world, it's not like that was a switch in my brain that someone activated overnight.

Yet, those early journals show signs of what was to come. I expressed joy at writing for the first time in weeks. I connected virtually with a WPA at a neighboring school about placement. I expressed relief at the quiet in my home. Slowly, I was building a new approach to my work and my life.

2021: THE BEST ONLINE YEAR

I did not apply to CCCC 2021. I knew there was no way I was flying to Washington state from the Midwest. I was angry, honestly, that an in-person conference was the plan. Meanwhile, as a WPA, I was fighting for more online classes, for GAs without health care to be granted online teaching to avoid risk. Sometimes I won; sometimes I lost.

But I was writing. Every day, I was writing. Working from home lent itself to a certain comfort, a routine that felt good to me. My wife went to work at 8:30 from home, and there was little avoiding the house being active then. So I, too, got up then, and wrote. It was the first time in a long time that I had a regular writing routine that I stuck to.

While I naturally missed my friends, I found that I had a growing network of online friends in writing studies on Twitter. I was not missing large gatherings of people at CCCC; I was craving more in-depth conversations with the colleagues I was interacting with day-to-day on Twitter.

On March 5, 2021, I tweeted the message shown in Figure 9.1.

Although I didn't end up organizing a party, I did reach out to at least five Twitter friends and scheduled one-on-one Zoom calls with them.



Figure 9.1. Screen capture of a Twitter post that reads “What if instead of a virtual CCCCs, I just organized a Zoom party to meet my Twitter friends ... ”

For a minute, let’s pretend that CCCC had been in person and that I was attending and that these individuals were also attending. I might go to one of their presentations; I *might* say hello and introduce myself. Maybe. Depending on how I was feeling and how many other people were around. It would have been one of those awkward hellos: “Um, yeah, I’m so-and-so, we’re, um Twitter friends. Nice presentation. Bye.” I know this because often the *C’s the Day* game has had a badge for meeting an online Twitter contact, and I don’t believe I have ever gotten this badge.

And yet, here I was, inviting these newfound friends to a 1-hr Zoom meeting, just the two of us. They all said yes.

We had great conversations. In one case, I had overlapping research interests with a junior scholar. In another, I had both professional and nonprofessional interests in common, and over the years we progressed from Twitter friends to someone I visited in person on a summer trip. One Twitter thread about D&D even led to a virtual gaming group that included both a senior scholar who I admired and a PhD student using the same methodology for her dissertation that I was using for my book. Suddenly, my connections in the field were more varied and diverse, spanning far beyond my previous “meet up with friends from grad school at CCCC” approach to professional contacts.

So, too, did my conference attendance diversify. While I didn’t go to CCCC virtually in 2021, I *was* attending conferences. I attended a

Zoom event put together by the Coalition for Feminist Scholars in the History of Rhetoric & Composition on “Witnessing Anti-Asian Racism and Rhetoric,” an event I learned about through Twitter. I went to a national assessment conference that I otherwise wouldn’t have attended.

Virtual conferencing did take some getting used to. While at the assessment conference, I tweeted about how it felt odd to be both “there” and “here”—at a conference but also continuing with day-to-day work, such as committee meetings. But there were ways that it also mirrored the face-to-face experience for me. I tweeted:

So far at the virtual conference, I missed the first session to make my profile and upload the right pic, was late to the second session b/c it was 2:15 today and 2:30 tomorrow, and shouted and waved wildly when I saw an old friend at the 3rd session. So pretty comparable to IRL.

Yet, I was beginning to find a new sense of confidence in this environment. And it wasn’t only in virtual conferencing. I found that I really connected with teaching asynchronously online. In my undergraduate rhetoric course, I built an assignment on invitational rhetoric based on one done by Sharon Yam (again, something I learned about on Twitter and then read more about). I wrote:

I’ve prioritized human connection in my class this semester, and the majority of my students have been on board. They have given so much to each other that is so beautiful. And it’s happening asynchronously online.

I even shared my own narrative as an example of the class, writing about topics I found difficult to speak on, sharing perspectives and pieces of myself I would have been unlikely to with twenty-five faces staring back at me. Although not statistically significant, I received the best course evaluations I’ve ever gotten. By the end of the semester, I tweeted about my sadness of abandoning this educational environment:

A year ago, I was profoundly sad when we went online. Now, I look at all I’ve done for my online classes, and I am profoundly sad to go back in fall.

It was a sadness that seemed only shared by my Twitter friends.

My administrative connections also flourished in this online space. I reached out to WPAs in my state and began forming our own CWPA

affiliate organization. This was put on pause when Asao Inoue's call for a CWPA boycott came out, just days after we had begun to draft bylaws for our new chapter. But it wasn't just this that put the group on hold; returning to face-to-face the following fall sucked the energy from me to continue leading this initiative.

2022: THE BEGINNING OF HYBRIDITY

I remember the beginning of the 2021–2022 school year, my return to face-to-face. I refused to go to the huge convocation in person, but instead watched the livestream. The university president heralded the return to the “genuine conversations” in the classroom while I donned a mask both literally and figuratively. I felt so awkward back in in-person classes. I worked with my office door shut, hiding, crying sometimes, but more often just going home as soon as I could. When the mask mandate went away just after spring break in 2022, I panicked when a colleague without a mask gave me a friendly “how are you?” shaking and telling her I was not okay, then feeling embarrassed afterward.

That year I returned to CCCCs but was thankful that it was virtual. I had done an NCTE on-demand presentation in fall that year, so my CCCCs on-demand presentation was my second. Rather than throwing together a script in an airport lobby or hotel room (yes, I was that person), I put a lot of energy into my video. And I *wanted* to. I felt confident speaking, knowing I could use the pause button as needed or re-record. Rather than a room of faces staring at me, I felt safe, secure, confident to say what I had to say.

I attended the main session, partly while eating lunch, partly while snuggling in bed with my wife, our work-from-home tradition over the lunch break. It felt a little weird watching it, knowing that no one could see me, not knowing who else was there. But it also was comforting watching in my own safe space.

I especially enjoyed watching on-demand sessions when I wanted, often speeding them up a bit or skipping over parts that I was less interested in. Face-to-face, I often avoided panels where I wanted to see only one of the presenters, finding it too much of a social faux pas to come late or leave early. Live online sessions, I found to be a bit more awkward, but I was more comfortable than face-to-face, writing in my Documentarian survey:

I get less anxious actually writing a question in the chat than I do asking one in a big group, but I still feel anxious afterwards if I asked something good or not or if the presenters took it right or not.

The particular week of CCCC was a challenge for me. Mentally, I was processing the death of a student who had died in a car crash the Friday before—the Friday before spring break, on his nineteenth birthday, after a fraternity party. The school didn't tell me about his passing until Monday, although my students did. But the school sure did tell me that mask mandates were gone as of the return from spring break, and that I could no longer require them in my classroom. Meanwhile, I missed the Anita Hill session at CCCC to take my eight-two-year-old father in for a minor medical procedure. All around me, life felt fragile.

I felt fragile.

My new sense of self felt fragile.

The year before, I had daydreamed about who I would be when I returned to face-to-face (see Fig. 9.2).

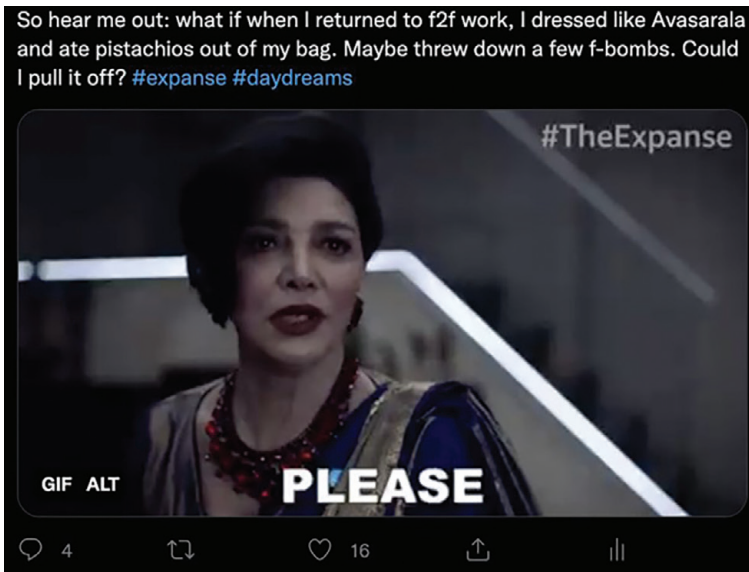


Figure 9.2. Screen capture of a Twitter post that reads “So hear me out; what if when I returned to f2f work, I dressed like Avasarala and ate pistachios out of my bag? Maybe threw down a few f-bombs? Could I pull it off? #expanse #daydreams”

For those unfamiliar with *The Expanse* (a sci-fi book and TV series), Chrisjen Avasarala is a powerful female political figure who speaks her mind freely, often with colorful expletives. She also wears bold and powerful, yet extremely fashionable, outfits.¹

Instead, I walked the halls looking at my feet, darted in and out of my closed office door, my anxious, embodied ways returning. On a daring day, I wore leggings with a long top, still recalling some anxiety from when I almost got detention for wearing leggings in high school.

Of course, my Avasarala side was still there, more than before. I might have dropped more f-bombs in meetings, sometimes in chat on Zoom, sometimes texting a friend during the meeting—backchannels not available in face-to-face counterparts.

And I finished writing my book, making the final revisions the same week as CCCC. My voice was there, and it was strong. A peer reviewer said my tone was “killing flies with a sledgehammer (in a good way).”

Yet, I now found myself split between my confident online self and an anxious, awkward, in-person self. And I found myself continually inundated with messages, like the one from the president of my university, telling me my face-to-face self was the real one, that this life was the “normal” one.

FINDING, NOT LABELING, MYSELF

While others frequently articulated their struggles with the pandemic life, with online teaching, virtual conferences, and Zoom fatigue, I had found a sense of confidence and self, an energy and productivity that I had never had before. I mourned (and still mourn) that 2021 may be the only year in which I am allowed to function in that virtual environment that clicked with my brain so well.

I searched for answers, reading about how autistics were more comfortable in Zoom environments, but also feeling like that identity did not fully fit my overall experiences. I attempted to explore it with my therapist, who suggested that Zoom fit with my introversion. Yet that possibility didn't seem quite right to explain the profoundness of the change. I know that I have a diagnosis of generalized anxiety disorder, but that feels vague and less than meaningful.

1. I should also note that Avasarala's style is also tied to her cultural Indian identity and for me to fully adopt it would be appropriation. Rather, it was the confidence of her style I dreamed of emulating.

I've come to think that the label isn't the important piece. Unlike me, my wife has a talent for accepting what is and often finds the "why" irrelevant. So, for now, I am adopting a curious stance, knowing that my experience is different than some, that it is neurodivergent in some form, but focusing more on what it means for me and my work life rather than for how I label myself. I have no desire to give in to what Allison Harper Hitt dubs the "rhetorics of overcoming," somehow overcoming my neurodivergent preferences to meet external definitions of success in a face-to-face world. I simply want to continue to *become*.

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Angst, Agency, and Longing: On (Re)Turning to Our Virtual Profession

Kimberly Thomas

It is Friday morning, March 8, 2022, a full day into the conference, or two days if you count the preconference workshops on Wednesday. The fatigue has already set in, and I wonder what I will accomplish today. Most Fridays are like this, especially when I think of getting back online on the very last day of my work week for a mandatory faculty meeting, one-on-one student conference, or, in this case, a presentation. I have been teaching all my New York University (NYU) courses online since mid-March 2020 when the COVID-19 global pandemic hit New York City and the official city-wide shutdown began. For some reason, I assumed that the 2022 Conference on College Composition and Communication Convention (Cs) would be different from the monotony and would not feel like an extension of my remote and distant life in a virtual fantasy that, at a fast pace, somewhat outdistanced my reality of being physically connected to anyone or anything. These days, turning on my flat-screen television seems to remedy the psychological malaise of being online. It is as if adding more technology is the “gateway drug” to relieving technological anxieties—the fear of being on(line) when you are not tuned in or mentally present. Consuming the latest reality television show, at least, informs me that the live action world is still as ridiculous as I remember and is not folded into a neat square pattern of sometimes repetitious virtual civility attempting to stand in the place of real-life, face-to-face angst and human bonding.

In the weeks leading up to the 2022 CCCC Convention, I began to reflect on how I ended up at this particular place in my professional life. I attended my first Conference on College Composition and Communication Convention in 2006, with the theme of “Composition in the Center Spaces: Building Community, Culture, and Coalitions,” and chaired the “Critical Theories for Questioning and Building Community” panel. I was in the second year of a dual doctoral program in rhetoric and composition, and Teaching English to

Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), at a state university in western Pennsylvania, about fifty miles outside of Pittsburgh. I did not have enough money in the way of funding to stay in the conference hotel in Chicago or any hotel. I received some research monies from my graduate school, which allowed me to pay for my conference registration fee and my round-trip ticket from the Pittsburgh International Airport to Chicago by way of Chicago Midway International Airport. Although financially strapped, I was excited to attend my first Cs. I stayed with my aunt in the Southside of Chi-town, taking the commuter train in the evenings and mornings back and forth to the conference hotel at the Palmer House Hilton in downtown Chicago. Having come off another doctoral program, which I failed to complete, but from which I received a master of arts in linguistics, I felt as though I was finally becoming a professional and starting to belong. This second attempt at a PhD, however, was not without some physical scars, mental angst, psychological trauma, and emotional baggage, having sacrificed my former self to be carved up into a unique professional identity that was now somewhat fragmented—a displaced Southern Black woman in a small northeastern Pennsylvania town studying English as a Second Language with classmates from all over the world, including Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, South Korea, and China. However, what began as a less familiar and unexpected journey, unbeknownst to me, became the path toward a new career.

It is Wednesday morning, March 6, 2022, and I am still nervous about my on-demand video presentation, “Why C.A.R.E. Matters: Building Community through Access, Respect, and Engagement,” for Cs. I have already submitted it, but I hope my message is transparent and my meaning is clear: Will my target audience of educators, researchers, scholars, and experts in my field appreciate what I have to say? Teaching writing courses online for nearly two years, including two summers teaching NYC rising high school juniors and seniors, meant making thousands of videos and Zoom recordings. However, I am still wary of this disconnected, discombobulated hyperspace in which we try to forge connections with other human beings we will never meet or interact with face to face. As I have considered my recent two-year stint in remote instruction, I have thought about how I have attempted to build virtual communities online and what this means. I was dealing with what I considered the “perfect storm.” I had been teaching first-year and advanced writing courses to international English as a Second

Language (ESL) undergraduate engineering students with different backgrounds, languages, and academic and linguistic abilities, during a global pandemic while contemplating how to deal with the effects of remote instruction and virtual learning while negotiating different time zones, often seven to thirteen hours apart. I wondered how remote education would impact belonging and how I could offer an inclusive teaching environment in this space. Further, I was curious about how virtual learning would impact *my* teaching of writing.

Since my first Cs, I have always been interested in what it means to build community. This notion took on another level of urgency during remote instruction since physical spaces between learners and their instructor were private and personal. We were all trying to create a place and carve out an IRL (in real life) location that allowed us to engage with one another and make our online existence more meaningful. Sometimes, I was privy to their hidden linguistic and literary ecosystems when having online one-on-one conferences with students. They spoke to me from apartment bathrooms for privacy, dorm rooms to avoid face-to-face encounters, or a COVID-19 quarantine camp in a foreign country where no video was allowed. The 2022 all-virtual Cs brought forth this idea regarding promoting inclusivity while negotiating diversity in a multifaceted landscape. None of us had any idea where we were individually and physically at times, what we were trying to mediate in our daily lives by way of required activities or responsibilities, and how we were transforming our own sacred linguistic and literary ecologies into workable modules to coexist in this shared spatial-like cocoon to attend this year's conference.

Being in one central place—"locked" into a specific location—to teach, hold meetings, attend lectures, or watch presentations is one aspect of virtual space that denies the very concept of freedom that the metaverse was supposed to give us. Although one is free to simultaneously move around, collaborate, or commiserate in several digital environments, to be together, in doing so, *in situ*, means to remain stagnant in our realities. For example, suppose I am teaching a class on Zoom. In that case, my students and I can visit our online university library databases, use an internet search engine, work on a Google document, and later watch a YouTube video. But in doing so, as individuals, synchronously meant we remain under very tightly controlled physical constraints, ensuring our Wi-Fi connections are secure, our laptops are plugged in, restrooms are available, and our audio is not

interrupted by a flood of noise pollution, urban or otherwise. We always need to be physically comfortable as well.

Attending the 2022 all-virtual Cs made this dichotomization of virtual freedom versus physical prison a true nightmare. At this time, I was doing virtual tutoring in the university writing center and teaching remotely; once I added my online conference attendance, it meant being within a tiny area of square footage most of the day. I sat on my red leather couch, with the TV on mute, my foldable desk at the ready, with my laptop and cell phone constantly plugged into my multi-adaptable charger. I barely took 100 steps between my bathroom, couch, front door, and kitchen to stay connected and tuned into the CCCC online site and teach, work, and live. And psychologically, this experience became overwhelming as I began to feel imprisoned in virtual space and IRL. And I sought to escape it. By Thursday evening, March 7, 2022, the first full day of the conference, I felt drained and withdrew from my plans to attend several other online conference events. Conceivably, I could have relocated to my on-campus office or found a nice, quiet spot with good food, clean restrooms, and power outlets somewhere in my large, metropolitan city. However, I had not carefully planned to attend the conference virtually in the same way I had meticulously set out to teach remotely. I realized the “freedom” to use technology to inhabit different spaces and places also meant constantly lugging around all this technology and reconstructing any carefully crafted literary and linguistic ecosystems in new environments. And as we know, those changes cannot be conducted randomly or overnight.

Before the 2022 CCCC Convention, the last conference I attended was the 2012 Thomas R. Watson Conference on Rhetoric and Composition at the University of Louisville. At this point, I was physically unwell and had taken paid medical leave from my job at a large public university in the Midwest. Because I was less than 200 miles away from the conference, I decided to take a Greyhound bus. I was working full time contractually at a large public university located several states away from my doctoral institution and dissertation advisor, but I was in a position that granted me health insurance and retirement. Also, I was working with renowned scholars who were in applied linguistics. I was in the dissertation writing phase of my doctoral program, which meant that, with a full-time job and an institutional graduate research grant, I could afford to stay at the conference hotel

and pay the registration fees. For my presentation, “Race, Identity, and Composition: Valuing Visibility in the Academy,” I focused my discussion on the idea of minorities in higher education situating themselves as apparent agents of diversity and inclusion and allowing this stance, or unmasking, to be both beneficial to them and their departments instead of being negatively attributed as mandated service, obligated to deal with problems related to equity and belonging because of their perceived cultural identities. I feel it is impossible to hide in my skin as a Black woman, often in primarily White spaces.

I care about students and minority faculty having equal access to resources, including mentorship. I care about students and faculty being respected for their ideas and expertise. And I know firsthand the value of creating spaces of inclusivity that foster belonging and bring about innovation because individuals feel that what they bring based on their experiences adds to the whole. In my on-demand prerecorded video for the 2022 Cs, I define and describe those parameters that open borders to collaboration instead of closing them. To me, *access* is bringing in as many as possible. *Diversity* means incorporating a range of lived experiences. And *belonging* means having a sense of place whereby an individual feels that they are a part of something greater than themselves and that their contribution adds value to the group or larger community.

I outlined these concepts within the confines of building engaged communities in cyberspace via remote instruction. But, truly understanding what they bring to learning is to present inclusivity as situated contexts that encourage and allow for voluntary participation with and without direct oversight and supervision. In this way, I feel that the all-virtual Cs included different ways for participants to engage in online activities. As attendees, we were given instructions for logging in and participating. Then, the rest of our involvement was left to our agency. I think it is also essential to create opportunities, online or otherwise, for voluntary participation. Individuals are given space to collaborate; this involves people working together to create a new product. For example, in the advanced writing for engineers, a research-based pilot course I taught at my university during the 2022 spring semester, I put my students in groups and asked them to work together to create a new team contract, construct a project proposal outline, and develop a script and storyboard for a multimodal project. And, of course, they had to collaborate to complete the final multimodal

presentation. What kept them engaged was a sense of shared duty from the planning stage to production. Also, they had carefully defined roles with responsibilities that they had agreed upon from the beginning of the assignment. I had set up the context for learning but understood that inclusivity meant allowing them to provide an atmosphere that encouraged participation due to a sense of belonging.

In my online essay, “Diversity is Trash,” I noted that most all contexts in which we found ourselves could be complex and multifaceted. There are always “differences between individuals, usually related to experience, background, or representation,” regardless of whether they are acknowledged (Thomas). This actuation, in fact, is the misnomer: we do not have to create diversity, or make it “more,” make it “better,” or “increase” it. As individuals, what we want is to simply exist. We want to belong, “to be accepted and included based on who we are and how we choose to identify ourselves” (Thomas). I describe this type of belonging as bringing peace, self affirmation, positivity, light-heartedness, i.e., without political motivation, and welcoming.

Belongingness predisposes a climate of inclusivity in feeling as though “folks are glad you are in their midst and [whereby] you are welcomed and appreciated by ... those you care for, respect, and ... admire” (Thomas). This type of community not only includes shared goals but values that are explored collaboratively; most important, “no one is left out, demoralized, talked down to, or condescended” (Thomas). No pressure is put on a select few to invent or innovate. When I call diversity “trash,” I mean to say that we have used the term so generically in higher education that it has lost its valuation. To me, diversity, in this sense, becomes a “trash bin” for social equity, a one-dimensional isolated response to all the qualifiers that do not seem to belong or fit within the mainstream curriculum or societal standard and, therefore, must be questioned. Historically, individuals and contexts—entities defined as “diverse”—are meant to be cast out, relegated to the sides, abandoned, abused, neglected, and possibly thrown away. So, I believe in redefining diversity for our modern era, thinking “of it as a place and space where we belong, are respected, contribute something positive, encourage others, and are included precisely because of our uniqueness” (Thomas). Such an inclusive climate values and “accepts how others want to represent themselves—valuing diversity in those individuals’ multi-faceted [individual] histories and complex life stories” (Thomas). I am asking us to be *human* again, to

appreciate what this means apart from differences associated with flattened hierarchical representations of Self that seem to matter the most, as capital, in a need to “sell” who we are.

I became a CCCC Scholars for the Dream conference travel grant recipient in 2007. I combined monies from this grant and my graduate school, allowing me to immerse myself in the experience fully. In our panel, “(Un)Masking ‘Identity’: Cross-Cultural Reflections on Lived Experience,” consisting of classmates from my doctoral program, I presented “Private Experiences Made Public: Reflecting on Cross-Cultural Racial and Ethnic Identity Construction.” At that time, I was beginning to see how my international and domestic ESL students’ identities were shaped by their interpretation of their lived experiences; it seemed that context played a role in how they perceived themselves. I could relate to this idea of my identity as a “Black, Southern woman” being shaped by the interpretation of my lived experience as a *Black, Southern* woman, the meaning of which is entirely dependent on context. In truth, after this attendance, I stopped coming to CCCC altogether. I applied each year after the 2007 CCCC, but after several proposal rejections in the following years, I gave up attempting to return. Financially, it was also proving difficult to manage and justify such an expensive endeavor. In the next years, I took on several contractual, non-tenure-track, low-paying jobs with no research funding in order to complete my dissertation. By 2009, I was completing an English Language fellowship in Malawi administered by Georgetown University and funded by the US Department of State. A year or two later, I was accepted to a Research Network Forum at Cs, but I ultimately decided not to attend. In all, I attended the Thomas R. Watson Conference on Rhetoric and Composition more times than I attended Cs. After receiving my PhD, there began a nine-year gap between attending my next conference.

Not attending Cs and other professional rhetoric and composition conferences over almost a decade caused me to feel a longing for the camaraderie I felt when interacting with other scholars face to face. The lack of networking made publishing difficult as I was moving around every few years, holding low-paying, non-tenure-track positions at institutions in different states, positions that were void of faculty mentoring and institutional financial support for research that would have helped me to advance my work. I got tired of applying for many jobs, going on online or on-campus interviews, resulting in only

one-year contracts, and hoping for reappointment, knowing there would not be a promotion. With these contractual appointments, every year, I applied and interviewed at several institutions to make sure I could move to another institution in case I lost my job. After not receiving a second reappointment in my postdoctoral instructional assistant professor position, I moved back home to South Carolina. I accepted a part-time adjunct position, sometimes teaching up to five classes a semester at a local college, relying on Obamacare for insurance coverage, and began with subbing for an instructor two semesters in a row who had to take medical leave. I managed to make my monthly student loan payments and lived with my family to survive. However, what seemed to be the “end” of my career changed my outlook on teaching and my profession. I enjoyed teaching a wide range of students, from charter high schools to two-year degree and transfer students and older adult learners. There was a great deal of difference in literacy levels and academic preparedness. At this time, I began to think of writing and academic literacy as preprofessional training.

In attending the all-virtual 2022 Cs, I felt this lack of belonging to my field, my profession. I thought about the disconnectedness of being unable to engage more with scholars face-to-face—being able to mingle in the hallways and courtyards with experts or have impromptu calls and responses during lively presentations and seeing old graduate school classmates and friends from previous conferences, reconnecting, reevaluating, and reconsidering. However, my inability to feel more included in this professional space was not due to the mode of the interface but based on a culmination of circumstances that left me somewhat neglectful and nostalgic for the situations that had brought me here. I want to *belong*. I want the work that I do to matter. I said in my dissertation almost a decade ago that “I am more than the sum of my parts”—I believe this statement to be accurate, even though the parts are just as important.

I wanted to return to Cs because I had a unique experience to share, something that had been shaping me as a rhetoric and composition instructor and scholar for over two years. It is important to have *something* to say. And perhaps for nine years, I did not have the words for it. I did not own the vocabulary, agency, consciousness, and consistent mental acuity of having a stable teaching position with health care, benefits, faculty mentoring, opportunities for advancement or promotion, and research funding that would allow me to speak in a way

that truly represented who I am. In this vein, I will concede that the lack of belonging I felt during the 2022 Cs was probably due to the psychological implications of living through a global pandemic for so long and attempting to reconnect in ways, i.e., virtually, that have left us disconnected.

The truth is that I am here. My voice is heard. And I know that belonging also includes making space for others to feel included. And so, I've done my work.

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Recollections: The Experience of Documentation as a Form of Evidence for Reflective Practice

Nitya Pandey

As I sit down to write this piece late in August, I cast a quick glance at the several tabs open on my laptop. Most of them are related to teaching as I prepare a lesson on literacy narratives for my undergraduate students. Since I plan to focus my literacy narrative assignment on the students' experiences with digital technology, I have been visiting the Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives to find sample narratives. My current lesson plan, meanwhile, is on reflection, since it is a component of each project that I assign to my students.

Reflection has been a major part of my teaching for the past several years. Initially, I would only include it as a part of the final ePortfolio due at the end of the semester. However, with time, I started assigning it as a part of each major assignment as well as peer reviews. Similarly, unlike the earlier iterations of reflection that were closer to freestyle journaling, my reflection assignments are now better guided, more streamlined, and immensely thought-provoking.

I am currently a doctoral candidate, an ABD, who is teaching writing to undergraduate students. In my current position, I get very little chance to methodically reflect on my own writing, personal and academic. Therefore, the opportunity to reflect that I have been granted as a Documentarian for the virtual CCCC conference held in 2022 is a good moment for me to employ some of the techniques that I have been using in my own courses as a teacher who has reflection at the heart of her pedagogy.

I will develop my reflection within the framework of Gibbs's Reflective Cycle (Fig. 11.1) which will help me illustrate and elaborate on my reflective choices and make them more lucid and comprehensible.

Graham Gibbs's Reflective Cycle, developed in 1988, offers a framework for examining experiences, and, given its cyclic nature, lends itself particularly well to repeated experiences, allowing you to learn and plan from things that either went well or didn't go well. He claims, "Learning from experience must involve links between the doing and the thinking"

(Gibbs 14). He further maintains that in order to bring about behavioral change through learning, it is essential that the acquired learning is reflected upon. Gibbs's reflective cycle has six domains: description, feeling, evaluation, analysis, conclusion, and action plan.

REFLECTION ON CCCC 2022

Experience: Attending the conference in the virtual format over the course of four days.

Description

The conference was a good opportunity to be a part of the community virtually. This year, I was a little less apprehensive about attending the conference virtually because it had already been done in the previous year. I did, however, have to spend a little more time on my schedule, but it was taken care of after a few emails with the organizers.

My presentation was an on-demand session, and I uploaded it a few days before the actual conference. However, on the day of my conference, I found out that my presentation was inaccessible. I let the tech support know immediately, and they took care of the situation.

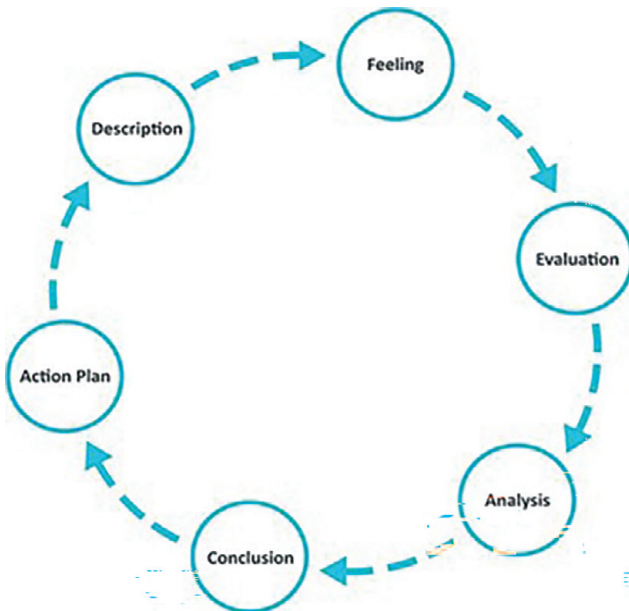


Figure 11.1. Gibbs's Reflective Cycle (The University of Edinburgh).

The sessions were interesting, but after a day, Zoom fatigue took over. I stayed on schedule most of the time, and I attended the sessions I had originally planned to attend, on-demand and live.

But unlike the initial two days when I was easily juggling grading with conferencing, I had to stop grading on the third day to take breaks and then continue conferencing. In addition, on Thursday, I was also teaching a section of a 3000-level composition course at my institution as an instructor of record. So, there was an added layer of working/conferencing balance since I had to be on campus to teach the class in person and attend the conference around the class schedule.

I always attended the conference from my living room. So, the physical setting remained the same throughout the four days. I was on the same couch next to the big window from where I could see the road. There were times when the weather changed: it rained and the traffic got a bit slower, and, since I live in Florida, the rain never lasted for too long, and we had the sun shining almost instantly.

My cat was a permanent fixture in my living room apart from my couch, desk, and laptop. I would get up every now and then to feed her and stroke her and let her out when she wanted to get some fresh air.

Feeling

I felt fortunate to be able to be a part of the conference. I attended several sessions that I found interesting, ranging from the ones on feedback and peer review to those on instructional design. I was happy that I was able to stick to a plan and attend most of the sessions that I wanted to attend. I was also excited to attend the conference after paying only the registration fee that was reimbursed by my institution. This was quite different from the usual in-person event that would have been much more expensive.

There was some anxiety attached to time management that probably would not have been the case if I had attended the event in person, because then I would have found alternate means of conducting my classes, and I would certainly not have taken my grading along. That would have allowed me to focus fully on the conference, which was not the case this time, because I was juggling work and personal life with conferencing.

However, I cannot deny the warmth that came with attending the conference from the comfort of my home. I sipped my freshly brewed sweet tea while I listened to people discuss things that they and I cared

about with equal passion. My cat purred on my lap as I stroked her, a cozy bundle that reminded me that, despite wars, hiking prices, and pandemics, life still had some goodness to offer.

In the scenario, the only physical challenge I experienced that dampened my spirits toward the end was Zoom fatigue. By Friday evening, I had a dull headache and my eyeballs felt as if they would be falling out. I decided to attend fewer sessions than I had planned earlier and not do any grading to give my eyes some much-needed rest.

Evaluation

It was, overall, a positive experience with some minor glitches. For example, there were instances when one of my devices froze, thus hindering my participation in the event. Likewise, there were other minor issues, such as unstable internet connection, that were solved quite easily. There was also the part about having to juggle multiple roles in life.

However, for the most part, I think the experience remained good. For a conference of this magnitude and participation, I think the organizers did a good job putting it together virtually. Most of all, I enjoyed attending it from the comfort of my home where I got the information, but without having to plan an expensive trip to a new city. Nonetheless, I missed the chance to actually meet people and socialize with like-minded individuals from the field and spend time networking and conversing about life, academics, and everything else. And finally, as someone who loves to travel, I missed the opportunity to visit a new city.

Analysis

I think the experience was mostly positive. But the fact that helped me weave it into a narrative was my role as a Documentarian. This is the first time I am taking it up at the Cs or any other conference. And I think it was an excellent decision. The forms that I had to fill twice a day kept me accountable for the job I had signed up for. But more than just that, they helped me stay grounded and focused. In one of my forms, I mention that they were like prayer beads that I sometimes use to meditate. Although technically intangible, these documents were like threads that helped me make sense of the huge conference with many sessions, spaces, and workshops.

The forms not only helped me gather my thoughts but also were able to take me back in time when I revisited them as I was drafting this reflection.

Nevertheless, they were not perfect. I feel that there could be practical and thought-provoking questions that would help people be more reflective. For instance, would you apply anything that you learned in your own teaching? If yes, how would you do that? Or a second idea could be, if you could join a panel, hypothetically, what would it be and how would you contribute? Similarly, a third question could be about the experience within the conference, such as how attending a live session was different than viewing an on-demand session, and so on.

Conclusion

This was a good experience, and I can totally imagine attending another virtual Cs. However, I think, with time, I would expect it to be a little more organized since that is one area with room for improvement. Also, I would probably expect more on-demand sessions or the live sessions to be recorded and stored separately so they could be easily accessed later. And finally, I could also see the Cs as a hybrid conference that would be inclusive of people who would not be able to attend in person and would still be willing to participate and contribute.

Action Plan

I do not have a concrete action plan. But if the opportunity arises, I would, most definitely, sign up for the role of a Documentarian because it would make my experience with conferencing so much better. Moreover, I would now also think about being a Documentarian for an in-person conference and a hybrid conference.

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There Is Something to Be Said for Asynchronicity

Emily Plummer Catena

During my virtual time “attending” the 2022 CCCC Convention from my tiny but cluttered at-home desk, I learned a new term. Actually, I learned two, but one of them resonated with me when I read it again in my Documentarian notes, which are in the form of survey responses and materials from presentations I had engaged with and saved during my fully asynchronous conference experience.

I read that new term again and was immediately struck by it as I re-attended my 2022 CCCC conference in these ways alongside the July call for our “Documentarian Tales.” And I am re-attending the conference again now as I recall—while sitting in the same small spot—the sessions I interacted with, the Twitter exchanges I took part in, and the takeaways I am still taking away as I type.

The new term was *crip time*, and—pun intended—I left myself a cryptic note in my first postconference-day survey about having encountered the phrase for the first time in relation to writing: “crip time—I gained a deeper understanding of the term, which I had never thought of in relation to time or writing.”

Apparently, I did not have “the time” (pun intended again!) that Thursday night, though, to delve more deeply into what the term encompasses or how I was conceptualizing it in relation to my writing practices as a writer and researcher and teacher of writing.

Fast-forward to the present Thursday, nearly five months later, and I find myself eagerly conducting academic searches for *crip time*, searches that quickly led me to Tara Wood’s article, “Crippling Time in the College Composition Classroom.” Thanks to my lousy Documentarian note-taking, likely due to a lack of *time* in the intersections of my personal and professional lives, I can’t say with certainty that I encountered Wood herself presenting about crip time directly at this year’s CCCC conference. But I do feel fairly comfortable in saying that from whomever and however I encountered *crip time* in March, it was influenced by Wood’s piece.

And as I have been working up to writing this Tale, and as I write it even now, I fear—no, actually, I know—that I am oversimplifying and

even co-opting *crip time* for my own personal narrative purposes. Yet, as I started to read “Crippling Time in the College Composition Classroom,” I found myself putting Wood’s words into conversation with my Documentarian role and with my experience of attending the 2022 conference virtually and, as I mentioned initially, entirely asynchronously. I feel an intriguing sense of connection and meaning in the fact that along with *crip time*, the new terms I highlighted in my notes as learning and the conference presentation materials made and shared by others I saved for future learning and use centered around time: finding it, expanding it, and even redefining our relationship to it.

Initially, my intentions when saving Ashley Barry’s 2022 CCCC slideshow presentation, “Inequities in Digital Literacies and Innovations in Writing Pedagogies During COVID-19 Learning,” had little to do with the ways she draws on the construct of “kairotic spaces” in relationship to participation, “presentness,” and social interaction. I saved a PDF of her slides because I am teaching a digital literacies master’s course this fall 2022 semester and so was searching for readings that tie into our current COVID-19 era. However, the need to unpack *time* is what stands out to me now as I reengage with Barry’s work.

As Barry emphasized in her 2022 CCCC presentation, Margaret Price defines kairotic spaces as “the less formal, often unnoticed areas of academe where knowledge is produced and power is exchanged” (60). Price goes on to talk about conferences more specifically in relation to these sorts of spaces: “Conferences are rife with kairotic spaces, including the Q&A sessions after panels, impromptu elevator encounters with colleagues, and gatherings at restaurants and bars on the periphery of formal conference events” (60). And while certainly nothing can match the intellectual spontaneity and camaraderie of clinking glasses and exchanging ideas directly with a colleague, old academic friend, or new professional connection in person in a conference arena, I also can’t help but feel that the path I traveled during the 2022 Cs through to the present is an important form of networking as I continue to delve more deeply into other scholars’ research and lift it up as I engage in my own learning.

This is precisely what I was doing as well when I took to social media during the 2022 CCCC conference to see how others might be navigating and experiencing it: the “real-time unfolding of events” that is central to Price’s construct of kairotic spaces as well and as drawn out by Barry in her CCCC presentation. In fact, it was this

sort of asynchronous searching and connecting across ideas and experiences that I noted in response to the “What was most fulfilling and/or rewarding in your virtual conference interactions today?” question on my Thursday evening survey: “seeing the conference come alive on social media.” I also couched these Twitter connections about “critical ignorance”—the other new term for me—as “social networking around the conference.”

These movements across and between the CCCC online conference platform and the Twitter app, all asynchronous, were driven by my own research interests in writing; my desires to learn as an educator and to share that learning with my students, many of whom are practicing writing teachers; and my hope of cultivating a meaningful conference experience out of limited resources (namely time and childcare as an early-career assistant professor). Especially given that my aims for attendance, as described in my Saturday evening Documentarian survey responses, were to “find something useful personally and for curriculum,” I am inclined to truly consider my actions and experiences networking and forming academic connections. I *did* find timely discussions of topics relevant to my own areas of emphasis as a teacher and researcher and to my students’ roles in classrooms as learners and educators themselves. I saved slideshows, looked up presentation creators and colleagues, and joined in Twitter conversations about a conference I *did* attend, albeit without in-person interaction. Is this not still “real-time unfolding of events,” particularly as they continue to unfold and contribute toward my learning and growth?

As I summed it up in my post-week reflection survey, I finished out my conference attendance and the duties of my Documentarian role, “wanting to engage more but feeling excited about what I was able to find” as well as, notably, “appreciating the chance to document my own journey even if it doesn’t look ‘typical.’” The opportunity to do just that is precisely what the Documentarian position has afforded me and is what the asynchronous allows: I would argue it is the asynchronous that positions us all to be our own Documentarians. What if we all attempted to capture and return to our own experiential learning during and after conferences? What are ways to move forward with the asynchronous as a purposeful component of an “in-person” conference? What if, as CCCC has appropriately (given the writing emphasis!) but still innovatively done for its Documentarians, conferences capitalized on the reflexive and knowledge-sharing potential of writing

and provided structures for all attendees to engage in reflection and connection asynchronously?

The “after” part of asynchronous engagement, whether that engagement is through Twitter threads, curating resources created by others, or personal reflection, is especially glaring for me as I sit with and work through my documented asynchronous experiences. I can and should connect with Barry and Wood and the Tweeters who inspired me during the conference—or, at the very least, I should try to connect with them. I have found myself feeling similarly after in-person conference attendance in the past as a junior scholar less certain of my place in the field and less comfortable in on-the-fly conversations about terms, practices, and experiences that are not my own and that may be entirely new to me but that clearly are loaded with meaning and potential relevance (like *crip time*). To and for me, such conversations require a level of care, of fore- and afterthought that necessitates marination before response, and asynchronous connections “after the fact” certainly more than allow that. And, at least in some ways, they seem to align with Wood’s words about what *crip time* both requires and allows: the recognition “that people will arrive at various intervals” (264).

Much like classrooms, we often conceptualize conferences as immediate and bounded in terms of participation: “expected to arrive on time, absorb information at a particular speed, and perform spontaneously in restricted time frames” (Wood 264); presentations begin and end at precise times with slots for questions and discussion, and then often presenters and audience members entirely disperse. I frequently do not make direct contact with those who intrigue or inspire (or even trouble) my thoughts and perspectives even when we sit in the same rooms. Through my asynchronous attendance, I felt less pressure to “perform” networking, and a positive impact is that I have had and continue to have a conference experience that is much extended, that has given me time to revisit and reconsider anew ideas that were already new.

And, much like with in-person conferences, it is now up to me to turn that inward potential into a catalyst for outward connection.

Opportunities to serve as Documentarian created by conferences; options for asynchronous reflection and connection emphasized throughout conference experiences (perhaps including during presentations themselves!); and personal commitments to recalling, reconsidering, and reaching out from conference attendance experiences

across contexts can contribute to less exclusive understandings of participation and provide meaningful opportunities for connection with self and others. After all, the person is still behind the asynchronous, even, as I have tried to argue, in more extended ways than a traditional understanding of only the “in-person” conference affords. I encourage all scholars to (re)consider the potential of the asynchronous and to wonder about purposeful ways to move forward with it alongside or as a component of in-person conferencing, coursework, and academic learning and connecting.

There is something to be said for asynchronicity. There are contradictions, to be sure, as in when I wrote in that same Thursday evening survey both that “I did not interact with anyone” and that it was particularly memorable and rewarding to have seen the conference “come alive on social media”: the isolated and socialized asynchronous consumption and creation of content simultaneously.

But really isn't all learning, in particular that which is most valuable and enduring, asynchronous? Even when we build new knowledge and practice together in the moment in a shared physical space, we hopefully take that learning with us to separate spaces and times and make distinct and new meaning and practices from it.

And so I ask you in closing to ponder this prompt in relation to your 2022 CCCC conference attendance and other forms of professional networking and connecting as well as in relation to your own learning, teaching, and research: What are the potentials of asynchronous forms of engagement, and what might the benefits even be?

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2023 DOCUMENTARIAN TALES

Among My People: Trying to Pierce the Veil of the Writing Studies Discourse Community

Quang Ly

"I am so delighted to welcome all of you to CCCC 2023."¹

The annual Conference on College Composition and Communication (Cs) was upon us. I felt the presence of the Cs even before the conference started. I was sitting in the Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport waiting for my connecting flight, when I overheard a group of women talking. It was their language that caught my attention—words like *archive*, *research article*, and *conference*. Right then, I knew the women were part of the same discourse community as me—the discourse community of writing scholars. I went over and introduced myself and asked if they were on their way to the Cs. They were. There were seven of them in the same sitting area, some from Georgia State University and some from Georgia Tech. I had no intention of conversing with anyone while waiting to board my flight, but loneliness struck me until I heard some familiar discourse. Maybe it was the thrill of attending an in-person conference for the first time in four years, or perhaps it was the simple fact that I understood their lexis. Whatever the reason, I wanted to go over and talk to fellow writing scholars about our research and profession. I wanted to be part of their inner circle.

One characteristic that creates a discourse community is that it has “acquired some specific lexis” (Swales 16). According to Swales, *lexis* is shared terminology that includes abbreviations and acronyms recognized by members of the discourse community (16). As I learned more about what it means to work in academia, I also accumulated a mental list of common jargon frequently associated with my line of work. Most of that jargon initially came from reading journal articles for seminar

1. The italicized quotes are excerpts from Frankie Condon’s greeting remarks. Condon was the program chair for the 2023 4Cs. The entire greetings can be accessed at <https://cccc.ncte.org/cccc/2023-cccc-convention-program>.

classes. Some occurred through talking to classmates. Some occurred through listening to professors talk to colleagues and graduate students. And some occurred through reading conversations in a private Facebook group for rhetoric and composition students at my university. The lexis included *tenure-track*, *NTT faculty*, *teaching load*, *rhet/comp*, *reviewer*, *service*, *proposal*, and *scholarship*. The process of acquiring the lexis of my discourse community occurred organically and naturally; I learned the lexis because I was trying to enculturate myself into this community. After finishing my graduate program, that list only grew through continuous research and attendance at meetings and conferences.

As I sat on the connecting flight, I got a chance to ponder my professional identity in my discourse community. When I joined the Conference on College Composition and Communication in 2022, I wondered whether there were a set of expectations that I had to fulfill to be taken seriously as a member. Once a person joins a discourse community, what should they do to become a sustained and established member? This is a rather complex question with an even more complicated answer. Just because people pay for their membership to an organization does not mean they are contributing members. If I pay for my annual membership and stay dormant, is that sufficient for people to see me as part of the discourse community? Can I tell people I belong to the CCCC organization if I am not an active member? It puzzles me when I think about why a person would want to be part of a discourse community unless they plan to do something meaningful with their membership. What does it mean, then, to be a member of CCCC?

“To those of you who have traveled to Chicago to convene in person—Yay!!!”

The 2023 Cs took place in Chicago. This windy city was chosen as the host site when the world was deemed safe to gather in person. The conference had not been held in person for three years due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The conference in Chicago, postpandemic, was a full-circle moment because it just so happened to be the same site as the first Cs in March of 1950 (CCCC, *Dates, Sites, and Themes for Past CCCC Conventions*).

The Cs was my very first academic conference. There is no better place to share our research and hear our peers' research than the Cs. Anyone who researches and teaches college composition knows that the Cs is the premier conference for the field of writing studies. It is

the *crème de la crème* of conferences for us. Even though I was aware of the Cs' existence as a graduate student, I had not officially joined the organization because I had not seen myself as part of that world or felt I qualified to be a member.

For the first few years of my graduate studies, I was oblivious to the fact that one part of being a professor was the expectation (and commitment) to conduct and present research at regional and national conferences. As a novice at that time, I saw the Cs as simply an event, a one-time conference. Through encouragement from one of my professors, I decided to submit a proposal that I wrote for my Introduction to English Studies class. My professor told the class that getting some experience presenting research was important for our academic careers. When my proposal was accepted for the 2019 Cs, I thought nothing of it. I only realized the magnitude of having a proposal accepted to the Cs in the final years of my program.

When I went to the Cs in 2019, I went there with no agenda. No goals. I did not know what I was doing or should have been doing. I felt lost. Looking back, I wish I had solicited some tips from my professors about how to approach these kinds of conferences. Doing the bare minimum, I presented my research and left. I neglected to go to any sessions. I did not network. I did not take advantage of anything the conference offered its attendees. Speaking frankly, I saw myself as an outsider, an imposter who did what he was told but did not understand the reason behind it. In fact, my battle with imposter syndrome started in 2016, right at the start of my PhD journey. Unbeknownst to myself, I desperately wanted to be part of this world but needed the right key.

Some short years later, having taken more classes, read more theories, and completed more seminar papers, I began to understand the profession more deeply. I adopted a different mindset regarding conferences. I wanted to experience the Cs as a member should experience it. For the 2023 Cs, I wanted my experience to be more interactive. Productive. Meaningful. Better than my 2019 experience. I thought about what I wanted from this year's conference. I also thought about what could go wrong. For example, I was afraid I would not know anyone at the conference, which would make for an unpleasant experience (like my first one). I needed a game plan to help me navigate the intricacy of the Cs to get the best experience the second time around. Thus, I had to do some planning to make the most of my time. I browsed the program book online to see which of my classmates and

professors would be in Chicago and which sessions would enhance my pedagogical practices.

The reality is that people graduate from school. They change jobs. They move. But the one constant in our career is attending conferences. Conferences can serve as a shared space for us to congregate and talk as if no time has passed. People travel great distances to be among people in their discourse community because that is where they belong. I found this to be true with the Cs. Upon arriving at the Hilton hotel on day one, the same place where the conference was being held, the first person I saw was a former classmate from graduate school. I was in the lobby waiting to check into my room when I glanced behind me and saw my classmate sitting at a table doing work on her laptop. She came from New York, and I came from Florida, and here we were, both in Chicago. After I checked in, I went to talk to her. For twenty minutes, we conversed about our presentations, our current roles at our respective universities, and our post-graduate-school life. I felt at home because I knew my classmate would be one of the many friendly faces I would see.

The Cs is more than just presenting and learning about new research. It is the perfect opportunity to catch up with former (and current) colleagues, professors, classmates, and friends (and to do a little sightseeing on the side). On the evening of my arrival, I attended an Ohio University reunion that one of my professors organized. This event was held at a local bar down the street from the conference hotel. Though the reunion was not directly affiliated with the Cs, it was part of my overall conference experience. Traveling to a different city for work also means catching up with friends. I made sure to include some personal time in my planning. When I arrived at the bar, I saw a lot of friendly faces. It was nice seeing former classmates and professors talking, laughing, and just gossiping. By the end of the conference, I saw three of my former classmates and two of my former professors, all from Ohio University. Not only did I attend some of their presentations, but we also got to catch up on our lives during dinner and between sessions. Sometimes, being in a new discourse community can be a forlorn experience, so seeing familiar faces at these annual events and feeling that hint of belonging is always comforting.

“In the call for papers for our Convention, I invited us to do hope.”

Participating in an academic conference allows researchers and scholars to build their reputations. We do not just do research in

silence. We yearn to share our research with our peers. This is why conferences matter. Regardless of how often a person presents at a conference, getting a proposal accepted is something to celebrate. This achievement means reviewers from Cs (and other conferences) find a person's work significant and worthy of sharing with the world. When I received my proposal acceptance in October (four months before the event), I was beyond stoked because that meant I would be at the 2023 Cs for the first time as an official member of the writing studies discourse community.

Another characteristic of a discourse community is having a “threshold level of members with a suitable degree of relevant content and discursual expertise” (Swales 16). Not everyone can join one. Being part of a discourse community must mean something. It has to feel special. That is why there are requirements that prospective members need to meet. According to the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), the parent organization of the Conference on College Composition and Communication, membership is generally open to people who study, teach, or conduct research in the English field. Students and teachers can join. Even though a person does not need a graduate degree to join, I believe having one would help establish them as someone with “a suitable degree of relevant content and discursual expertise.” This characteristic means that membership in any discourse community is not automatic. Instead, a person needs to go through the process of earning their membership (i.e., meeting specific requirements).

Despite studying English and teaching college composition to undergraduates throughout my graduate program, it felt odd to consider myself part of the writing studies discourse community. I was a student and not yet a professional with a full-time job. I decided against joining the Cs organization as a student because I was still learning my craft. The first time I heard about imposter syndrome was in graduate school, a term that was constantly part of class discussions. Some of my professors and PhD classmates wrestled with their identity and placement in the community. Hearing my professors and classmates talk about their experience with imposter syndrome was shocking since they were more senior than me. At the same time, some experts long into their careers still hold this imposter syndrome mindset, including those in business (Dixon) and medicine (Vaa Stelling et al.). As I progressed in my program, I increasingly understood the imposter feeling.

Several months after receiving my PhD in the spring of 2022, I decided it was time to join the Conference on College Composition and Communication, a professional organization for researching and teaching composition. It took several years before I deemed myself worthy of declaring membership. But those years were a necessary learning period to understand more about my professional identity and the field. Before that, I was a rhetoric and composition student studying to become a composition specialist. From my vantage point, I needed to have a PhD in my hand in order to meet the requirements of being a qualified and contributing member of the organization. I registered for my Cs membership once I began my teaching job later that fall semester because that was the point at which I felt ready to join the elite club. That was when I possessed the right key.

What I did not count on happening, however, was the imposter feeling lingering long after I finished my program and had already entered the profession. My foot was in the door, but my body had not made it through. I was in, but somehow, I felt out. Though Swales had identified several criteria that make up a discourse community, I would argue that another criterion is necessary: a feeling of belongingness.

“We have tried to create a Convention that surrounds you with opportunities to try out doing hope within and beyond workshops, panels, roundtables, and poster sessions.”

Giving effective conference presentations requires lots of preparation. I spent my Christmas break working on my research paper to have it ready. My father thinks that teaching is the only thing I do as a college professor. He often needs clarification on why I am constantly reading journal articles or writing papers, especially when there is no school. I must continuously remind him that I need to do research because it is part of my job. I tell my parents and relatives that there are three pillars associated with the role of a professor: teaching, research, and service. I do not just teach. I do research. And I also serve on committees. It is true that, depending on the job and university, a person may only be expected to teach. But to contribute meaningfully to the discourse community, research is a critical component that allows people to establish a name for themselves and advance the field.

Another characteristic of a discourse community is that it “develops horizons of expectation” (Swales 16). Certain routine things occur,

such as teachers creating lesson plans for new units. Likewise, there are certain things that people are expected to do or follow. Such expectations are typically understood just by being a member or being told. For example, even if a person has a non-tenure-track job, there is this expectation of volunteering for service activities, including participating in departmental committees or reviewing conference proposals and journal articles. These expectations are not requirements by any means. They are opportunities to give back to one's field. To help our discourse community where we can.

Some discourse communities, like the National Council of Teachers of English and the Conference on College Composition and Communication, depend on volunteers to keep their operations running smoothly. There is a member engagement hub on the NCTE website: "We are the organization we are today because of the expertise, time, and energy of our members ... Browse the list of volunteer opportunities below." On the CCCC website, there is a page inviting members to get involved: "It is because of committees that we have position statements, award programs, even a conference itself. We are always looking for potential committee members with expertise, energy, and collegiality. Indeed, we depend on such people" (*CCCC Committees and Task Forces*). After paying for my membership, I browsed the NCTE and CCCC sections of the NCTE website to find ways to be of service. Service is a vital part of our profession. We need people to do more than pay for their membership. We expect them to play an active role in addition to teaching.

Aside from volunteering, doing research is another aspect of playing an active role in the discourse community. Even though I am not in a position that requires me to produce research to keep my job, I feel I am expected to participate in such endeavors as a college professor. Especially for those who work for an R1 university, it is customary for professors to immerse themselves in scholarship to generate new knowledge. Whether one is required to conduct research as part of their job or wants to do it for personal gain, the world of academia demands that research be done. As challenging as it is to do research, it is an area where I strive to improve. However, doing research is, for lack of a better word, *hard*. Sometimes, finding the motivation to fill out an IRB application or write a literature review can be difficult. Still, research is a major part of my discourse community, and it is something that I was trained to do in graduate

school. Engaging in research activities does help me feel that sense of belongingness.

“In the program, you will find lists of sessions by emerging scholars—folx who are newer to the field, who should be heard and recognized.”

Each day leading up to my presentation, I learned more about what it means to present at a conference. Research has been done into how attendees can get the most from academic conferences (Popovic). However, I believe the best learning results from attending in person and learning from direct experience. I like to sit through several sessions to see how people present their projects. Do they read a paper? Do they show a slideshow? What do they share from their research? Day two of the Cs involved attending sessions on multimodality, reflective practice, archival research, justice pedagogy, and STEM writing. As someone new to the discourse community, I took the time to learn from seasoned researchers and scholars. To ask questions and to get advice. More important, I wanted to understand the current happenings within the writing studies field. One thing I took away from attending some of the sessions was that almost anything could be turned into a research project: journaling stories about people’s COVID-19 experience or writing about the healthcare experiences of LGBTQIA+ people.

My presentation was set for Friday afternoon. Before I delivered my presentation, I spent the morning by myself. I went outside to enjoy the snow, the cold, crisp air, and the beautiful sight of the city. I wanted to take a break from doing anything conference-related and take the time to appreciate life away from the chaos. Outside, the setting was different. There was not a crowd of people waiting in line for food. Nor were there people rushing to get from room to room. No, it was quieter in the streets of Chicago. It was a completely different world: conference and non-conference. I walked around the area for a bit to collect my thoughts and to have mini bursts of worry-free moments.

Two hours before I was scheduled to present, I returned to the hotel room for some last-minute preparation. As I reviewed my slides, I became nervous. I never enjoyed giving presentations because I have a slight fear of public speaking. As much as I wanted to feel calm like the streets of Chicago, internally, I was feeling chaotic. Over time, I have improved my public speaking skills through the many presentations I

had to give for class. When I sat through other people's sessions on days one and two of the conference, the panelists all exhibited confidence and authority, something I hoped to achieve someday. I practiced my speech Thursday night and was not as nervous Friday morning. As a tactic to help calm my nerves, I viewed the conference as another practice session but on a much bigger stage.

Another characteristic of a discourse community is that it "uses its participatory mechanisms primarily to provide information and feedback" (Swales 15). In other words, receiving information and providing critical feedback is essential to improving a discourse community. When we present research at conferences, we hope to receive comments and questions that challenge our thinking and help us see our ideas through multiple perspectives. We should not have the sole goal of presenting our research and leaving. We should welcome criticism. It is our duty to help our peers. To learn from each other. Typically, when I finish working on a research project, I like to share it at a conference to hear the audience's thoughts. For me, presenting at a conference is integral to the research writing process.

My project was grouped in the session "Collaboration, Teamwork, and Peer Review." I was on a three-person panel and was second in line to talk. I did not want to disappoint myself or my discourse community, so I had to set aside my fear of public speaking and deliver a stellar presentation. I knew my research well enough that I did not need note cards. My nerves got the best of me as I talked, though, and I picked up speed. I went through my slides much more quickly than I had while I practiced, knowing I had forgotten to mention some key points. While presenting, I glanced around the room and saw one of my co-workers in the audience. We locked our eyes briefly, and, somehow, I felt calmer. Knowing there was support made me want to perform even better, and this meant ensuring I provided all the necessary points for the audience to understand my research. After that, I slowed down in my speech and moved steadily from that point onward.

After my fifteen minutes were up, I felt relieved. I was done. I had come to the Cs mainly to give this presentation, and I accomplished that. There were a few questions from the audience regarding my collaborative writing research (such as whether there was a systematic way to group students), all of which I had easily answered without stuttering or freezing up. The members of my discourse community fulfilled their duty because they provided thought-provoking feedback

to my research, which I later used to improve my project. Finally, the hour came and went. The session was over. The panel members and I received our applause, and we proceeded to the exit.

“Planning a Convention as big as CCCC requires a lot of labour on the part of a great many people.”

Delivering my presentation marked the beginning of the end of my conference trip. I attended the award ceremony on the third night. It was there that I questioned my belongingness (again). When people join a new group, they tend to want acceptance. If people feel they have a home and belong, they will likely retain their membership the following year. Joining CCCC was a crucial step in my career. And gaining acceptance to present my research at the conference was one testament to this feeling of belongingness.

The Cs is not just a place to hear about research in our field but also an opportunity to meet some researchers. During the award ceremony, people were acknowledged for groundbreaking, timely, and compelling work. People studied counterstory as a methodology, languaging practices of Chinese international students, and literacy practices in social media spaces. I was recognized as one of the Scholars for the Dream Travel Award recipients. When I first received news of this award, I was shocked. I did not think my research on collaborative writing was deserving of recognition. However, my peers thought otherwise. This level of recognition was a reassuring moment for me as an early scholar, especially as a new member of the discourse community.

Sitting in the audience among the award recipients, I felt inspired. Some people won two or three awards for their research. Seeing their article title on the screen made me want to do more research. Better research. At the same time, I felt intimidated and out of place. There were brilliant scholars to the left and right of me. They were the who’s who of writing scholarship. These were the people whom Swales would say have “a suitable degree of relevant content and discursal expertise.” Though I have done my own research, it pales compared to other people’s work. I walked out of the award ceremony feeling under-accomplished. I left wondering whether I belonged to this world or whether I was simply an imposter with a really nice tie.

Following the last conference day on Saturday night, I sat in my hotel room, staring out the window. Time slowed as I was admiring

the city. I lost myself in deep thought. I thought about my professional identity. I thought about who I was and what I wanted from my discourse community. I even thought about the meaning of my CCCC membership. As I searched for the answers, blankets of snow continued to cover the ground. Even in the darkness, I could see the white snow. I was reminded of the temperature during the duration of the conference: the highest was 46 degrees Fahrenheit, with the lowest at 19 degrees. Thankfully, all the conference action was inside the hotel, and I only had to brave the elements when I went to get food or explore the city. An hour later, I was still sitting, staring, and searching. I think that being part of a discourse community is knowing you belong. How soon would I know that I do? How soon would anyone know?

“CCCC 2023 would not have been possible without the dedication of the NCTE/CCCC’s director and staff.”

They say planning a conference is taxing. I would agree. I would also say that planning for my Cs trip was thrilling, yet busy. I was amazed at how much I did in three days. Reflecting on my time in Chicago, I had a positive conference experience. I learned quite a bit from attending the Cs this time around. I deliberately came into the conference with a different mindset than when I attended four years prior. For the second time, I wanted to have a total immersion experience as an official member of my discourse community. Accordingly, I planned my schedule to ensure I experienced the Cs as someone should experience it. Fortunately, the Cs had a full program for each conference day to keep attendees busy from morning to night, so I created a game plan to take advantage of their offerings.

The amount of information I gained from my discourse community over the span of three days was truly remarkable. In total, I attended eight sessions: five on Thursday, two on Friday, and one on Saturday. By the time I retired each night, I was mentally exhausted from everything I heard and saw. The 2023 Cs sessions were eclectic. The topics were different but equally powerful (e.g., antiracism and social justice, inclusion and access, histories of rhetoric, information literacies and technology). I also checked out sessions I would not typically include in my schedule, such as the special interest group sessions, partly because I did not know what they were about but also because I was not one of the group members. At the same time,

I had a curious mind and wanted to see all things conference-related, so I decided to make an appearance. I briefly attended special interest group meetings on medical rhetoric and lifespan writing. From the ten sessions, seeing the diversity of research topics, the members' interests, and the excitement from people wanting to do more for the field gave me the energy to want to play an active role in the discourse community.

Of course, I did not just attend the sessions. When I put together my plans, I made sure to check out events beyond the panel sessions. I wanted to participate in some of the other major events to get the full conference experience. For example, I attended the grand opening session, the Scholars for the Dream reception, and the awards ceremony. During my time between sessions, I took advantage of the exhibit hall to peruse the latest books from NCTE. It was wonderful to see so many representatives speaking to attendees about the books at their stations. It was refreshing to know that constant research is being done on writing and that people are genuinely intrigued by the learning and teaching of writing. My discourse community is undoubtedly productive because the members want to continuously refine their craft and contribute knowledge to our field.

Being part of the writing studies discourse community, of any discourse community, means more than just paying for membership. It means being an active member. It means being engaged. A discourse community serves as a space for people to be among their people. To be among like-minded individuals with shared goals and interests. Joining a new discourse community can be a laborious task, though. There are many doors to open, and it is not always a walk in the park to gain access. People must earn the keys to open the right doors. I did. And I was glad I went through the process of earning my membership. People may struggle with imposter syndrome. They may question their place in a discourse community. But these are common feelings when people want to join a discourse community. It does not mean they do not belong. It is just part of the process.

As I sat at the airport, waiting to board the plane to go home, I once again thought about my professional identity in my discourse community. My conference experience made me realize something: I did belong. When I finally felt that sensation of belongingness, when I pierced the veil of the writing studies discourse community, it was a feeling I had long craved but one that felt familiar all along.

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Assembling the Conference Experience: A Quasi-Materialist's Reflection

Jason Tham

Perhaps like many scholars reading this narrative, I considered myself an avid conference-goer before the Great Shutdown. Conferencing was always a core part of my academic career, a professional responsibility of some sort. For me, going to the CCCC Convention was an effective way to learn about trends in the field, pick up new methods of teaching and research, and share my own practices with other interested attendees. However, prior to virtual conferences, I have paid little attention to factors other than the content of the conference (i.e., what's going to happen, who's making it happen) that would make the conference experience *the experience* that I desired. I used to only focus on the conference content when negotiating my own engagement. Needless to say, the recent pandemic has changed my modus operandi. Admittedly, after participating in the 2021 virtual CCCC, I decided it wasn't the kind of experience I wanted, and so I opted out of the 2022 virtual conference—making it the first time that I skipped the CCCC Convention since my first attendance in 2014.

In retrospect, I assumed it was the screen fatigue we all got from prolonged online meetings, or the confusion and frustration caused by new technological interfaces used for an online conference, or other stress-inducing activities (like having to video-record myself in a talking-head presentation) that had deterred me from doing yet another virtual conference. Frankly, yes, those were all contributing factors. Yet, through the exercises of reflection required by the 2023 CCCC Documentarian role, I have discovered even more ontological conditions that may well have shaped the conference experience for me. This narrative is an attempt to revisit some of these conditions (hence a “quasi” reflection) based on the thoughts and feelings I documented when conferencing in Chicago. Reflecting intentionally, while reorienting to an in-person conference, has heightened my attention to the things, people, and places/spaces that make up *the experience*.

MATERIALITY AND MEMORY

When I began writing this entry, it was just the day after our doctoral program's annual May Seminar—a multi-day, onsite conference for online PhD students. I was tired but mostly refreshed after seeing many of my students who I usually only interacted with on screen. More important, I was animated by a keynote presentation that was given by a founding faculty member of the Texas Tech online PhD program in technical communication and rhetoric, namely Joyce Locke Carter, who also happened to be a former CCCC Chair. Carter's talk covered our program's origin story and highlighted the crucial function of material resources in inventing and maintaining the program. Carter reminded faculty members and students at the Seminar that what we do, and *the things we use to do them*, can have a great influence on the outcomes of our actions. Consequently and readily, I am steered toward a materialist mindset as I reflect on my 2023 CCCC experience.

Memory and materiality share an affective relationship. In writing about the part personal memory plays in social construction of food decisions, Nick J. Fox and Pam Alldred draw from a new materialist perspective to propose, "When human bodies are assembled in a present event, memory traces of past events are materially affective, entering into the 'affect economy' of the present" (25). As such, I presume that conference attendees carried with them individual memories of the conference or associated events that could be emotionally manifested in material forms—the anxiety felt when setting up a laptop for a workshop presentation in a hotel meeting room where one has never been in, the anticipation of the long-awaited Chair's Address in the grandiose main ballroom and the prospect of sitting next to someone new during the opening session and having to make small talk, the excitement in seeing an old friend, the joy of a hug, the pleasure of moving around and trying local food, a new city, etc.

I have recorded some of these materialized feelings when completing the Documentarian surveys in Chicago. The in-person conference did allow me to pay closer attention to my personal memories with CCCC and the material expectations I have to relive those experiences.

Simultaneously, the Documentarian surveys have encouraged me to make those feelings and expectations explicit. For instance, in my entry for a survey on the first conference day, I wrote:

Thursday, February 16 (Evening): I am sitting at the small desk in my room at Congress Plaza Hotel. I am hearing a humming

noise from the air conditioner, and the distinctive sounds from my own typing as the room is quiet.

And the next day, I noted:

Friday, February 17 (Morning): I am in a big ballroom set up for the ChatGPT special session. It's a bit chilly for me. The white tablecloths are somewhat awkward looking to me for an event like this. People are chit-chatting around me. The lighting in the room is warm and not too bright.

Looking back at these responses, I am most taken aback by how much the things around me got written into my documentations. From ambient sounds to room temperature and lighting, I cared (perhaps too much) about the physical environment around me as I chronicled my conference experience.

While I have previously created Twitter threads with trivial photographs of CCCC hotel carpets (check out hashtags like #4c18carpets and #4c16carpets), the above environmental conditions were seldom at the forefront of my evaluation of a conference. I begin to wonder now why the color of tablecloths at a session or people's chit-chatting mattered to my conference experience. Quite likely, I was associating the environments of the 2023 CCCC with particular memories I had of the conference. I might be basing it off of a mental script and image(s) of the conference—ones informed by my very first or second CCCC conference attendance. These *mental models*, as user experience and technical communication scholars call them, can serve as cognitive guides for navigating current as well as future events.

Memories and materiality also add corporeal effects to an experience; as the tablecloths reflected the warm chandelier lights onto my sleep-deprived face on a Friday morning, and the chatter of the people around drowned my own inner head voice, I was reminded of the difference between an onsite conference versus a virtual meeting where I could easily turn off the computer's audio or video, or both. Being at the conference, my experience was an assemblage of the interfaces and interactions of people and things that made up the conference.

PRESENCE AND PARTICIPATION

Just as memory and materiality manifest the experience of conferencing, presence promotes participation across various levels at the

CCCC Convention. For me, the most apparent contrast between an online conference and an in-person experience is the awareness of others when engaging with the conference program. Bodies, movements, and conversations can be markers of participation at a conference. In my evening entry on the first day, I documented where I had been, whom I had spoken to, and what I had done:

Thursday, February 16 (Evening): I spent some time with folks at the Social Justice at the Conference (SJAC) table. I attended the digital praxis poster (DPP) presentations. I went to a pre-scheduled meeting with some researchers. I went to some sessions I did not think I was going to go to, but I just followed my body-mind. Later in the evening, I went to dinner with friends (and had really good conversations), and then karaoke with more (new) friends from the conference.

Reexamining this response from a distance, I recognize my third-grader-diary-like entry reported a series of events that were made possible by the presence and company of others. At the SJAC table, I met and held conversations with people I had not met before; at the DPP presentations, I made it a point to visit a colleague from another institution whose work I admire; and as for the sessions I ended up attending even though I did not mark them on my calendar, they were due to names and topics I stumbled upon while flipping through the conference program booklet. These encounters were possible largely because people were present—physically, intellectually, cordially.

And speaking of convivial presence, I was most pleased about the opportunities to share meals and leisure time with colleagues with activities like talking, eating, and singing (don't mind us!) as part of the conference experience. These activities were not central to the CCCC Convention, of course, but they were possible—and desirable—because the people who were present formed congenial relationships that complemented the professional exchanges among one another during the conference.

Additionally, individual presence can have substantial impacts on communities. Strange or unfamiliar individual bodies present in a certain space at a select time can affect the routines of the local people and their ways of life. This realization certainly reminds me of Asao Inoue's 2019 CCCC Chair's Address, where Inoue urged conference attendees to think critically and carefully about the impact of their embodied

presence on social and racial injustices, control and agency, and life and livelihood of themselves but more importantly others around them. I noted in one of my Documentarian survey entries about ways in which I physically occupy spaces in a place I don't reside. Responding to a prompt about what I had planned for the day and how my plans might determine my movement, I wrote:

Friday, February 17 (Morning): I will be mostly around the conference hotel today and some restaurants for meals. I will be in the presence of other CCCC goers and I occupy spaces that are typically used by local residents (and a lot of Columbia College Chicago students nearby).

In that response, I was trying to stay attuned to how an influx of out-of-state visitors (give or take 1,000+ CCCC attendees) could cause changes to the downtown Chicago area. Were we an inconvenience to the locals? Were we expected (since the area *is* already a tourists' hotspot)?

Were we contributing to local businesses? Or were we simply invisible to the local residents? Having no empirical data to even begin to answer any of these questions, my guess is that our collective presence does make a difference in the community's well-being. Conferencing is, thus, more than just individuals participating in a designated program; rather, our collective presence has dynamic imprints or impressions on the host community.

While presence promotes participation, it can also externalize non-participation. I'd be remiss to disregard the antipode of being present—i.e., being non-interactive at (or after) a conference.

Truly, it may not come across as nuance to many seasoned conferencegoers that there are no rules on participation in events at a conference. Unless attendance is used to earn certain professional development credits (I know some institutions do that), CCCC Convention attendees can usually choose for themselves what to take part in and what to skip. Having people around may motivate attendees to join sessions, like when I followed my spontaneous (body-mind) instinct to attend sessions that were not written to my plan on Thursday the 16th, but it is an individual's decision to negotiate how energy would or should be spent at the conference. The presence of self among others in corporeal reality amplifies my awareness of the surroundings. I am more observant of my own movements when there are others

around me. While at the conference hotel, I was actively making decisions about when and how I would conserve my strength by not doing things with people.

Leaving Chicago first thing in the morning on Saturday, I wrote in the airport:

Saturday, February 19 (Morning): I expect to see a lot of faces today—passengers in transit, service members, airport cleaners, etc. *I don't expect to spend time with anyone today.*

My expectation for interaction was independent from the environment of presence. Even as presence demands participation, I realize the importance of choice—choosing to engage or disengage from activities. A conference *experience* should, as such, be a matter of personal agency, albeit assembled with material effects and scripts from memories.

SPACES AND PLACES

As it's been alluded to earlier when considering how conferencegoers occupy local places, I acknowledge the effects of bodies on spaces that host the bodies. Vice versa, a new materialist perspective would also consider the perceived subjectivity of place and space on human actants. Space refers to the physical dimensions and characteristics of the environment, while place encompasses the meanings and values that individuals and communities attach to specific locations. Given this understanding, locations (i.e., downtown Chicago) and surrounding areas for activities (e.g., restaurants, gyms) can afford or limit individual movements and actions.

Given the specific prompts on plans, activities, and movements in the Documentarian surveys, my responses yielded space- and place-based reflections such as this entry on the official first day of the CCCC Convention:

Thursday, February 16 (Morning): I will be in the conference hotel mostly. I will also be going to restaurants and bars.

In that reflection, I knew my activities would be bound by the physical places and social spaces in which the convention occurs. My plans for the day were guided by *where* I'd be or go, ahead of *whom* I would interact with. Social theory, such as the relational framework forwarded by sociologist John Urry, has it that “places are about relationships,

about the placings of materials and the system of difference they perform” (74). The places and spaces at or in which my engagement with the conference occurs—like the ballroom where I observed the award ceremony and congratulated winners of various CCCC accolades, or the exhibition hall where I learned about numerous academic presses and publishers, or the hotel bar where I met the Documentarian project facilitators and enjoyed a free beer, or the close-by Asian restaurants where I enjoyed meals with company and shared memorable conversations—all facilitated my social encounters and ultimately shaped my participation at the conference.

Sitting with the responses I’ve made through the Documentarian surveys, I found the affective association I made with spaces I spent individual time with, like the gym:

Friday, February 17 (Morning): I felt most comfortable when I was in the hotel gym by myself. Generally, I feel comfortable around people in the conference hotel. I was able to move around comfortably.

While the survey prompt, “Where do you expect to feel comfortable? Where not?,” would seemingly land itself on a place/space-based reaction, my response connected feelings with movement in time. Although psychologists like Christopher L. Heavey, Russell T. Hulburt, and Noelle L. Lefforge have attempted to organize the phenomenology of feelings in a systematic way, my experience of the spatial and locational apprehension was rather more an amalgamation of personal autonomy and unexpected, visceral return to given circumstances. Where I go and what I do could yield different experiences across time. Even though I wrote on Friday the 17th that I felt most comfortable when I was in the hotel gym, I was later disgusted by a weird smell in the same gym the next morning, making it most certainly an uncomfortable experience during my time at the conference.

In that same response I also noted my feeling of comfort with movements. Expectedly, a flagship conference such as the CCCC Convention that demands a great deal of physical movement can be challenging to a lot of people. I am reminded of the volunteers at the convention’s Access and Accessibility resource table who gave out information about accessibility and recommendations to attendees about ensuring accessibility for everyone. I am thankful for their time and contribution. Although it seems like we have come a long way to

provide access to all CCCC Convention attendees, the effort needs to be maintained and updated according to ongoing research.

Even as I was able to move around comfortably during the convention, I noticed numerous physical barriers and spatial challenges that could hinder attendees from a desired conference experience. Unlike the visible roadblocks for structural constructions around the conference location, some of these place- or space-based constraints were not easily noticeable, like the heavy doors by the conference hotel entrance that were difficult to use (partially due to the wind resistance in Chicago but mainly because they were old). For someone who couldn't use the revolving doors as an alternative to these heavy doors, simply getting in and out of the conference hotel could be an immense challenge.

The relationships between space, place, and embodied movements are intricate and intertwined. Together, these elements can create a dynamic interplay—embodied movements are influenced by the spatial attributes of a place, shaping how individuals navigate and interact within it. At the same time, individuals' movements in a place can also transform and redefine the spatial dynamics, influencing the perception and *experience* of space. This interrelationship highlights the interactions between the body, its movements, and the environment, revealing how our physical engagement with space and place shapes our sense of belonging, identity, and understanding of the world around us. In other words, the spaces and places that make up the CCCC Convention directly affect my bodily movements and make up a major part of my conference experience.

CODA: ALL THINGS EMBODIED AND EXPERIENCED

In this reflection, I've explored my personal experience with a return to an in-person conference, delving into the factors that contribute to the *conference experience*, as I've initially probed.

Evidently, my involvement as a Documentarian for the 2023 CCCC Convention has compelled me to contemplate the fundamental conditions that influenced my own experience. I've come to recognize the significance of materiality and memory in shaping my conference encounters. The physical environment and tangible elements contributed to the overall experience. Moreover, my presence and interactions with fellow attendees played a vital role in fostering participation and engagement. I acknowledge the impact of my presence on the host community and the value of personal agency in determining how I

engaged with conference activities. Additionally, the spaces and places where conferences take place significantly influenced my experiences and interactions. The surroundings and ambiance contributed to the overall atmosphere and shaped the nature of my engagement. Through this introspection, I have gained a profound appreciation for the multifaceted aspects that *assemble* a conference experience, extending beyond mere content. I recognize the importance of considering the material, social, and personal elements intertwined within the conference realm.

It's worth reiterating—embodiment plays a significant role in shaping the in-person conference experience. When attending an in-person conference, my physical presence and bodily experiences become integral to how I engage with the event. How I occupy a space, listen to others, and make conversations all contribute to building connections, establishing rapport, and fostering meaningful relationships. These physical interactions create a sense of shared presence. Being physically present allows me to engage with the conference environment through my senses. I can see the vibrant displays, hear the buzz of conversations and presentations, and even smell the coffee in the break area. The physical layout of the conference venue influences the dynamics of the event. Navigating through different spaces, such as meeting rooms, exhibition areas, and informal gathering spaces, offers opportunities for chance encounters and serendipitous connections.

Collectively, the intertwining elements of materiality, memory, personal agency, and physical presence contribute to a rich and multifaceted engagement that goes beyond the mere transmission of information or fostering connections, thus ultimately *assembling* the overall conference experience. This narrative has attempted to shed light on these ontological conditions, which I hope to be somewhat insightful. I am also grateful for the opportunity to contribute to documenting this event. The Documentarian role has not only allowed me to capture the essence of my own conference experience but has also provided a unique vantage point to inspect this experience reflectively.

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Documenting a Documentarian Friendship

Adrienne Jankens and Jennifer Grouling

Jennifer Grouling and Adrienne Jankens met on Zoom in summer 2023 to talk about their experiences at CCCC 2023. They chat about their role as Documentarians, the way their CCCC experience has changed over time, their friendship that began online in 2020, peer mentoring, and writing program administration. The transcript below is edited from the full 52-minute conversation but is meant to capture the informal nature of speech.

Adrienne Jankens: Maybe to get started, we should just introduce ourselves. You want to go first?

Jennifer Grouling: Sure. I'm Jennifer Grouling, associate professor at Ball State University.

Adrienne: Great. I'm Adrienne Jankens. I'm an assistant professor at Wayne State University. What's your cat's name?

Jennifer: This is Ghost. She likes Zoom.

Adrienne: Hi, Ghost. I'm glad you can't see too much of the room behind me because we put off school shopping until yesterday, so we had to pull all the old stuff out, organize it, go to Target. [Jennifer laughs.] And it's an absolute disaster. [Jennifer: Wow, yeah.]

Jennifer: Well, do you want me to start with my first question? [Adrienne: Sure.] So, what were you expecting going into this particular Cs? How were you expecting it to be similar or different from other ones? And since it was our first one back in person after a couple years?

Adrienne: I had attended some conferences online in the meantime, so I could see the desire people had to stay in touch with each other or meet new people. So, I expected it to have that kind of energy. What I didn't expect, and what was really nice to see, was that people seemed really happy just to be around other people. That could just be my perception, because I was not sure how I was going to feel about being around a ton of people. It ended up feeling really nice to just see people smiling. I wanted to spend that time meeting new people and

not what I've done in the past, which was spend most of my time with people I already knew.

Jennifer: Yeah, I feel like that changed with the online, like I met so many people like you over Twitter and social media and connected, and I was really looking forward to seeing those people for the first time in person. I was less seeking out my old, like I would go to the Virginia Tech alumni night sort of thing and meet up with people I already knew, which was great too.

Adrienne: Meeting you was like—I saw you right at the beginning of the conference and then I saw you right before we left. I remember I saw you at the elevators [Jennifer: Right!]. I could see you from the back [Jennifer laughs.] and I walked up, and I was like, “Well, well, well.” In my head, I was like, “You have known her for five days!” [Both laugh.] But I felt like I'd known you for a lot more.

Jennifer: Yeah, I feel like we'd known each other for a couple years at that point.

Adrienne: Yeah, just not in person. [Jennifer: Right?] So, it was nice to have that kind of familiar feeling, even in the midst of this crowded space. [Jennifer: Yeah, yeah.] What was it like when you arrived in Chicago? How did it feel to show up to the conference and sort of get in the zone?

Jennifer: Well, I drove three graduate students up. So, I was excited for that. But I was also, like, nervous to be at the conference and around so many people and meeting new people and all that. So, yeah, I don't know. I mostly remember getting checked in and trying to figure out all that because it also had been a while since I've done a hotel on my own [laughs].

Adrienne: Yeah, for sure. I drove in by myself, which was really nice. Work had been super intense for a couple of weeks, so I had a four-hour drive from north of Detroit just to enjoy time to myself. [Jennifer: Right.] I kind of forgot that people that I knew were going to be there [Jennifer laughs], like, that there would be an expectation that I did spend time with people that I work with when it was like, well, no, I'm getting away [both laugh]. Like this conference is for me [laughs]. Did you go in with things you wanted to do while you were there? I'm not sure that I went in wanting to check off a list of things.

Jennifer: Yeah, I don't think I really did either. Also, since my presentation was on demand, it was nice to be there and just feel like I could be more open ended in what I did. I had already looked through the program and like, saved a bunch of stuff on the app. But I knew I

wasn't gonna go to everything that I'd saved. So, it was more like these are some people I'd like to see while I'm here, things I'd like to go to. I think conferences have become a little bit of like a mentoring time for me, bringing the grad students up, but then it kind of felt a little weird because I'm being more cautious than they are. So, I was kind of like, you are here now. Be free. Text me if you need anything [laughs]. Like, yeah, we're just like, dumping them at the check in. [Adrienne: Carry on!] Good luck! [Both laugh.]

Adrienne: So, when you messaged me and we met up, we decided to go out to dinner and try to find somewhere outside, which is maybe a challenge in February in Chicago, but we actually had pretty good weather.

Jennifer: Right? So that was one of the reasons we tried to do the first night because it was gonna get cold after that, but it was actually nice that night.

Adrienne: It was beautiful. And I remember you navigated us. You got us down the road. And then we had a hard time finding the restaurant. [Jennifer: Right!] It was a weird entrance. But we had to sort of decide whether it was okay, because we didn't end up getting to be outside, really. Was that—like in our post-COVID sort of entrance into being at events again—was that one of the first times that you'd had to make choices like that and with a new person, which is hard, too?

Jennifer: Yeah, I mean, we've been primarily eating outside. So, I went into Cs kind of with a mindset of, like, if there's an option to do outside, but if it's like a really important thing to me, like, and I need to eat inside, I'll, I'll do it. So, I was nervous about it. But also like, "Oh, I really want to hang out with Adrienne, and this restaurant looks really tasty."

Adrienne: It was good [laughs].

Jennifer: And that view was gorgeous. So, they had a little outdoor area, but it wasn't—they weren't serving food out there. But we did get to go out and stand on the patio and have like this—it was such a perfect background of Chicago that I feel like the pictures look like we're on a green screen. Chicago in the background [laughs] (Fig. 15.1).

Adrienne: Like this beautiful lighting from inside this very trendy restaurant and [Jennifer: Yeah.] the glow of the little fireplace pit [laughs] [Jennifer: Yeah.], and then big buildings and lights in the back. I was nervous, because I didn't want you to think that I expected that we do whatever we had to do to eat food. If you would have

been, like, “I can’t do this,” we could have gone to, I don’t know, a hotdog cart, and I would have been like [both laugh] this is great! Which I think is one of the hard parts about that shift from knowing people online to then meeting in person and it matters to you that the relationship, like, goes beyond the dinner [laughs]. [Jennifer: Right, right.] I hadn’t met new people in, like, three years, because that’s not a thing [both laugh]. You know, my world got really small.

Jennifer: Yeah. And I feel like, you know, you were great about it. I was like, “I’m really hungry and this looks good and we’re just gonna do it.” But weighing how that factors in with my overall risk at the conference.

Adrienne: Yeah, for sure. That was one thing that was challenging about being in the conference hotel. I really loved that we didn’t have to go places, but some parts of the hotel got pretty cozy, like the elevators.

Jennifer: The elevators, gosh, yeah, yeah. Like there were some good tables. I hung out with some other people at some tables, and we had some snacks and wine and hung out, like, up in that area where, kind of like where the poster session was. [Adrienne: Mhmm.] We went there in the evening. That felt pretty safe. But yeah, the elevators were [laughs] not my favorite.



Figure 15.1. Photo of the authors in Chicago: Adrienne Jankens (L) and Jennifer Grouling (R).

Adrienne: I didn't share a room, so when I wanted to just get away [Jennifer: Yup.] I could have my space.

Jennifer: Yeah, same. I used to share rooms all the time, right? And now it's like, okay, between actually having the money and being further along in my career and COVID, I'm like, this is my room, my safe space [laughs].

Adrienne: I ended up really needing the time to clear my head about a bunch of stuff that was going on at work. [Jennifer: Mmm.] And so that time to myself and [Jennifer: Yeah.] time just to sit with my one friend from work. We ended up having more time to just eat together or have a drink. There was so much processing [laughs] that happened about events that have been going on. I needed that downtime to not feel like everything had to be happening fast. [Jennifer: Yeah.] I think being in one spot for the conference and not having to travel to different locations helped me do that quiet time without feeling like I couldn't dash over to another session I really wanted to get to.

Jennifer: Yeah, yeah, that's nice. So, speaking of us meeting up, since we've met online before, and we chatted through Zoom, how did meeting in person and hanging out fit or not fit with your kind of expectations of me or our online friendship?

Adrienne: Yeah. It was so nice to meet you. It was really easy, which felt good. I feel like we immediately started talking about just things we like, and our families, and stuff. And that was really great, because that's what I hoped it could be like. [Jennifer: Right.] I think sometimes when you meet people that do the same work as you, there's some posturing and stuff, and people want to always show what they know. [Jennifer laughs.] And you know a lot and you're very smart and successful. [Jennifer: Thanks.] And I'm learning a lot from you. [Jennifer: Oh!] But that's not what the friendship time is about. [Jennifer: Yeah.] So I think that's really cool. I get super nervous meeting new people, and it was just so nice that you messaged me when you got in, and I was like, "I'm just gonna do this." [Jennifer: Nice!] So, for me, meeting you matched up with what I hoped that it would be like.

Jennifer: Yeah, I'd say the same. Like, it seemed very easy. And I mean, I think for me, like, I definitely think a lot of people feel like the online relationships aren't as genuine or something, but I don't really feel like that, so I felt like I already knew you. [Adrienne: Yeah.] Well, enough that I was just excited to see you.

Adrienne: That's awesome. Yeah, that's how I felt too. I think I told my kids, "I'm gonna see my friend Jennifer in Chicago." [Jennifer: Nice.] Like I just decided, you know, we're gonna be friends. [Jennifer: Yeah, exactly.] I think I feel, like, that we have some other interests in common that make that easy too; it's not just that we do the same kinds of jobs.

Jennifer: Yeah, it is interesting you mentioning—like it's kind of weird to me to feel like I'm mid-career like I'm going up for full professor. Sometimes that still just seems very strange to me, that perception of me as, like, somebody in the field that's farther in a career. [Adrienne: Right.]

Adrienne: I had to do a reflective activity a few years ago when I started in this position about identifying mentors. And I had been assigned a couple of mentors, but they were also my professors when I was in graduate school. [Jennifer: Right.] So, they already were serving that role for me. And when it came to finding mentors for other parts of a professional life, I had, like, two colleagues I could list. And I was like, "I really need to start identifying, [laughs] like, who." I think those relationships do grow, or you identify them, more organically, but you also sometimes have to be purposeful about it. We've talked before about our work with graduate students, and that's really helpful for me. And, you know, I will probably be a writing program administrator sooner or later. [Both laugh.] [Jennifer: Right.] The closer I get sometimes the more I'm like, Oh, boy. [Both laugh.] [Jennifer: Yeah.] and I just finished getting my manuscript under review, [Jennifer: Yay!] so that's really exciting. [Jennifer: Very exciting!] If I were to put you on the spot, and I'm about to, what advice do you have for me, for either taking on the role of a writing program administrator or taking on the role of being a published scholar in the field?

Jennifer: Right [laughs]? So, what's your WPA structure like? Do you have, like, a team of people?

Adrienne: We have a director of composition, who, for at least a decade has had the support of an assistant director. That's a graduate student position. And then there's a set of non-tenure-track faculty members in composition that do the assessment, curriculum development, mentoring aspects of that work. [Jennifer: Nice.] And then other tenure-track faculty are involved to varying degrees, although we have a small group right now, there are only three of us. I'm observing as time goes on, and our people power gets lower, because we have

more responsibilities and a lot fewer people [Jennifer: Right?], that I'm not really sure what the best structure is. [Jennifer: Mhmm.] So, it's variable [laughs], I guess, is the short answer.

Jennifer: I've been really lucky to have a team with, like, two associate directors that are non-tenure-track faculty, and then two graduate student assistant directors. So, it's a big team. And I think one of the things that I didn't know much about going in was just how to manage a team or how to work with that. It was kind of funny because during COVID, we were all working from home, and at the time, we were in a loft apartment with an all-open floor plan.

And so, my wife and I were like literally working next to each other, and she was managing a team at the time. And to see, like, the way that she did that was actually really helpful. Like, I'm always like, "I don't want to be corporate!" And that's still true, but just like the way that she'd meet one-on-one with them and let them direct what they wanted out of the position—it was really helpful for me to see. And I think that's one thing I did well [laughs]. So, I feel like those relationships are so key.

Adrienne: Yeah, I think that probably is one benefit I'll have having worked with the same people [Jennifer: Right?] for a decade, being mindful of drawing on the strengths they have and asking, what they really want to bring to the table is going to be important.

Jennifer: When I took the WPA job, I also did, like, I was calling "strategic coffee hour" where I was reaching out to people on campus and being like, "Okay, you're the director of assessment, you are the person who does transfer credit, like, let's just get a coffee" or, you know, I'll come to your office, it doesn't have to be coffee. But like, here's what I do. Because I feel like, on campus, people don't know that this is a role; they don't know what it does.

Adrienne: It seems like unless you end up landing on a committee with somebody, you might not ever know. And then once you do know them, you realize the wealth of opportunity that brings for both offices to [Jennifer: Yeah.] learn from each other. That's something I'll have to get better at for sure.

Jennifer: Right. And so often we wait for an issue to come up. And then it's like, "Who do I talk to?" But if you have time, which you don't always because so many issues come up.

Adrienne: Was there anybody that you met at the conference that, or any conversation you had, or any session you attended that, like unveiled some of that working stuff to you?

Jennifer: I am thinking about Jacob Babb and—who is he working with?—was doing a thing with interviews with WPAs about their time during COVID. That was interesting, especially because I also participated in that study [laughs]. So, then you're listening, you're like, "Oh, was that quote me? [Adrienne: Yeah, right!] I might have said that [laughs]."

Adrienne: That's how I felt going through the surveys for the Documentarians. Like, oh, that's me. I said that.

Jennifer: Wow, I was smart! [Both laugh.] Yeah, but I think that that's kind of neat, too. Because both that and the Documentarian one, seeing their research presented, I was able to connect my piece of it to what they thought on the whole, and that was kind of fun to do and think about.

Adrienne: Yeah, that's really cool. I think, for me, the best example I have was seeing my friend Nicole present on the work she's done with summer bridge students. [Jennifer: Nice.] And it's like, this is a person I work with every week, in research teams and for mentoring stuff, and I didn't know this whole project [Jennifer: Yeah.] she was doing with students. And so that was really cool. She's an amazing teacher. I remember sitting in the audience for her session and people taking notes and asking questions, and everybody wanted to know so much!

Jennifer: Yeah, I know. It's a nice feeling.

Adrienne: That's definitely one of the perks. I was super nervous for my presentation. And didn't sleep enough the night before [laughs]. [Jennifer: Ohh!] It went fine. But I went in with really high hopes. I used to always want to do a thing where I would memorize my entire presentation and do a monologue, like, tell a story. [Jennifer: Right?] That's my high school drama director persona in me. And I don't have the time anymore to prep [Jennifer: Nope.] something to that level. The memorizing and the performance piece of it, I would have had to practice for weeks. [Jennifer: Yeah.] And the time leading up to the conference just didn't afford me that sort of attention, which felt weird because I was on sabbatical last fall. That sudden shift back to having almost no time to think once the semester started. I was like [laughs], "I thought I was going to be able to do better!" [Jennifer laughs.] I was just glad when my presentation was over. It helped me think through some things, so the process was useful. But I felt like I got more out of doing other stuff at the conference.

Jennifer: Yeah. It's interesting because I realized how much I like presenting online or doing the recorded stuff. I realized that pretty

early on during COVID. I mean, I'd made some videos for classes before, but not as many. And I was making one with my assistant director, graduate student at the time, for the writing program when we first transitioned online. And he noticed right away, like, a difference in my level of—I don't even know what to call it—comfort. I guess. [Adrienne: Mhmm.] When I'm staring at a roomful of people, I get more, like, tongue tied. When I'm just recording on the computer, I'm like, nobody's there. I'm just doing my thing. It's great. [Adrienne: Yeah.] [laughs] I was glad that I got to do this online, even though I was there in person too.

Adrienne: Yeah, you still get to share your ideas and get feedback from people that are watching it. But I agree. I'm so comfortable doing workshop kind of stuff in class [Jennifer: Mhmm.] and answering questions. But when it comes to the performance of delivering content, even for a ten-minute thing, I'm very nervous about it. Even though I know the stuff [laughs]. [Jennifer: Right?] Getting to record something, I get very animated. I'll realize how loudly I'm talking to the camera [both laugh], but very comfortable to the point where I don't even stress about that anymore in the same way. So, I'm glad you got to enjoy both sharing your information and then not having to worry about that part of it.

Jennifer: Yeah, of course, a few weeks before when I was recording, I was like, "Ah! [both laugh] I have to have this done already." So how did documenting the conference impact your experience of it? And do you remember any time when the survey, or your work as a Documentarian, maybe changed something about your approach to the conference?

Adrienne: So, this was the fourth year that I did the Documentarian work [Jennifer: Nice.] and the first time doing it in person. I think probably the biggest impact for me is on setting expectations every day and really going, "What is it that I want to get out of this conference today?" [Jennifer: Yeah.] That moment makes me be reasonable [laughs]. [Jennifer: Right?] I wanted to go talk to publishers. And I did try. Like writing it in the survey meant, "Okay, Adrienne, you said you were going to try this thing. So, you have to walk your body downstairs [Jennifer laughs] to the tables, and just do it. It's going to be fine." So, I set my purpose, and then at some point in the day, I did it, because I didn't want to have to write later on, "Oh, I didn't do it." [Both laugh.] But nobody was ever there when I

went [Jennifer: Oh.] which was okay. I mean, that was really like the reason I told everyone I was going to the conference. It's happened since, so it's okay. But I think that doing the survey work has made me be very intentional about setting a purpose and making sure that I get something out of what I'm doing. How was the experience of doing the reflections for you?

Jennifer: I've done like diary days here in Muncie. There's like a local community that everybody will write, like, about their day or a certain [Adrienne: Oh!] day, which is really cool. But that hasn't had that survey component. And so that was, that was interesting to me to think about, especially like, the second day of the conference, I think there were questions about what you were looking forward to, or how you were feeling. And I realized I was gonna go to lunch with some people from grad school, and I really didn't want to go [laughs]. And I was just feeling like, the first day of the conference, I was excited to be there. And I went hard and did a lot of things. So, I decided, you know what, you don't have to, so I told them, like, "Let's do drinks later, instead of lunch." And I went out in Chicago more that day. I think that in my head, I was like, "This is what I've signed up to do today, meet these people for lunch, I need to do that." And then the survey helped me gauge where I was at with that and be like, you know, that's okay to push that back and do something you need to do for yourself today.

Adrienne: Yeah, that's good. Where did you go that day?

Jennifer: So, I went up to—it was like a contemporary art museum. I kind of wandered through the city, went by the big, the bean. [Adrienne: Yeah]. Right. [Adrienne: Yeah.] I was not great at navigating [laughs], so I got lost a bit. But I finally found my way up to the museum. It was really cool.

Adrienne: Cool. Did you go out in the snow? Or before the snow?

Jennifer: It was not the day it was snowing. It was cold, though.

Adrienne: When I graduated from Valparaiso, most of my friends moved back to Chicago, and I moved up to mid-Michigan. I spent my first two years teaching high school just wanting to move to Chicago because it was cool. [Jennifer: Yeah.] And I love visiting there and stuff. I feel like it's pretty easy to get around. But I think I'm more of a green-space person [laughs] now. I felt spoiled getting to go there for a conference, because I got to see college friends and only had to drive. What was your favorite thing about being in Chicago that weekend?

Jennifer: Hmm, I mean February is not the best time of year to be there [laughs]. Even the times that I got DoorDash or whatever, I just enjoy getting really good food [laughs] in a big city.

There's a place—way back in 2011 I went to NCTE in Chicago, and I think that was when I discovered a donut place I really liked. [Adrienne: Nice.] But I ordered DoorDash and I just ordered a dozen donuts. And my friend from my MA program came up and we watched, well we “watched” the opening session. We ended up talking through the entire thing [laughs]. But she came up and had donuts with me. And then like the rest of the trip I was just eating donuts, [Adrienne: That's great.] 'cause I had, like, a dozen that I just ordered, so.

Adrienne: Now I'm just thinking about good food. So, anything else you want to ask?

Jennifer: I guess this is another future thinking one. But did anything from this particular Cs make you think differently about future conferences? Or Cs in the future?

Adrienne: I think it showed me that I am not as out of place as I sometimes feel. That I can just show up and be in the moment of the conference, and I'll get what I need out of it. [Jennifer: Mhmm.] And it was a good reminder for me that I much more enjoy presenting on something I've been working on for a long time than something that's a little bit newer. To go in feeling confident about what I'm going to talk about is a better choice for me. [Jennifer: Yeah.] How about you?

Jennifer: I always thought Cs was, like, the thing to do every year. And I still love it. But I think, like, balancing it with smaller, more focused conferences is good for me at this point, because, like, travel funding has gotten cut, right? Like, it's just harder to do all these things. And I'm less willing to spend my—even though I have more of my own money, I'm less willing to spend it on. Because I'm like, “This is my job. You should be, you should be funding me to do this.” [Adrienne: Right. Yeah.] There was a time where I was like, “I'll never miss a year at Cs.” I'm not done with Cs. This is great. But I think like next year, I might try to go to a smaller conference instead and kinda play it by ear a little bit.

Adrienne: That makes sense to me. Like two weeks ago, I searched the program from the 2023 conference [Jennifer: Mhmm.] for GTA training, teacher development, other versions of those keywords. And I found, like, four sessions. [Jennifer: Really?] That was what I could find. Like, if the people that I'm supposed to be connecting with aren't

people that I can find this way, [Jennifer: Mhmm.] how am I going to find them? I mean, obviously there's a lot of other ways to connect. But I was like, "Oh, I wonder, what did I miss? What didn't I go to?" [Jennifer: Right?] So yeah, I hear you on being selective. One of my mentors told me a couple years ago that I should stop going to conferences and just work on my book. He was like, "Adrienne, you've done all the conferences. [Both laugh.] You don't need to show anybody that you can do them anymore." So, every time I'm about to apply [Jennifer: Yeah.] even for next year for Cs, I was like, I don't need to do this.

Jennifer: Yeah, it's hard to, to get that balance. I mean, I think that's the other thing that has become like, definitely a time where I can like, support my grad students. Like I went to a presentation that one of my grad students did at Cs. [Adrienne: Oh, cool.] It also was, and I think maybe this is just having been away from it for a few years and not seeing it in person—but Cs felt very young to me this year. Did it feel that way to you?

Adrienne: Yeah, it did, which is great. [Jennifer: I agree.] I hope that conferences, with the spoken emphasis on inclusivity, which includes a lot of different things, but it seems like the point should be giving younger scholars in the field an opportunity to talk about their ideas or talk with other people. [Jennifer: Yeah.] And the only way that can happen is if the people who are reading their proposals are open to hearing new things and new ideas. That's a good shift. [Jennifer: Yeah, I agree.] It's cool to see, like, the big people. It's cool to see them at a conference for sure. But when I was a grad student, they weren't the people I was gonna end up working with. [Jennifer: Right, right.]

Jennifer: Yeah, I loved all that energy. I was like, "This is great," but also made me feel a little disconnected.

Adrienne: There is a moment where you go like, wait, I'm not the young person at the conference. [Jennifer: Right?] [Both laugh.] I'll just take my gray hair back upstairs. That's how I feel. [Jennifer: Yep!] [Both laugh.] Nothing wrong with that. I had a great time. For sure.

Together, in Chicago

Karen R. Tellez-Chaires

As a consistent user of planners and as a collector of paper memorabilia, it was crushing to sit at the dining room table with markers, stickers, and an empty planner, having nothing to document during the most frightful days of the COVID-19 pandemic. There were no movie ticket stubs to paperclip to a page. There were no lunch plans to write into a washi-tape-decorated calendar box—an occasional balm to my sadness of not having obligations to plan was to make goals for the future ahead. Instead of creating a to-do calendar, I made long, numbered, and bulleted lists of all that I needed to do to get ready for life after quarantine.

Something I noticed, as the quarantine lifted, was that, like many people, I missed traveling and spending time with my family. I also regretted that I didn't have a chance to become more involved in my new career as a professor of rhetoric and composition because quarantine put a pause on all in-person conferences. During the days when I could not leave the house, I felt most frustrated that I did not know when I would be able to spend time with people again. I longed for connection. I didn't want to see or hear people, I wanted to share space, to touch them. In the days since the lifting of the pandemic quarantine, I have traveled some, spent more time with my sons who live in New Mexico, and attended in-person conferences in Louisville, Kentucky, Los Angeles, and Davis, California. The big conference trip for me in 2023 was to attend Cs in Chicago, and it checked all the boxes I'd listed during the days when all I could do was hope and plan. Cs offered the opportunity to travel, spend time with family, and be close to friends whom I hadn't seen in what felt like more than two years. At Cs, I blended my love for work and love for family by meeting my mother (Lori), sister (Kathy), and tia (Aurora) for a five-day trip.

The Windy City is a special place to my parents, sister, and me, in that we lived briefly in Cicero, Illinois, a town just outside Chicago, in 1978. Our three brothers stayed in El Paso, Texas, with family during this time, allowing my parents to get settled before they would join us. Life could be trying for our family—especially in the early days when

my parents raised five children on one income. Our youngest brother wasn't born until 1980. Chicago was beautiful, but we missed our brothers, extended family, and our southwest home. We returned to El Paso before our brothers ever came to Cicero. There were some consolations in the city, though, like *The Bozo Show* on Saturdays, delicious pizza, and Gerry Rafferty's "Baker Street" that played constantly on the popular radio station our dad tuned in to. My sister and I would sing in the backseat of our green Mercury Cougar, "But you know, he'll always keep movin'. You know he's never gonna stop movin'. 'Cause he's rollin', he's the rolling stone." For the rest of my life, this song has brought back memories of our sparsely furnished second-floor apartment, flashes of interactions with a friendly beat cop who seemed to look out for us while our dad worked nights as a police officer himself, and of an exciting swim in Lake Michigan that I likely would not take today for fear of hypothermia or pollution. The CCCC 2023 trip to Chicago marked a return for my mother, sister, and me after thirty-five years of reminiscing about the lake, the wind, and the tall buildings. As our Uber driver sped into Downtown from our airport pickup, I felt like I was in a dream that I'd had many times before of my sister and mom with me in a car, the lights of traffic whirring by us. Together, in Chicago.

THE CONFERENCE

All four of us—Lori, Aurora, Kathy, and I—arrived in Chicago on Tuesday, February 14, 2023. Mom and Kathy flew straight through from San Francisco, I arrived on a flight that started in Santa Barbara, California, and our tia Aurora came from Dallas, Texas. By the time we got checked into our room, it was time for dinner. We settled in for burgers and beers at Kitty O'Shea's in the hotel and remarked on the quiet all around us that I knew would soon change. The server mentioned the snow that was in the forecast for the week, which was news that made the four of us Southwesterners shiver.

As is the sensation that often happens with travel, particularly far from home, I felt that I was fully in conference mode by the time I boarded my flight. Many of the tasks I'd set aside to be done at the hotel, such as grading and the revising of chapters, slipped to the back of my mind. All my thoughts were devoted to the role I would have as a co-hostess in the relaxation room during the Feminist Workshop, on my first opportunity to serve as a respondent on the Job Market

Panel, put together by Laura Micciche, and on my panel presentation. This conference experience was starkly different from my attendance in 2022, when I took notes on my virtual role, participating via Zoom. As some of my final thoughts on the 2022 attendance, I had written

My locations during conference days included my car, home (dining room), and office on campus. One of the patterns I could see was that I was working intently to stay scheduled, but to no avail. It seemed that no matter where I was, something came up that distracted me from the task at hand. This ranged from a situation in a parking lot where someone was waiting for me to leave my parking space, although I was at work in it, to emergency meetings with students and faculty. Even though I have been a big proponent for online conferencing, I longed for the days when I was on site at the conference. I thought about the ways that being *at* the conference meant warm and fuzzies like seeing people and traveling, but also, being able to focus on panels, and know that I have dedicated time for conferencing. My university didn't give me days off for the conference, so being online meant balancing it all.

Revisiting those notes reminded me of the difficulties I had with balancing my work and home life that were compounded by working at home throughout the pandemic quarantine. When we returned to teaching on campus in 2022, it was once again difficult to find balance between home and work. Events like conferences were somehow given less importance by administrators who figured that faculty would figure out the best way to teach, fulfill service requirements on campus, and dedicate time to home responsibilities while attending conferences. Even though I could feel the stress of my situation when reading my notes, it was hard for me to imagine the feelings I had while attending the 2022 CCCC online. I couldn't feel the actual pull of attending the conference online because I was in the conference hotel, able to give attention to my roles at the conference. Of course, this was only my first evening in Chicago and the euphoria of traveling, being in Chicago, and at the conference was still fresh.

Holding a space for retreat and relaxation away from the conference during the Feminist Workshop contributed to my early conference feelings of bliss. Andrea McCrary and I got to hold a full room open for conference attendees to retreat during the Feminist Workshop.

Andrea and I told stories, got to know each other, and commented on how good it was to be together again with old and new friends. The relaxation room wasn't visited by many conference attendees, likely because it was in the basement of the hotel, but we didn't mind. We were happy to be conferencing face-to-face, to have space for rest, and to be reconnecting with people we'd missed. There were moments during the conference when being with people felt like a gift that was too much of an ask, as if the other shoe was going to drop and I would realize all wasn't as grand as I had anticipated or was feeling at the time. In retrospect I am filled with gratitude that the other shoe did not drop, and all went relatively well.

MY TIME IN CHICAGO

The surveys I completed while at the conference ended up feeling like a much-needed journal of my time in the hotel. On April 15, I wrote,

I'm in my hotel room this morning and it's beautiful and cold out. I can see a building in front of me, and a man in the window across from my building is working on his laptop. I am not sure if he is a conference-goer but he is working feverishly on something. My room is quiet with my travel buddies asleep.

In some ways I felt that I was writing a captain's log that would survive hundreds of years after I had left this earth and my ship was found capsized on a forgotten island. The initial experience of documenting my time was romantic and glamorous as I kept track of every restaurant and meal we ate. The writing and tracking were practices reminiscent of my COVID-19 lists filled with plans for travel. I didn't want one detail to go undocumented. In the exhilaration of being at the conference and the shunning of my academic responsibilities tied to home, I also seemed to forget or put aside my bodily limitations as a woman with a chronic autoimmune disease. On the first night of the trip, Kathy and I ran downstairs from our room to the lobby café at nearly midnight in our pajamas in search of a snack. Time was not important to me, nor were my dietary limitations. I chose to forget that my body relies on sleep, certain foods, and tight schedules that uphold rest and activity if I intend to function at my best. From the time I got on the plane in Santa Barbara, I had been moving non-stop, eating and drinking without concern for the way my body would react. In my morning response to survey questions for April 16, I wrote,

I am sick, having drank something that triggered a food intolerance so I'm drinking hot tea and water with hopes of getting back in control in time to participate in the day.

Unfortunately, feeling sick has me worried about how the day will go. Thus far, I have missed the Opening Session and a panel on Hopeful Feminisms. I am pushing myself to rebound in time for a session on Handcrafted Rhetorics. Having attended the Documentarian Meet and Greet last night, I am excited about all that the conference offers. Kathy and I sat in the hotel bar among other Documentarians, met new people, had a few drinks, and "felt" like we were in Chicago. There was a tremendous amount of hustle and bustle around us in the bar and outside the windows.

My day will be at the mercy of my body. Fatigue, body aches, tummy aches, and headache are not what I hoped for, so I will manage my time around what I think my body can handle. I am looking forward to intentionally going to the cafe to get something healthy to eat, to eating in the hotel restaurant (the healthy buffet), and to getting to my first session in the early afternoon. Overall, I am telling myself to not stress and to "go with it" whatever comes my way. I will be improvisational to emergent situations, looking forward to seeing Kristi Prins from CPP. Oh, we went out for pizza at Aurelio's last night and it was so good—too good. I may never want California pizza again.

By afternoon, Kathy and I did make it to the Handcrafted Rhetorics panel discussion and we did see Kristi Prins. We ate all three meals at the hotel, and got the gift of snow. My body aches and nausea finally lifted after a few hours of rest and doubling up on medication. Of the many gifts our time in Chicago brought, there were the dreams that came true that I'd never imagined, such as running into the arms of Felicita Arzu-Carmichael at the elevators, after having not seen her since our PhD program at New Mexico State University. I got to kiss Lauren Rosenberg's cheeks in the lobby of the hotel, forgetting about COVID-19 and only seeing a face that I missed. Without embarrassment, I looked for and found Ada Hubrig to tell them how much I appreciate and admire their work.

By the time the snow came in the evening, Mom, our tia, Kathy, and I bundled up and made our way to the front of the hotel to play.

We told other conferencegoers about our rare experiences with snow, and they too celebrated the snow with us. Our tia wrote her name and our uncle's name side by side in the white dust like a schoolgirl, our mother looked up and caught snow on her tongue in the most childlike manner, while my sister and I tried to make snowballs but mostly twirled, laughed, and took video and photos to send and post to social media. Kathy and I got to experience the Chicago winter we had missed as children, having returned to El Paso in early fall of 1978. In my end-of-day notes, I wrote the words: eating, learning, talking, playing, and sistering.

When we were all finally home from the conference, I marveled at the word cloud put together from the collection of Documentarian surveys that boasted the most frequently used words used by the 2023 Documentarians. The words “family” and “time” were the most popular words used in the 2023 Documentarian surveys, with “family” being used most at the beginning of the conference, and “time” at the end. By our third day in Chicago, we had most definitely eaten delicious food, learned during panels, stayed up late into the night talking in bed to the light of our smartphones, played in the snow, honored each other in the roles of sister—my mother and her sister, me and my sister. We made up for lost time, while simultaneously going back in time to redo what was left undone when we left Cicero in a rush that our father never explained.

Fulfilling this winter memory with fun seemed to take care of a hole that was missing in my memory, somehow making it easier to return to California with the feeling of having taken care of weighty business, or as if I had found a treasured item I'd long since accepted as being lost.

The five days in Chicago were more lovely and heartening than I'd expected but, as we neared the last two days of the trip, I knew there was so much I needed to do at home and work.

RESPONSIBILITIES AND COMPETITION FOR MY ATTENTION

In-person conference attendance is about many things for me. It's about presenting, but also about sitting in the role of student once again, learning from the presenters in chosen panels. Being on location at a conference is also about meeting new people, eating food that nourishes the soul, seeing the sights in the conference city, and reconnecting with the people who inform my scholarship and my heart, and

a combination of all the above. My Retention, Tenure, and Promotion packet provides me a list of the teaching, service, and research I must do to be promoted at my university. The actual enactment of fulfilling those responsibilities can be endearing or not, as the individual decides they will face each requirement on their own terms. For me, research begins in the classroom and is grown and fed through the interactions I get from online meetings, but mostly from the brief and long discussions held at in-person conferences.

Many of the networking connections made at conferences are never revisited, but some are. I have found that it is the connections I make with people that get attention once the conference is over, that are lasting. It was difficult to make connections when conferencing via Zoom, as somehow, when clicking the red “LEAVE MEETING” button on the bottom of the right-hand side of the screen, it is not only the technological connection with the conference that is severed but also the emotional connection that only feels real when logged into meetings.

Once I had given my presentation with my panel on the morning of the seventeenth, it was time to give my full attention to the grading that waited for me and to chapter revisions I had put off. I had to make time to sit at my computer and work, even if it was for a few minutes. The balance I had struggled to find when attending Cs online in 2022 was completely off, as I was 95 percent in conference mode and not focused on calling my sons, touching base with our father who was back in New Mexico, or checking on my partner as often as I might otherwise. Remarkably, I was not interested in checking out of conference mode in some sort of stubborn resistance that gave me control over this time that I cherished and had looked forward to for so long.

My notes reveal that my conference mode is very tightly tied to the conference program, accentuated with plans to see the conference city, and to eat at recommended restaurants or the local eateries found by chance. Conferencing in person means coffee, tea, and stopping people in lines while they wait to buy a muffin to tell them how happy you are to see them, to ask how they have been, and to find out what they are doing. The responsibilities at my university, the laundry or packing mess I’d made at home were in my head, thousands of miles away. While I did find the time to get some grading done, worked on some chapter revisions, and texted and called my beloved family, I was in Chicago—body, mind, and spirit. All of me was in Chicago and at

Cs and I didn't want that experience bothered because I knew this trip would end and the rest of my responsibilities would be waiting for me.

GOING HOME

The cold, the draw to family, and longing for the warmth of the Southwest were some of the reasons my parents decided to leave Cicero. Our neighborhood was predominantly inhabited by people of Italian descent in the late 1970s with us as the outliers, second generation Mexican Americans. We didn't know the word *nepantla* then but knew the sensation of not totally belonging (Anzaldúa). My bilingual parents were white-passing enough to keep our neighbors wondering about the origins of our last name, Tellez. My father's job in law enforcement placed him and us in a precarious position. The Statistical Summary 1978 report published by the Chicago Police Department stated, "Major crimes in Chicago were reduced 6.6% in 1978," but police and resident activity in our neighborhood revealed otherwise. My family had these two significant reasons to be marginalized in the neighborhood—my father's occupation and our ethnicity. And although we didn't have the words for it, we could feel the gravity of what it meant to be the other, not from Cicero, "ni de aquí, ni de allá"—"neither from here nor there." The decision to return to El Paso, Texas, was an easy one for my parents. It was nearly winter in Chicago when we packed our car to travel back to El Paso, and I suspect they were not looking forward to the winter weather or what it might mean to raise children in rapidly changing Cicero.

The day before leaving the conference, Mom, Kathy, Tia Aurora, and I got out into the city. We walked a mile or so before becoming discouraged by the cold from the remaining snow and, of course, the freezing wind. Intent on finding Chicago-style hotdogs, we took an Uber to Portillo's Chicago. The dining experience exceeded our expectations. With my mind already reconnecting me with home, I had two slices of their famous chocolate cake packaged to sustain the flight to Los Angeles—a gift for my partner. I deleted Whova, the conference app, from my smartphone as a way of breaking my connection with the conference program, and transferred names and emails to my physically written journal where I'd kept notes from the panels I'd attended. In a box I'd drawn in my journal labeled, "To-Do CCCC 2024," I wrote reminders to myself to volunteer to read James Berlin Award applications again, as well as to read first-round conference proposals for 2024. Before bed, I wrote three ideas for conference proposals of

my own for 2024, none of which I used when applying, although all centered on feminist rhetorical resilience (Flynn, Sotirin, and Brady).

With afternoon flights, Mom, Tia Aurora, Kathy, and I left for the airport at the same time. We were satisfied with our exhaustion, but ready to return to our lives in California and Texas. We had done some anticipated and some unexpected things in Chicago—work, learn, teach, connect, document, remember, and play. Without realizing until we were at the end of the trip, we fulfilled promises that we'd made for years that we'd spend time together. For Mom, Kathy, and me, we at last got to leave Chicago together under different circumstances, better even, and on our terms. This time, we wanted to leave Chicago to return to our lives for different reasons than when we left in 1978.

Our willing return to our lives was a reassuring reminder of how far we had come since we left the first time around as individuals, as a family, and as Chicanas who work too hard sometimes to break the inevitability of regret that generations of women before us could not avoid. I got to show my mom, tia, and sister some of the work I do and am so proud of, and I got to introduce them to the work being done in my field, most of which also brings me great joy.

As the Uber pulled into the temporary lane for departures at O'Hare International, I sang in my head, "When you wake up, it's a new mornin'. The sun is shinin', it's a new mornin'. You're goin', you're goin' home," from the final lines of "Baker Street" (Rafferty). I smiled at what this song means to me. I was softened by the realization of how much can change in thirty-five years since being in one place and returning. I was also moved by the difference from one year of virtually meeting at a conference, to being able to hold the hands of a dear, respected friend and colleague while saying, "It is so good to see you!" when what you really mean is "It is so good to touch you!"

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AFTERWORDS

Afterword

Kindness and Kith

Frankie Condon

The Documentarian narratives in this collection have carried me back to my own experience of the 2022 Convention and, still more so, to the flurry, the excitement, and the hope of the months after that conference as, with an extraordinary collaborative of volunteers and staff, the 2023 Convention was planned. In 2022, I was struggling my way out of a cold and deep pandemic depression. Separated not only from friends and colleagues, but also by a closed international border that kept me from two of my three children and them from me and from their home. Those months of worry, loneliness, and loss came near to breaking me.

When the land borders between Canada and the United States opened once more, and as the 2022 Convention approached, I was determined to see my daughter Lucy and my dear friend Jennifer, come hell or high water. I packed my car and drove from Waterloo, Ontario, to Potsdam, New York, where Lucy was a student and Jen a faculty member at SUNY Potsdam. I stayed at Jen's home, deep in the woods of upstate New York, where snow still lay thick on the ground. I spent hours talking, talking, talking the way old friends do, snuggling her dog, and sneaking out for visits to her chickens, donkey, and sheep. I held my daughter every chance I got, reveling in the pleasure of her presence: her smile, the smell of her hair, her wit, and her wisdom. Frankly, I sandwiched the conference in between love-ins with my beloved people, caring much less about attending sessions than on the joy of reunion. What duties I needed to perform at the conference I undertook at the Potsdam public library. Jen had booked us a room with reliable Wi-Fi. In between sessions and tasks, we perused books about gardening and foraging in upstate New York.

This is what I learned from COVID: I don't know that I will ever again depart easily from family, friends, or colleagues. The recurring nightmares of separation, suffering, and loss with which I have contended since I was a child can, in fact, come true. And so, the 2022 conference concluded, I drove away from my daughter and my friend heartsore at the leaving and reaching for gratitude. I had held my

daughter in my arms. I had broken bread with my friend. I needed to be grateful. At home, once more, the work on CCCC 2023 kicked into high gear. I poured myself into writing the call-for-proposals, willing my vision and my writing to both represent lovingly and well the yearning for affiliative relationship, for camaraderie, and solidarity for which friends and colleagues across the organization called and which I, too, felt deeply.

Very often I find myself stretched uncomfortably between the social norms of professional institutions (like the university) and organizations (like CCCC) and the pressing human needs of folks whose lives those institutions and organizations impact for good or ill. I am struck by the propensity of such entities to abstract the value of human—and humane—relations from the material conditions and lived experiences of workers, students, staff, or members. To the extent that those relations can be said to possess exchange value for the institution or organization, that value is extolled and credit for that value claimed by the institution or organization. The impact of such a practice, I think, is the continual thinning of human and humane relations as casual insouciance is encouraged under the heading of “professionalism.”

As the 2023 conference cycle swung into action, with proposals and first and second round reviews, with negotiations and frustrations over conference space and time and accessibility, and all the myriad organizing tasks, missteps, failures, and triumphs, I worried. Like every professional organization I know of, CCCC has journeyed in just such a way, leaving in its wake too many ignored, belittled, marginalized, uncared-for folks: students, teachers, and scholars who slipped unnoticed and uncelebrated through sessions and awards ceremonies and social gatherings. Could we be and do something else, something quite different altogether? Could we care differently and more for one another? Could we create and learn to sustain an organization and a conference grounded in kindness? Could we, together, learn to recognize and promote as scholarly and pedagogical practice simultaneously critical and compassionate intellectual engagement with one another? Could we learn with and for one another on the go, as it were, staying, supporting, assisting? Getting fierce when ferocity is called for without abandoning one another or stomping off in a fury when caught out in failure? I wanted—I still want—to try.

The accounts of conference experiences over the last three years produced by the Documentarians catalog themes of conference experience

that we should attend to carefully, for there are longstanding themes in experience well-articulated here as well as qualities of experience long overlooked that we all need to learn from and about if we are to create increasingly inclusive and caring conferences. Karen Tellez-Chaires, for example, writes of CCCC 2023 as an opportunity to travel with family and commune with friends after years apart, combining her love of her people and her work. She also notes the ways that the demands of work and the need for respite continue to contend throughout the conference, documenting the need for self-care as well as for the being-with and touching of one another that the pandemic denied to us for so long.

I was particularly moved by Quang Ly's account of the conference and their observation that imposter syndrome often lingers long after graduate school. This is certainly an experience I share, and, like Quang Ly, I have struggled over the years to find my way and my place within both the CCCC Convention and the organization. And yet, they note, even through the excitement, trepidation, and angst of finding a place and people to belong with, the conference does support the opportunity to learn from colleagues and friends, to hear constructive criticism and so expand perspectives and hone ideas.

One of the great challenges for program chairs of conferences like CCCC is to think carefully and critically about whether or how one's own experiences and ways of being might not be generalizable or serve the needs and interests of other folks. Nitya Pandey and Jennifer Grouling both wrote tenderly and powerfully about their need and preference for virtual conference attendance. Pandey's chronicle should remind us of all the comfort and well-being of home that no conference hotel, however filled with friends old and new, can provide. Grouling writes:

While others frequently articulated their struggles with the pandemic life, with online teaching, virtual conferences, and Zoom fatigue, I had found a sense of confidence and self, an energy and productivity that I had never had before. I mourned (and still mourn) that 2021 may be the only year in which I am allowed to function in that virtual environment that clicked with my brain so well.

Her words caught me up, made me stop and think. In a certain way, I, too, found "confidence," "energy," and "productivity" when all the

working world was virtual. And yet, although I find commonality, I recognize significant differences as well. I can and do choose to work in person when the option is available. I recognize that I move through a world designed for my ease and not for the ease or well-being of those who are neurodivergent. I do not mourn the return to that world as Grouling does. This means, I think, that I and other neurotypical readers have a special obligation to think more, think harder, do better at allying with neurodivergent colleagues and friends to ensure that the CCCC conference and the organization hold space and time and opportunity for them to thrive in greater ease.

I'm ever so grateful to all the Documentarians whose writings are collected in this volume. Their work has affirmed for me the importance of human and humane relationship to the thriving of CCCC members, conference attenders and presenters, to those who are able and take pleasure in gathering together, and to those who are safer and happier participating from their homeplaces. The work of the Documentarians makes me want to keep wondering but also to do more and better to create and sustain a CCCC that serves the profession well by centering the health, happiness, and well-being as we study, teach, write, and learn—together.

Afterword

Making Academic Conferencing Meaningful across Modalities: Lessons from Documentarians

Jennifer Sano-Franchini

This volume of CCCC Documentarian Tales offers a glimpse into the conferencing lives of fifteen CCCC Convention attendees, as the context and conditions surrounding us shifted and changed between 2021 and 2023. During this time, we were in the throes of the COVID-19 pandemic. Many of us had been working online and going about our day-to-day lives with limited face-to-face interactions for some time at that point (Budhathoki, Thomas). In response to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines, CCCC experimented with online and then hybrid conferencing modalities. Together, these tales document how the contributors experienced the Convention in abundant ways, with a range of concerns, emotions, and encounters in mind. Moreover, we see how the authors' experiences are shaped by their teaching and administrative responsibilities, the pressures of academic review systems, their obligations as caregivers, and their concerns as individuals who must manage their own health and medical conditions. Importantly, these tales point to a number of other embodied and material factors that affect the experiences of conferencegoers; these factors include but are not limited to how our bodies are or aren't racialized and/or politicized (Kim, Patterson), disabilities and neurodivergence (Grouling), our professional and familial relationships and obligations (Jankens, Marlow), our nationality and citizenship status (Budhathoki), where we are in our studies or careers, and self-perceptions about how we fit into academia and academic trajectories (Ly), amongst other factors.

As the Program Chair for the 2024 CCCC Convention and as a digital rhetoric and technical communication scholar who's interested in the technological and infrastructural design of experiences, I cannot help but notice how this set of Documentarian Tales offers important insights for learning from the 2021, 2022, and 2023 CCCC Conventions, and drawing on the experiences of conference attendees to reimagine (large) academic conferences after the COVID pandemic, and now

that COVID has become endemic—a permanent fixture of our lives, in 2024 and beyond. I found myself reading these tales as user experience (UX) narratives that speak to the form, structure, and feelings associated with large academic conferences, and CCCC in particular, as well as with academia as an industry and line of work. Along these lines, some questions to consider include: What do large academic conferences like CCCC do and enable for attendees, in all its iterations? What are the values that inform and shape them? How might these values be fraught and informed by inequitable power structures? What aspects of traditional in-person academic conferences do attendees feel are important to maintain? How might the affordances of in-person conferences be most effectively translated for online and hybrid formats? How do digital technologies like Zoom, Whova, and other digital and hybrid conferencing platforms impact what it feels like to participate in a conference? And what can conference organizers do to support these changing technological and social contexts?

I can't answer all of these questions in this brief essay, but I can try to think through some of them. Below, I offer my reflections in the hopes that others might likewise be interested in engaging with these questions and in collaborating to—as Jones and Williams put it—reimagine academic structures for more equitable and justice-oriented futures.

WHAT DO ACADEMIC CONFERENCES LIKE CCCC DO/ ENABLE?

This set of Documentarian Tales taught me a lot about the rhetorical work of CCCC—what people appreciate about it and what academic conferences like CCCC can do, or enable, for attendees. In brief, they describe how academic conferences like CCCC can be empowering, educational, practical, and enriching. They also describe the social element of conferences—how it can be a way to feel connected with others in the discipline through planned and serendipitous encounters. At the same time, it can be—and perhaps in certain ways by its very nature is—exclusionary, inaccessible, and demanding, bringing on feelings of guilt for those who might feel like they aren't doing “enough.” And, as an intervention into the conferencing experience, the Documentarians project at CCCC can enable not only more open forms of participation but also reflexivity and the ability to navigate the conference with a sense of purpose.

Quang Ly's narrative reminds me of how academic conferences can be quite empowering as they create opportunities to actively contribute to a given discourse community, to shape the profession, and to build professional relationships. For Jason Tham, "going to the CCCC Convention was an effective way to learn about trends in the field, pick up new methods of teaching and research, and share my own practices with other interested attendees." For me, the CCCC conference, and more important, the people with whom I've interacted through the organization, have opened up research and collaboration opportunities, made me aware of new (to me) teaching ideas, given me an opportunity to reconnect with friends, and, at times, made my work in the profession not only bearable but also worth doing. In other words, I've found it to be a sustaining space, in a lot of ways.

Perhaps the most common thing that I hear people appreciate about attending academic conferences like CCCC is meeting up with their people, reuniting with graduate school friends, and/or socializing with others in their field (as Jennifer Grouling addresses in her chapter). As Ly writes, the CCCC conference "is more than just about presenting and learning about new research. It is the perfect opportunity to catch up with colleagues, professors, classmates, and friends (and to do a little sightseeing on the side)." At times, as Victoria Braegger notes in her chapter, what attendees remember aren't the content of the panels they attended but who they met, how they did or didn't connect with people, and how they felt during the conference. They raise questions about how we measure what we take away from conferences, and how they stack up with what we remember.

And it's not only people they already know and are connected to that people appreciate meeting. As Tham noted, in-person conferences offer "opportunities for chance encounters and serendipitous connections." At times, these encounters even occur outside of the conference site. For example, Ly described running into and connecting with others on their way to the conference at the airport, thus enabling professional connections. Sometimes these connections are not verbal but small connections that are nonetheless meaningful—such as when Ly and a familiar colleague's eyes met at the convention space; when Adrienne Jankens and Jennifer Grouling saw one another at the elevators after having just met a few days earlier,

which would lead to a deepening and lasting friendship; and what Karen Tellez-Chaires described as simply but profoundly “[sharing] space” with others. It’s these brief, fleeting moments that contribute to a sense of belonging and that can allow deeper, sustaining connections moving forward.

Ly’s narrative also serves as a reminder that the CCCC conference is—whether rightfully or not—a big deal for a lot of people. It is viewed by some as an “elite club,” as it is also a space around which the language of “belonging” often occurs. Probably because of this, academic conferences—or perhaps more to the point, the larger systems and labor conditions that make them possible and that emplace value onto them—can instill in people feelings of guilt, whether about not attending enough sessions or events in person, or not watching enough on-demand sessions online, even as what’s “enough” varies (see the chapters by Joel Bergholtz and Analeigh Horton). Emily Plummer Catena, drawing on the work of Tara Wood, offers a theory to explain how these expectations we sometimes feel pressured to live up to may be informed in part by how we conceptualize frameworks for assessing participation in our teaching:

Much like classrooms, we often conceptualize conferences as immediate and bounded in terms of participation: “expected to arrive on time, absorb information at a particular speed, and perform spontaneously in restricted time frames” (Wood 264); presentations begin at end at precise times with slots for questions and discussion, and then often presenters and audience members entirely disperse.

Thir Budhathoki’s and Ly’s tales also illustrate how conferences can stir up feelings of being an “imposter” and somehow inadequate. At the same time, I found it interesting how both Budhathoki and Ly described a trajectory where they initially felt out of place or inadequate, but through the conference experience and through their participation as Documentarians, came to have a stronger sense that they do indeed belong and can and do contribute to the academic discourse community through their participation in CCCC. “Elite-ness” implies exclusion and gatekeeping, and I believe this is a fundamental aspect of academic conferences; however, I believe that the organization—and more specifically the people who volunteer their time to run and improve it—has worked hard to make its policies

and events, including the annual convention, more and more inclusive. Yet as with most institutional structures, there continues to be more work to be done. For instance, Tham notes, “Even as I was able to move around comfortably during the convention, I noticed numerous physical barriers and spatial challenges that could hinder attendees from a desired conference experience.” This observation reflects Margaret Price’s argument that “conferences are often among the least accessible spaces that people with disabilities encounter in the course of our work, since they combine the typical inaccessibility of public spaces with the fact that most participants are on unfamiliar ground.”

On a phenomenological level, Documentarians describe how conferences often come with a shift in time, space, being, and embodiment (Patterson, Ly). For instance, Ly describes how conferencing time is different from the experience of time outside of the Convention space when contrasting the hustle and bustle of the Convention with the world and everyone else seemingly outside of it.

Centering on the notion of space, Kimberly Thomas described how attending a virtual conference and “Being in one central place—‘locked’ into a specific location—to teach, hold meetings, attend lectures, or watch presentations is one aspect of virtual space that denies the very concept of freedom that the metaverse was supposed to give us.” And Tellez-Chaires mentions being in “conference mode,” where her “body, mind, and spirit” were focused on the conference experience and all that came with it. During this time, she writes:

Many of the tasks I’d set aside to be done at the hotel such as grading, and revising of chapters slipped to the back of my mind. All my thoughts were devoted to the role I would have as a co-hostess in the relaxation room during the Feminist Workshop, on my first opportunity to serve as a respondent on the Job Market Panel put together by Laura Micciche, and on my panel presentation.

She continues to describe how conferences, for her, are a moment to take a break from the responsibilities of day-to-day life, and to commit herself and her time to her scholarly work. On the other hand, this notion of conferences as a separate and distinct space from the rest of our lives is complicated by Braegger’s tale where they describe how they attempted to use the conference as a way to use “productivity to

avoid processing grief,” even as, ultimately, grief, which moves at its own pace and on its own timeline, would not, could not escape them.

DOCUMENTARIAN ROLE AS PRODUCTIVE DISRUPTION

Often, authors reflected on how the Documentarian role in some ways intervened in their typical conferencing experience. Several mention how this role and the way it was structured by the organizers and editors of this collection enabled them to navigate the convention with purpose and reflexivity (see the chapters by Emily Plummer Catena and Nitya Pandey). Indeed, as I write this Afterword, I’ve tried to think back to the virtual conferences I’ve attended since the onset of COVID, and it’s mostly a blur. I remember exhaustion, pressure points from sitting in the same chair for too long, Roxane Gay’s keynote where she shared stories about her experiences in the discipline, flashes of Anita Hill’s face on Zoom, scrambling to get *something* onto the virtual platform for my on-demand session and feeling both guilt and resignation about the messy slides I quickly threw together and uploaded. I wonder how much more I might have been able to retain if I’d participated as a Documentarian.

WHAT DO DOCUMENTARIANS’ TALES TEACH US ABOUT VIRTUAL CONFERENCES?

While virtual conferences went from being relatively uncommon to a requirement during the COVID-19 pandemic, I think it’s fair to say that it’s a platform that has yet to be fully and critically interrogated, revised, and refined. New modalities and platforms require a re-interrogation of how technical affordances support or must be reworked in order to meet existing outcomes. In this way, the Documentarian tales provide useful insights for better understanding what it means to conference online.

Accessibly designed virtual platforms can make academic conferences more inclusive in many different ways. For instance, it can enable access for those who are immunocompromised and who would be placing themselves at risk by traveling to and attending an in-person conference. It also supports access for those who are in close proximity to or who provide care for at-risk individuals. Emily Plummer Catena describes how asynchronous attendance helped her to feel “less pressure to ‘perform’ networking” and encouraged her to take time “to revisit and reconsider anew ideas that were already new.” Likewise,

Jennifer Marlow describes how “[a]s someone with extreme social anxiety, the virtual conference experience ended up being a nearly perfect one in some ways,” as it got her to attend events and meetings that she had never attended previously. Virtual conferences can also make attending a conference more accessible in terms of the cost to attend—no flights need to be purchased, and no hotels need to be booked. At the same time, virtual conferences can be inaccessible for some, particularly those who do not have access to a strong and reliable high-speed internet connection as well as those for whom being online for hours is more challenging or even debilitating than attending an in-person conference (Sano-Franchini et al.).

Given that a significant aspect of what conferences do involves interpersonal relationship building or networking, there is a need to learn more about how such connections might be best facilitated on virtual platforms, where we are generally not able to interact with other participants in the same way—we sometimes can’t see them or directly interact with them (see Karen Tellez-Chaires’s chapter). We share virtual space with them, but it doesn’t feel the same as being in the same physical space.

Tham notes how “presence promotes participation” and how for him, “the most apparent contrast between an online conference and an in-person conference is the awareness of others when engaging with the conference program.” Perhaps relatedly, Tellez-Chaires also notes how it can be challenging to create lasting connections on a platform like Zoom, and we might ask ourselves how other conferencing platforms enable, facilitate, and/or hinder lasting connections among participants. Thomas points to some critical context for this idea of virtual conferences feeling disconnected, offering, “I will concede that the lack of belonging I felt during the 2022 CCCC Convention was probably due to the psychological implications of living through a global pandemic for so long, and attempting to reconnect in ways, i.e., virtually, that have left us disconnected.” What can or should conference organizers and attendees do about this reality, to mitigate feelings of unwanted alone-ness or dis-connection?

In addition, new technologies require time and effort to figure out. As Tham notes, conferencegoers often find themselves having to navigate and learn frequently changing conferencing platform interfaces, some of which are easier to figure out than others. And there is also the stress of learning new genres that presenters must perform, such

as the video-recorded “talking-head presentation.” What’s more, new and emergent virtual platforms for sharing research and scholarship also necessitate that we attend to new and emergent questions about issues of authorship and intellectual property. For example, it’s come to be more and more common to expect that presenters make their/our work openly available to all—or at least all who register for the conference—so as to enhance accessibility, an important goal. At the same time, how might this digitization of scholarly exchange make the sharing of knowledge in academia more transactional, rather than relational and reciprocal? How does it matter to have a sense of who is listening to you and reading your work, particularly when it is unpublished work in progress?

On the other hand, Tham notes, “While presence promotes participation, it can also externalize non-participation,” or the opting out of sessions and other convention-related events to sightsee and engage with the places and communities surrounding the conference—not that this is a bad thing! It leads me to wonder if such tendencies help to make in-person conferences manageable, as built-in time for breaks, breathing, and space.

TAKEAWAYS FOR CONFERENCING IN 2024 AND BEYOND

So, how might we rethink how we go about participating in—and organizing—conferences in the future? Here are some preliminary thoughts that will most likely require further thinking, revision, and refinement.

Making Virtual Conferencing Meaningful

Joel Bergholtz suggests recommitting “ourselves to the habits and rituals that make our work meaningful *to ourselves*.” When it comes to rethinking how we engage with virtual conferences, then, my suggestion is to consider what things we appreciate about in-person conferences. Many conferencegoers take the initial step of browsing through the program and highlighting what sessions and events they want to attend. This is something I don’t always bring myself to do when attending a virtual conference, in part because the information is often presented in a way that is difficult for me to navigate. So how can conference organizers present this information in a usable and maybe even enjoyable way?

For some, conferences are an opportunity to travel and enter into new spaces, while for others it might be a chance to reconnect with

grad school or other colleagues. How might these experiences be re-envisioned—even if they can't be replicated—in an online conference setting? For example, some people enjoy and are able to make time for sightseeing when they are taking part in conference travel, while others enjoy going to new restaurants. What if online conference attendees similarly made space and cleared their calendar for the entire week, even if they aren't traveling? What might happen if people portioned out some of this time as a way to experience the place where they live anew, by finding a new place to eat in town, if they can, or by going to a place they'd always wanted to visit but never did? What if they set up meetings, whether in person or online, with a colleague or friend? What if they used the conferencing platform or hashtag to arrange virtual meetups, perhaps not altogether unlike the serendipitous experience of running into other CCCC-goers at the airport (as Quang Ly notes)?

To do any of this, I think program and department administrators would need to allow for that flexibility, with the understanding that professional development is an important and necessary part of building a strong academic program. Understanding that people can't engage fully on top of all of their other local responsibilities, and that they need the time that they would typically take to do these things, what if administrators actively encouraged faculty and graduate students to block off their schedule, offer alternative, low-oversight, or asynchronous online activities, and not attend any inessential in-person meetings, just as they might have for an in-person conference (as Karen Tellez-Chaires observes in her chapter)? What if they funded lodging expenses so that online participants can remove themselves a bit from their typical home responsibilities and dedicate themselves more fully to the conferencing experience, if they so choose?

For the part of conference organizers, I think Catena offers a useful question that those of us organizing in-person conferences should take time to consider: "What are ways to move forward with the asynchronous as a purposeful component of an 'in person' conference?" In addition, reflecting on the notion of conference space and time, what if conference organizers created Zoom backgrounds as a way of signifying shared space and making it easy to keep personal spaces private? Marlow also offers the useful point that it is all the more important that those organizing virtual events have a clear structure, e.g., "a facilitator, scheduled speakers who knew what they wanted to say and said it efficiently, and then breakout rooms devoted to specific themes

with some guidelines for what attendees might want to address or talk about in these small-group sessions.”

Conferencing with Intention

My final suggestion is that we do more to enter into conferences much like the Documentarians do—by taking a moment to reflect and intention-set. When I co-organized the 2022 Association of Teachers of Technical Writing (ATTW) Virtual Conference with Donnie Johnson Sackey and Kristen Moore with the support of the ATTW Executive Committee, we all agreed that we wanted to open the conference with an intention-setting moment. In some ways, I think this idea resonates with how the Documentarians’ role is set up. What might it look like for other conferences to adopt a practice like this? What if we called attendees together at the start of the conference to take some time to consider questions like:

- How will you make your time here meaningful, however you define that?
- What do you hope to gain from your experience at this conference?
- What can you do to heighten the chance that you’ll have the meaningful experiences you hope to have?
- How will you care for yourself while doing those things?

Another thought: What if we included the Documentarian prompts at the beginning of each Annual Convention program, as a possible way for everyone to navigate the Convention?

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Editors

Bump Halbritter is an associate professor of rhetoric and writing and former director of first-year writing (FYW) at Michigan State University. His research attends to teaching and learning in FYW and to the integration of audio-visual writing into scenes of college writing and scholarly research and production. Bump's long-term collaboration with Julie Lindquist has yielded many articles and chapters, including their 2013 article,



“Time, Lives, and Videotape: Operationalizing Discovery in Scenes of Literacy Sponsorship,” which received the Richard Ohmann Award for Outstanding Article in *College English*. Bump's book, *Mics, Cameras, Symbolic Action: Audio-Visual Rhetoric for Writing Teachers*, received the *Computers and Composition* Distinguished Book Award for 2013. Bump has served on the CCCC Executive Committee and many CCCC working groups. Bump writes, performs, and produces music under the name Hope Junkies with albums released in 2024 and 2026.

Julie Lindquist has taught courses in first-year and professional writing, and graduate courses in rhetorical theory, composition studies, cultural rhetoric, research methods, and writing pedagogy. Her books include *A Place to Stand: Politics and Persuasion in a Working-Class Bar*, *Elements of Literacy*, and *Recollections from an Uncommon Time: 4C20 Documentarian Tales*. Her writings on rhetoric, class, literacy, and writing pedagogy have appeared in major journals and in edited collections. Lindquist has coauthored several articles on literacy research, writing pedagogy, and reflective learning with her colleague and writing partner at MSU, Bump Halbritter. Their coauthored piece, “Time, Lives, and Videotape: Operationalizing Discovery in



Scenes of Literacy Sponsorship” won the 2013 Richard Ohmann Award for Outstanding Article in *College English*. Lindquist was elected in 2019 to serve as Assistant Chair of the Conference on College Composition and Communication, was Program Chair for the (planned) 2020 Convention in Milwaukee, WI, and served as Chair of CCCC in 2021. She has twice served as director for the first-year writing program at MSU, a program that serves more than 7,000 students annually. Her research and scholarship on class culture, identity, and learning, along with her work in administration and leadership, has always been motivated by questions of educational access for diverse learners.

Bree Straayer is an assistant professor at Michigan State University and the associate director of first-year writing. Her vocational and research interests focus on the intersections of culture, gender, and education. She has several publications and has presented nationally on her research examining the role of religious ideologies in educational trajectories along with her other interests in language learning and writing program administration. Bree’s interests are also expressed through her community-based work in the nonprofit sphere, where she was director of a language learning program and helped to bring in over two million dollars in grant funding and significantly increase program participation. When not reading, writing, or working, Bree enjoys spending time traveling, gardening, antiquing, and making all manner of things.



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This second volume of *Documentarian Tales* features narratives by attendees of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) Annual Convention (both virtual and in person). The first collection, *Recollections from an Uncommon Time: 4C20 Documentarian Tales* (2023), was conceived to be a product of the new Documentarian role at the 2020 Convention in Milwaukee. When that meeting was canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Documentarian idea became a means for CCCC members to share a common experience at a most unusual time.

As with the earlier collection, the *Tales* in *Recollections from Our Common Places* began as responses to Documentarian daily surveys. Taken together, they narrate authors' experiences on the days of the CCCC Convention in 2021, 2022, and 2023, foregrounding contrasts and commonalities between virtual and in-person conferences, and addressing such themes and issues as professional growth and belonging, forms of participation, the professional life of the field, accessibility, and work-life balance.

The essays in this volume resonate with the themes surfaced in the earlier collection and introduce new provocations about the terms of our work in writing studies and the changing landscape of our disciplinary participation, particularly in light of educational shifts occasioned by responses to the pandemic.

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