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THE GHOSTS OF PENDLETON: ARTIST'S STATEMENT

"Rhetoric [...] is a process that unfolds and materializes with time and space. We can thus learn a lot about rhetoric, I imagined, by focusing on the material consequences that unfold during futurity—those spans of time beyond the initial moment of production and delivery."
- Laurie Gries, *Still Life with Rhetoric*

Although the humanities have traditionally addressed critical issues in society, many times, these theories do not propose solutions for change. Gregory Ulmer, a critic who coined the term *electracy*, argues that scholars should "reduce the gap between theory and practice" through creative invention (*Applied Grammatology* ix). "*The Ghosts of Pendleton*" is a work of creative invention that incorporates my interest in electracy and social justice—the combination of ideas that I will refer to as *electrate justice*. The film examines the explicit and implicit racism that still pervades a small Southern town outside of Clemson, South Carolina through the use of historical documents and images, as well as contemporary photos and videos of material spaces within the town. In particular, I am interested in the convergences of material, digital, and unseen spaces that compose the *chora* of Pendleton. The film represents the beginning of a *konsult*, an interactive space where individuals can "consult" together to enact change (Ulmer). It is an act of agency—or *egency*, in the words of Ulmer—in which I argue that although the *chora* of Pendleton is diseased by racism, we can create a *konsult* for socio-political change. "*The Ghosts of Pendleton*" seeks to explore how marginalized voices and images are represented, how sharply segregated neighborhoods spur continued racism, and, in doing so, begins to uncover a more complete history of Pendleton.

Electracy and the Konsult

Because it is an unfamiliar concept, electracy is sometimes best expressed in relation to literacy, as Ulmer states: "Grammatology—the history and theory of writing—uses an analogy with the literate apparatus to set up the terms for the invention of 'electracy' (a neologism coined to distinguish the emerging apparatus from the established one)" (*Internet Invention* 28). In differentiating electracy from literacy, Ulmer explains how the transition from text-based literacy to electracy sets the stage for an engaging and relational approach to language. A rough history of our use of language begins with orality, when oral tradition and storytelling was the primary mode of communication; to literacy, when traditional alphabetic text became the prominent method of language use; and finally, to electracy, an apparatus that "is to digital media what literacy is to print" (xii). Electracy does not replace orality and literacy; instead it complements them. A social machine, electracy is "part technological and part institutional" (Holmevik

4). In other words, electracy gives people agency to communicate in digital media, and these people are known as *egents*. As Derrida argues, writing is not simply the re-creation of speech/oral language, and, similarly, digital writing is not the reproduction of alphabetic writing (282).

To further understand how electracy functions in our culture, Ulmer's "Apparatus Table" delineates how different concepts are articulated within orality, literacy, and electracy.

Apparatus	Orality	Literacy	Electracy
Practice	Religion	Science	Entertainment
Procedure	Ritual	Method	Style
Institution	Church	School	Internet
State of Mind	Faith	Knowledge	Fantasy
Behavior	Worship	Experiment	Play
Philosophy	Mythology	Epistemology	Aesthetics
Ground	God	Reason	Body
Ontology	Totem	Category	Chora
Mode	Narrative	Argument	Figure
Axis	Right/Wrong	True/False	Joy/Sadness

Source: Adapted from Ulmer, "Apparatus Table." The Learning Screen Networked Art.

For example, the practice of religion is linked to orality. Within literacy, though, it is science that centers practice. Finally, the practice of electracy is entertainment. Although these three modes of practice are distinct, they still converge and affect each other in our culture. The "Apparatus Table" helps us visualize how our culture has shifted from orality to electracy but also how these ideas relate to one another. Central to

electracy is this notion of movement, connection, and communication. Thus, Ulmer sometimes explains electracy in terms of electricity and trace—combining the buzz of electricity with Derrida's understanding of trace as a rupture. Bringing these two ideas together, Ulmer asserts that we leave traces of ourselves when we interact with others in digital and material spaces (Arroyo 6-7).

It is tempting to evaluate electrate artifacts the way we do with alphabetic writing. But as Holmevik argues, ". . . in today's complex digital world, we must understand new media expressions and digital experiences not simply as more technologically advanced forms of 'writing' that can be understood and analyzed as 'texts' but as artifacts in their own right with their own discrete and generative impacts on the creation of knowledge in our time" (Holmevik 4). The konsult, then, is a natural outcome of electrate discourse because it allows egents to express themselves within new media and digital modes without being constrained by the boundaries of orality and literacy. Similar to the way that Plato used dialogue in

his Academy, electracy uses the konsult within the digital apparatus. In a forthcoming book, Ulmer discusses how his involvement in the Florida Research Ensemble (FRE) and EmerAgency inspired his interest in the Murphy's Well-Being Site in Gainesville, Florida. The FRE created an installment to discuss the Cabot/Kopper's Superfund site and to explore how and why this site affects the surrounding community. Ulmer argues that the Cabot/Kopper's Superfund site negatively affects the *chora* of North Central Florida. As a result, the konsult gives egents like himself the ability to use his background in the Humanities to provide citizens in his community the knowledge to participate in their own well-being. As I will explain, "The Ghosts of Pendleton" performs a similar operation within the Pendleton, South Carolina community. My short film does not seek to offer solutions to the implicit and explicit racism in my small Southern town, but, instead, seeks to empower citizens in my town to consider how how the town's history influences its present-day *chora*.

Egents and "The Ghosts of Pendleton"

"The Ghosts of Pendleton" is a short film that draws attention to the segregation and racism that still lingers in a small Southern town. It explores how the presence of slavery haunts the town—from the two plantations that exist as tourist destinations, the ruins on the West Side of Pendleton, to the sharp lines that divide where white and black people reside in the town. The film identifies that the *chora* of Pendleton is ill but also that these symptoms are present in cities and towns across the United States. As a konsult, the film does not offer simplistic solutions to improve the racial climate in Pendleton. However, "Ghosts" does seek to give agency to residents in the town to form their own conclusions based on the information that is presented.

"The Ghosts of Pendleton" functions as an artifact for socio-political change in several ways. First, as a digital expression, the film has the ability to reach a broader audience in a smaller amount of time. As Sarah Arroyo argues, our writing practices have "shifted" as a result of electracy "with the added layer of sharing, networking, and participating" (2). Where traditional alphabetic text reaches a narrower audience, a piece like "Ghosts" has the capability of connecting with a more diverse audience via journals like this one as well as a variety of social media platforms. As our society becomes more electrate, it is an electrate language that resonates with greater strength and influence. So, I would argue, the most significant way that "Ghosts" can function as an artifact for socio-political change is because of its format as a brief, almost Buzzfeed-like video. Secondly, the film has significant pedagogical implications. For example, I can share the video with the two sections of first year composition that I teach (about 40 students). In turn, I can assign a similar project for my students and ask them create a konsult to address an issue and use "Ghosts" as a springboard for their thoughts. What starts as a single project about a small Southern town transforms into a multi-faceted project with a variety of voices and perspectives represented. Finally, as a citizen of Pendleton, I can find others in my town who share my concerns and use "Ghosts" as an educational and inspirational tool. The konsult is not an individual project but one that is inclusive and seeks to connect with others.

While the film addresses several ideas briefly, it does not fully explore the many histories of Pendleton, South Carolina as well as the many stories of both human and nonhuman subjects. For example, what narratives might emerge from deeper research of the metal structure on the West Side of Pendleton? What dialogues might develop as I engage with residents of Pendleton? Because of these questions—and many others—“The Ghosts of Pendleton” offers agents the possibility to be a part of this change as we delve into the histories of Pendleton and analyze how and why the town is so haunted by racism. As Ulmer concurs, the “Problems B Us,” so this film and its future iterations asks of all of us: How have I contributed to this problem? (*Internet Invention* 2). Broadly, the film also exists as a model for digital creativity and contends that visual media is a powerful venue to convey these messages of socio-political change. On a more personal note, “The Ghosts of Pendleton” reflects my research interests as I explore how the notion of electrate justice functions in my small town. This film marks the beginning point of my research, and I hope to create various iterations of this konsult in the future.

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