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### **Cosmopolitan Practices, Networks, and Flows of Literacies**

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It is easy to point out the myriad ways writing now permeates our lives: we dash off texts as we wait for a bus, write a report for work with a colleague via Google docs, update our blogs on our tablets, and post on social media to protest unfair social conditions. Writing now occupies the interstices of our everyday lives, flowing in and across increasingly globalized networks (Appadurai, 1996; Jenkins, Ford, & Green, 2013), as a central means of participating in contemporary life (Freedman, Hull, Higgs, & Booten, 2016). Digitally networked writing practices expand and amplify participation in the social world, as people compose, remix, orchestrate, and assemble symbolic artifacts in ways that connect them with others (Lankshear & Knobel, 2011). Networked writing can be understood as a principal way of participating in textual ecologies, built through the collaborative creation, curation, and circulation of artifacts linked with people in complex networks. As a fundamental part of these ecologies, writing now includes more and more spatially-oriented and aesthetically-inclined forms across multiple modes, media, and languages (Bezemer & Kress, 2008; Canagarajah, 2012), affording new opportunities for people to collaborate with others to take action in areas of local and global concern (Flower, 2008; Stornaiuolo & Jung, in press).

As people participate in the world by writing with, for, and about others under multiple configurations, they must navigate interactions with those with whom they do not share common ground. Examples of these complicated configurations abound: People can easily comment on news articles and YouTube videos, but the comments sections can also serve to dehumanize, reproducing and exacerbating racist, patriarchal, and homophobic discourses; social media sites allow people to connect across geographical distances but just as often polarize across ideological ones; blogs provide opportunities for people's voices to be shared and amplified, but those voices can operate outside of mainstream media, speak only to the choir, and be lost amid the sea of online content. As people attempt to communicate across increasingly widening ideological and material divides, such engagements require an ethical set of practices that create space for the kind of dialogic interaction at the heart of humanizing practices (Freire, 1970).

This chapter explores implications of these shifting and unstable practices for writing in digital spaces, particularly the ethical dimensions of writing in relation to others across linguistic, cultural, and ideological diversities. How does networked writing - which includes translingual, multimodal, and collaborative practices, emerging digital tools, and networked spaces for curating and sharing - require people to take other people, ideas, and materials into account in

new ways? How do people engage in writing online as a form of action, to transform themselves and the world around them, for purposes of social good? What rhetorical approaches do people take in recognizing, navigating, and challenging different forms of power and privilege online across asymmetrical and unequal global conditions? We take up these questions throughout the chapter as we explore the ethical ramifications of writing in digital spaces and cultures, particularly the role that new forms of networked writing can play in creating equitable social change that recognizes people's full human potential and challenges conditions of injustice.

### **Cosmopolitanism in Education: From Shared Humanity to Humanizing Practices**

To theorize how people engage in ethically attuned literacy practices, education scholars have increasingly turned toward cosmopolitanism (e.g., Campano & Ghiso, 2011; Hansen, 2010; Harper, Bean, & Dunkerly, 2010; Hull & Hellmich, in press; Hull, Stornaiuolo, & Sahni, 2010; Juzwik & McKenzie, 2015; Papastephanou, 2002; Rizvi, 2009; Stornaiuolo, 2016; Vasudevan, 2014). Often defined as a form of global citizenship, cosmopolitanism involves “membership in and identification with a world community that transcends locality – whether that locality be tribe, culture, race or nation – and which respects differences nonetheless” (Go, 2013, p. 210). In other words, cosmopolitanism orients us to the ways we understand ourselves in relation to others with whom we are not immediately or visibly connected, as we navigate the moral, ideological, and physical distances between us (Hull & Stornaiuolo, 2014). For literacy scholars concerned with the ethical dimensions of digital practices, cosmopolitanism offers a generative lens for understanding how people rhetorically negotiate multiple localities and distances while recognizing “the essential humanity we all share – not so much despite our differences but by virtue of our differences” (Fine & Boon, 2007, p. 8). Chouliaraki (2016) calls this effort to understand across differences - by “recognizing the humanity of others and acting upon them without demanding reciprocation” - a “moral project” at the center of a cosmopolitan ethic (p. 3). The idea of recognizing our shared humanity rests at the heart of most definitions of cosmopolitanism (see Kleingeld & Brown, 2013).

What it means to recognize our shared humanity, however, is not an uncomplicated endeavor. Scholars theorizing posthumanism have framed the ‘human’ as a historical construction, pushing back on liberal humanism and undermining human exceptionalism (Hayles, 1999). As technological systems become more visibly intertwined with and inseparable from our bodily ones (Haraway, 1991), posthumanist scholars are questioning what constitutes ‘human’ qualities and where those boundaries fall (and fail), rendering problematic cosmopolitanism’s universal ethical commitment to humanity (Pin-Fat, 2013). Of course, critical scholars have long challenged normative conceptions of humanity in cosmopolitanism by rejecting ‘universalizing’ models rooted in western, elitist, and colonial moral imaginaries (e.g., Appiah, 2006; Bhabha, 1994; Delanty, 2012; Mignolo, 2002; Werbner, 2008). In focusing on grassroots, grounded, everyday forms of negotiating difference and diversity, these critical scholars have theorized a “collective effort to humanize” (Fine & Boon, 2007, p. 8) as a key aspect of cosmopolitanism

‘from below’ that must be paired with critical reflection about social inequality to avoid becoming an uncritical celebration of global togetherness (Chouliaraki, 2016).

These critical cosmopolitan approaches move scholars away from more static notions of shared *humanity* and toward consideration of the dynamic process of *humanizing* oneself and others through everyday actions paired with critical reflection. Such efforts to understand and historicize “cosmopolitan activity” (Stornaiuolo, 2016) are well aligned with Freirean notions of humanization that center around taking reflective action in the world – because, as Freire (1985) notes, “to transform the world is to humanize it” (p. 70). The process of becoming fully human, for Freire (1970), involves people acting agentively and consciously to shape the world as historical actors in particular social, cultural, and political contexts (cf. Del Carmen Salazar, 2013). A key practice in this process of becoming fully human is dialogue. In cosmopolitanism, dialogue has the potential to transform and humanize the world, with the goal not consensus or agreement but mutual learning, enrichment, and reciprocity (Appiah, 2006; Hansen, 2010). We turn now to explore how networked writing practices can serve humanizing ends, not only by functioning as a form of reflective action that can challenge conditions of injustice but also in fostering conditions under which mutually enriching dialogue can flourish. To do so, we first consider central challenges to that enterprise.

### **Central Challenges**

Perhaps the gravest challenge to a cosmopolitan ethic and practice as a framework for networked writing is the vexed historical moment in which we live. Discourses of populism and nativism abound, fueled by fears of increased immigration and a resulting super-diversity, and economic uncertainties and a frustrated awareness of the vast divides that separate the wealthy and the few from the rest. Ironically, the very forces of globalization, which propel the movement of capital and labor and ideas and people across political borders, and which strongly, urgently signal the need for outward facing polities, have inspired an inward turn, as nations grapple each with their own aftermath of vast demographic, economic, and ideological shifts, eruptions, and realignments. Schooling, traditionally a national enterprise, is typically designed to socialize individuals for participation in local communities and in autonomous nation-states, shoring up a labor force for international competition. There have been inroads in recent years, to be sure, as nonprofits and international schools attempt to globalize education, exploring the development of “international mindedness,” but these are exceptions that prove the rule of an inward national focus. In such an environment, positioning networked writing as a key site for cosmopolitan practice is both an uphill struggle and a crucial one, a humanizing effort in a dehumanizing time.

So too is the reclamation of cosmopolitanism as a suitable framework for this enterprise. Conventional cosmopolitanism has already been roundly critiqued for its western origins and elitist associations, and some disciplines have found ways to move past those perceived limitations and embrace cosmopolitanism almost as a given. But in education we’ve just begun

to explore how this philosophy and set of values can usefully be taken up, not only by the privileged, but by the marginalized, and not through assumptions of welcome and gratitude but through positions of reciprocity. Silverstone opined eloquently about the moral responsibility of the West and of media to listen to and hear the Other. Surely such an attitude of openness is an important gesture of solidarity, but it cannot be the only or the last one, and the positionality of the privileged can't always or usually be the place we start.

As Freire (1970) reminded us long ago, an “authentic education is not carried on by ‘A’ for ‘B’ or by ‘A’ about ‘B, but rather by ‘A’ with ‘B.’” What does this admonition mean for writing, for youth, and for teachers in a digital and global age? Pratt (1991) gave us alternatives twenty-five years ago by helpfully naming some of the “literate arts of the contact zone” that might be used by those who must struggle in asymmetrical relations of power: “autoethnography, transculturation, critique, collaboration, bilingualism, mediation, parody, denunciation, imaginary dialogue, vernacular expression” (p. 37). But she also reminded us of the “perils” of writing in the contact zone: “miscomprehension, incomprehension, dead letters, unread masterpieces, absolute heterogeneity of meaning” (p. 37). A central challenge, if we are to embrace cosmopolitanism as a humanizing framework for understanding networked writing in practice, is resisting the paternalism inherent in being privileged to choose to listen, and concomitantly, resisting the insularity of writing in ways that only one's own community can hear and comprehend. Imagine confronting these challenges, which have forever existed, in a digital age, and they become magnified and intensified, but perhaps also do potential solutions.

### **Cosmopolitan Practices in Networked Writing**

We turn now to consider three networked writing practices with cosmopolitan potential – literate arts of the contact zone (Pratt, 1991) that we suggest can serve humanizing ends. These are practices we have observed and studied in our work with young people, which we illuminate further in the next section. While certainly subject to the challenges we outline above, these networked writing practices – negotiating visibility, expressing solidarity, and critiquing systems of power – each foster the possibility of reflective action and dialogue. As people imagine and discursively create spaces of inclusion or counter-narrate oppressive or marginalizing discourses, these rhetorical acts can work to humanize participants and foster critical reflection. And as people take up positions of reciprocity and openness with one another in their writing, opportunities for mutually enriching dialogue to take root become expanded. While we recognize that these three practices always unfold in particular contexts and under specific historical, political, and cultural conditions, we hope they serve an illustrative purpose here: to suggest that literacy researchers remain attuned to writing practices that position people as historical actors who shape the world around them, especially those practices with cosmopolitan potential, turned to ethical ends.

The first networked writing practice we highlight here is “autoethnographic” (Pratt, 1991, p. 37) in nature and involves people making themselves – or, more precisely, narrated versions of themselves – visible to others. Many times these practices of visibility involve first person accounts or critical autobiographies (Gutiérrez, 2008), as individuals add their voices to the public sphere. Expressing one’s voice publicly – and expecting that one’s voice matters – is now a central way young people participate in civil, political, and cultural life (Rheingold, 2008; Zuckerman, 2014). Stornaiuolo and Thomas (2017) have explored how these participatory practices of visibility online represent new forms of youth activism that can disrupt or counternarrate deficit discourses about marginalized youth. One example of how young people are engaging in these practices of visibility to counternarrate dehumanizing discourses is Beltrán’s (2015) study of undocumented young people narrating their immigration stories online. As young people created and circulated first-person accounts about being undocumented in the United States, Beltrán shows how their networked writing served to humanize undocumented young people, making their stories visible as a form of collective witnessing of oppression. These young people’s efforts to document their everyday realities of injustice were acts of courage and risk, as they made themselves vulnerable in multiple ways by sharing their stories publicly. Certainly not all autoethnographic networked writing practices are ethically alert, particularly those that reproduce or exacerbate conditions of injustice – but we do think the act of making oneself visible, and therefore often vulnerable, can serve the social good: to witness acts of injustice, document lived realities that may be invisible, or counter narrate mainstream discourses that dehumanize (for further discussion of this networked writing practice, see Bakhti’s example in Hull, Stornaiuolo, & Sahni, 2010).

The second practice we suggest has cosmopolitan potential is the use of networked writing to express solidarity. Chouliaraki’s (2013) work on solidarity is instructive here; she argues that while people are now exercising their voices in more democratic fashion, these expressions do not always lead us to recognize others’ humanity because of “the deep inequalities of power that selectively enable some voices to be heard and recognised as worthy of our solidarity and not others” (p. 279). While expressions of solidarity are always rooted in these power asymmetries, they can also serve a powerful inclusive function in online communities, as they might work toward “the imagination of a safe and fairer global order for every human being” (Chouliaraki, 2016, p. 4). This act of imagining a more equitable global order requires new configurations between people, ideally that position oneself and others in reciprocal relationships. As a networked writing practice, expressing solidarity with others requires a careful negotiation of the power inequalities Chouliaraki warns about, as writers rhetorically signal openness and a willingness to listen but also awareness of whose voices are positioned in the speaking and listening roles. Writers must guard against appropriation or paternalism as they work toward reciprocity.

Finally, we consider the rhetorical means by which networked writers engage in a critique of relations of power, recognizing their positions of relative privilege even as they work to decenter

those positions. Scholarship by Campano and colleagues (e.g., Campano, Ghiso, & Sanchez, 2013) illustrates the importance of recognizing and valuing people's multiple epistemic positions, arguing that people from minoritized social locations have unique perspectives on issues of inequality that can challenge normative viewpoints (see also Moya, 2001). Networked writers often work to recognize and value these multiple positions by engaging in collaborative practices to build knowledge together for a shared world. For example, these efforts to co-construct knowledge, particularly from minoritized positions, can be seen in hashtag activism (Williams, 2015) as people join together on Twitter to collectively discuss a topic via a shared hashtag. One of the most salient hashtags in the U.S. has been #BlackLivesMatter, a movement begun by three women of color after teen Trayvon Martin was killed in 2012 (Carney, 2016). The hashtag gained momentum in the protests that erupted nationwide after the killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, MO, sparking a movement that collectively challenges "racialized policing, the vulnerability of black bodies, and the problematic ways in which blackness is perceived as a constant threat" (Bonilla & Rosa, 2015, p. 8). While hashtag activism represents one way people have been using ethical rhetorical practices to recognize and legitimize different ways of knowing, young people are regularly using new tools and networks to "restory themselves" (Thomas & Stornaiuolo, 2016, p. 313) - that is, to write themselves into narratives and discourses that have historically excluded them (Gates, 1986). We suggest that these networked writing practices that name power and privilege and the systems that serve to dehumanize can be turned to ethical ends, as people individually and collectively 'restory', challenge, and decenter privileged viewpoints.

### **Implications for Educational Practice: Write4Change**

To illustrate the cosmopolitan potential of these three digital writing practices, we turn now to one context in which young people are engaged in writing as a form of social action, the Write4Change (W4C) online writing community (see Stornaiuolo & Jung, in press). Working collaboratively with a group of teachers, youth, and partners, we designed the W4C community to virtually link educators and adolescent students committed to multilingual, multicultural, and multimodal writing for social justice. In the online global community, adolescents from countries including Pakistan, India, South Korea, the UK, Canada, and the US (currently) engage in inquiry to action projects that aim to intervene in the world around them. Examples of networked writing projects that young people have designed include documentaries about domestic violence, essays about schools' overreliance on testing, blogs about Islamophobia, and digital posters about gender discrimination.

In the W4C community, youth create and share digital writing at various stages of completion. Using hashtags to organize their writing, youth post brainstormed ideas, in progress work, inspirational or creative postings, and material they want to share beyond the network. W4C positions young people to write about social issues they would like to impact. Because they post their work in a global forum with peers who represent diverse linguistic and ideological

experiences, critically reflection on their own position in tandem with acknowledging others' perspectives and rights is at the forefront of students' networked participation. Many of the topics they have chosen directly or subtly question or challenge systems of power. While we acknowledge that stratification and "othering" can and does arise from these interactions, in the following sections we offer examples of young people who turned these three networked writing practices toward ethical ends, opening possibilities for dialogue and reflective action.

### **Negotiating Visibility: Claiming Identities and Creating Space**

The first networked writing practice with cosmopolitan potential that we traced in W4C was autoethnographic, as young people made themselves visible, and vulnerable, in different ways. While sometimes this took the form of first person accounts, similar to the young people in Beltrán's (2015) study who shared their own stories of marginalization to powerful effect, other times writers combined modes to "counternarrate inequality" (Duncan-Andrade, 2007) by making themselves (and the issues they were writing about) visible - often in a literal sense. We share one example of a young writer in the community who designed a project to make visible those with mental illness, creating a series of self-portraits that revealed the dehumanization and marginalization of those who suffer stigma with mental illness.

In four panels of original art accompanied by writing, Lexy (name used with permission) cast herself as a central figure, as someone grappling with mental health issues (Figure 1). In the rightmost panel of the artwork Lexy represented herself as a young person with mental illness, asking in the caption, "Am I going insane?" To convey anguish, she juxtaposed a photograph of herself in a distressed position, clutching her head (visible in the top right of Figure 1) with an illustrated representation of the image. Similar to the ways photography has been used in social work to document and humanize a variety of social issues (Huff, 1998), Lexy's post works to complicate and reposition the stigma of mental illness by making herself the face (and body) of schizophrenia across multiple representations. She discussed the act of making herself the subject of the photos and writing as a deliberate way of addressing the stigma of mental illness, literally putting her identity and body on the line and making herself visible, and vulnerable, to others in the community.

<FIGURE 1 HERE>

Figure 1. Lexy's project about mental health issues

In her commentary, Lexy further made herself vulnerable, sharing that several members of her family struggled with mental illness: "Many family members of mine suffer from mental health issues and I wanted to really express this through my art. To show others what it's really like, that these things are real and these disorders are not just excuses." By narrating herself as a member of this stigmatized group through image and positioning, Lexy chose not to take a

documentary stance, depicting others' experiences, but placed herself as the object of the reader's gaze. This act of humanizing, whereby she gave what could have been an abstract issue, mental illness, a face and name, grounding it in her personal experience to challenge the stigma (and silence) that often accompanies the topic. To negotiate visibility in the community, Lexy made explicit her commitments by claiming and enacting a particular identity and thus brought awareness to an issue important to her. Such an effort to use her voice (and image) to counternarrate dehumanizing discourses about mental illness - offering herself and her personal experiences as a ground to such an effort - made possible spaces for dialogue. That is, she signaled to others that she would be open to talking and thinking *with* others about the issue, one of the first steps we found was necessary in creating spaces for dialogue and understanding to flourish. The practice of rhetorically negotiating visibility offered potential for cosmopolitan action, particularly when young writers, like Lexy, used different writing strategies to expand opportunities for dialogue by positioning themselves as open, vulnerable, and willing to contribute their voices to illuminate causes of common concern.

### **Expressing Solidarity: Imagining Equitable and Reciprocal Relationships**

The second networked writing practice we examine is the act of expressing solidarity, not, as Chouliaraki (2013) reminds us, as merely or only a spectator, but as an empathetic attempt to imagine someone's reality and a more equitable social order. While young people regularly sought to put themselves in other's shoes (much as Lexy attempted in her artwork), such efforts to express solidarity were not easily managed. One of the central challenges involved how to express solidarity while not positioning others as vulnerable, objects of our mediated gaze, or in need of our (paternalistic) assistance. In other words, young people struggled to find and express reciprocal relationships with others. Nonetheless, we want to call attention to the ways young people persisted through the challenge and worked toward solidarity rhetorically.

We turn to one young man from the UK, Sam (real name used with permission), and his efforts to express solidarity - and his struggles to do so in reciprocal, sensitive ways. Sam regularly and thoughtfully posted about current events worldwide that he felt promoted justice and equity. In one particular post we examine here, he called attention to the #BlackLivesMatter (BLM) movement that had recently gained national prominence in the US (see Figure 2). As a young man outside of the US national context, he was removed from BLM, though certainly he was aware of the dehumanizing, racist discourses and practices that gave rise to the movement and were circulated through the international news media. Despite his outsider status, he was keen to call attention to the "Black Lives Matter organisation" as an important movement to promote racial justice that was rooted in the US but spread worldwide. This post also served as an early introduction to a writing project Sam planned to take on. Paired with the image in Figure 2 he wrote: "I will be researching into some of the deaths of innocent black citizens who were killed by white police officers in the USA. I will be looking in detail as to what happened with specific deaths such as the death of Eric Garner and Michael Brown of which triggered the protests from

people all over the world.” Later he continued by asking others to “Please tell me your own opinions of the tragic events in particular how you feel about it and whether or not you feel affected by it.”

<FIGURE 2 HERE>

Figure 2. Sam’s post about #BlackLivesMatter

Like Lexy, Sam combined his text with image to create greater impact in the community. He included an image foregrounding two Black women holding protest signs, drawing specific attention through his text to the woman on the left holding a sign asking “Is my son next?” Using image, specifically documentary photography, to explore the lived complexities of experiences has a long standing history in social research and policy change (see Szto et al., 2005; Russell & Diaz, 2011). In featuring this photo, Sam drew on the affordances of image to contextualize while also evoking emotion - working to humanize the protesters by identifying with them personally and situating those struggles historically. While potentially participating in ‘othering’ a group of people through posting an image, by combining the image with text that explained his interest in researching the BLM, Sam attempted to interrupt such patterns by using the networked space to imagine how he could learn more and intervene.

An important dimension of expressing solidarity through networked writing involves positioning oneself in relation to others and the world discursively. While the photo alone might locate him as outside the movement looking in, his text linked these local BLM events to worldwide protests and acknowledged the need for interaction and communication about the topic by formally addressing his audience with requests for their reactions. In doing so, he positioned himself and his imagined audience in conversation with each other, acknowledging the varied viewpoints and perspectives that might be held on the topic but also expressing openness to discussing core issues of equity, race, and power.

### **Critiquing Systems of Power: Naming Conditions of Injustice**

The final networked writing practice we examine involves young people using various rhetorical means to name conditions of injustice and foreground multiple voices and perspectives on issues. We found that the practice of critiquing systems of power involved young people regularly questioning their own positions in relation to others, as we highlight in the following example. In a collaborative writing project by a group of students in Korea, the PJK team was a group of four students who all shared an interest in working in education in their future. In their project they co-constructed knowledge about different ways various countries structure educational opportunities for adolescents compared to the opportunities they had access to in Korea. They created a short newspaper offering a critique of the Korean education system, which included a

description of the current system, comparisons to other countries, individual opinions of the four writers, and results of a survey conducted by the team to gather perceptions of education opportunities from peers (see Figure 3 for one page from the newspaper). Throughout the newspaper, the four students worked to reconcile their different opinions and positions about their education system by locating those viewpoints in relation to others (e.g., through surveys, research into different global opportunities with which they were familiar, comparison charts, and opinion pieces).

One of the students' central arguments revolved around the injustice of the Korean system, which they felt limited and narrowed students' potential career options. They described the current process that required Korean teenagers to choose liberal arts or natural sciences as a career focus early in their studies, which then dictated the kinds of classes and career paths available to the student. Each of the writers included an opinion piece about the effects of such a system toward the end of the newspaper, with one student writing, for example: "I think it is too early for students to choose their path during high school years. Even Confucius, the great saint of China, set up his aim at the age of 30." Each of the students shared personal experiences to support their opinions, suggesting that they had suffered, and known others who suffered, from narrow expectations and high pressure. Through their collaborative writing process, the students engaged in reflection about their individual and collective experiences as they worked to trace their positions and assert their opinions.

<FIGURE 3 HERE>

Figure 3. One page of PJK newspaper

Throughout the newspaper, the students described the impact of the Korean education system and the power it asserts over teenagers by including charts, graphs, images, and text to make their argument tangible. In the opening to the newspaper, PJK specifically name how this structure, which forces teenagers to choose a career focus at an early stage in the process, "has caused some problems for students who are not convinced of their dream." The students' critique of the rigidity of this system involved them naming their own experiences and positions as students, with each of the four students describing different positions and perspectives and their efforts to negotiate those different stances. They further explore differentiating opinions through a survey of over 150 students, reminding readers of the ways this system of power fails to take into account the perspectives of the very youth they claim to serve. The newspaper can serve as an example of the ways collectively challenging privilege and power can be a humanizing act, by explicitly naming injustice and working to legitimize the under-represented voices of the youth who experience education in this system.

## Future Directions

In her scholarship on the media representations of human suffering, Chouliaraki (2006, 2013) has called attention to the ways in which injustice is reproduced discursively. In her earlier work (2006) she examined how spectators in western countries related to images produced on television of the suffering of distant others - in India, Somalia, and other countries remote from the West. She paid attention to the ways in which the news media shapes or mediates how we experience far-away misfortune, embedding in the selection of images and language particular values and mores that position viewers, or spectators as she calls them, to feel and act and engage in particular ways – to view some sufferers, for example, as worthy of attention and empathy and others as undeserving of these. She makes the point that whether viewers of media adopt cosmopolitan attitudes and actions depends on how the stories are told through the media. More recently, Chouliaraki (2013) has explored changes in media representations over the last four decades in how we express solidarity with others. She argues that images and multimedia displays of vulnerable others, in connection with related institutional and political shifts, have resulted in a different kind of moral self that she labels an “ironic spectator” - someone who is skeptical but open to action. Chouliaraki holds out hope, in fact, that the human capacity for imagination, to put ourselves in someone else’s shoes, to experience in even a small or temporary way that person’s suffering, can be harnessed in this new media age for ethical ends and actions.

We are hopeful, too, and see in the networked participation of youth in the Write4Change community the opportunity to foster dispositions that are alert to dehumanization and that are instead at the ready to humanize self and other through reflective action in the world. In some ways the sharing of images and commentary by youth to take forward conversations about social justice, such as the photo of a suffering mother at a Black Lives Matter protest, could be seen as part and parcel of the larger media-driven discourse on human suffering that Chouliaraki so helpfully theorizes. But in other ways this project and youth’s writing potentially interrupts that discourse, positioning youth, not CNN or BuzzFeed, as authors and curators and commentators. Rather than spectating, youth are participating in an educational project that explicitly asks them and organizes them to “write for change” and thereby to experiment with, try on for size, inhabit an ethic of caring and a sensibility for doing. This expectation sets apart the work of youth in Write4Change, potentially distinguishing their praxis from passive viewership or unreflective action, even as if perforce is influenced by the dominant “limit situations” (Freire, 1970) of our era.

The ethical dimensions of literacy practices we understand to be intertwined with aesthetic, creative, and rhetorical dimensions as people engage their capacities to question and challenge the status quo and to work toward human rights and equity (see Hull & Stornaiuolo, 2014). In our view this intertwining—its description, its range and variation—has yet to be fully documented and theorized. Nor has its import for writers been articulated, especially those who

desire to influence an audience to think and act differently via a constructed, shared sense of moral agency. In analyzing witnessing as a news genre, Chouliaraki (2013) comments on its “irreducible aesthetic dimension,” going on to argue that, far from indexing an external reality, it is a “narrative performance with moral effects” (p. 152). She even offers the metaphor of theater to account for the rhetorical nature of news representations. In Write4Change, as in other networked communities that privilege the sharing of multimodal, translingual, and sometimes collaboratively composed texts, there is a treasure-trove of artifacts waiting to be sorted, analyzed, appreciated, and understood for what they reveal about how the complex dimensionality of ethical engagement with global audiences for social good. There is also substantial work to be done in exploring how people develop the capacity to take another’s perspective and acknowledge their rights and suffering as well as the role that writing and symbolization generally might play in that process.

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