

Spectrographs, Electrons, and Highlighters  
The Hidden Depth (and Height) of Annotations

Earlier this semester, I recorded a brief, scripted version of an essay, with the twist that I relied on voices other than my own when I was using voices other than my own.

Written out, it honestly seems like a fairly trivial matter.

But I find that there's an unaddressed problem in that, and it's something that's been gnawing at me since releasing the Elaboration. By having Kathryn read Kathryn's words, Lauren read Lauren's, Kristen reading for Phoebe Palmer, and Joe read for Nietzsche, it's absolutely clear, *I am not speaking* in a way that easily quotation marks don't. Even lines I wrote earlier in the semester do not belong to me, and are made distinct from my own voice. Especially relevant for a project on how the multitudes of rhetorical interactions are meaningful in the construction of the self—"my" project is the work of a dozen voices. But that clarity is misleading: this project is not a conversation, my speakers are not really speaking their own words. I selected the quote pulls from my voice actors, then selected from those pulls (See Figure 1) to create the script that

stitched them together,  
and there are at least two  
misquotations that are

Palmer Comments

"Gloss/analysis: This is excellent phrasing in that it makes it clear that the churches have been acting upon women, implicitly rejecting the idea that women are inherently meek, subservient, or without opinion."

**Figure 1 An unused quote pull from Kathryn**

wholly traceable to me (I will sooner die than reveal them). This is not a *fault* of audio recording and podcasting; it's a feature of good direction and scriptwriting. But for a project that's looking to move towards a form to emphasize the multifaceted, interpersonal network by which people

rhetorically construct themselves, I have to acknowledge that another media is necessary, not to give a better answer, but to give another perspective to illustrate and explore how language and concepts are constructed rhetorically from a multitude of outside texts and voices. Ironically, what I sought to do in my audio quilt project was already in play in the texts I was pulling from, but done in a way that was, in a double irony, flattened in my transition to audio. My interest, then, is rediscovering this three-dimensionality and texture, in something even flatter than paper.

### The Livingstone Field Diary: Annotation and Impression

While paper seems flat compared to the ridges and pulses of the sound wave, both print and manuscript rely on the impressionable qualities of paper, and subtle, yet still three-dimensional, indentations and stains across multiple layers. I look to UCLA’s version of Livingstone’s 1871 Field Diary, a digital humanities project directed by Adrian Wisnicki. The project is headlined as “A Multispectral Critical Edition,” and is available at

<http://livingstone.library.ucla.edu/1871diary/>. This project looks to the field journals the British

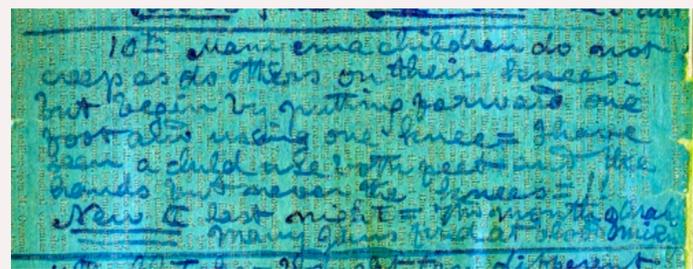


Figure 2 A section of the original 1871 Diary and under spectrographic imaging

explorer David Livingstone (of “Dr. Livingstone, I presume” fame) kept while in Central Africa. Due to limited resources, Livingstone resorted to writing with “an old copy of *The Standard* newspaper with ink made from the seeds of a local berry”

(“Introduction”). The poor quality ink,

paper, and the interference from the newsprint left the original journal all but unreadable. But with spectrographic imaging, Livingstone's "overtone" that seemed lost to age, the printer ink, or water damage is revealed to still exist, even when invisible (See Figure 2). This is, I should add, not just the process of putting the paper under a particular spectrum that best reflects the color of the Zingifure dye, but also makes use of "raking" lights, which "illuminate the folia at an oblique angle and so highlight page topography," ("Spectral Imaging in Scotland") emphasizing the paper's three-dimensional state by tracing Livingstone's penmarks by the indentations left on the page.

The Livingstone Collection also creates a digital variorum, comparing the transcripts of the original field diary with two later journals, one from 1872 and the published version from 1874, putting particular interest on the events of the 15<sup>th</sup> of July, where Livingstone witnessed a massacre of the Nyangwe locals at the hands of slavers. The restoration of the original field diary allows another perspective in the chronology of the development of Livingstone's writings, and moves the reader to look at Livingstone's published works as part of a continuous timeline moving from the shocking and traumatic original experience, recorded with limited resources and then revised over time until prepared for publication.

### **Hypothes.is: Hierarchy and Chronology**

Looking closely at the Livingstone Diary reveals that the Hypothes.is program used in this class does not function at all like a manuscript document. "Pressure" and "Impression" are not part of the creation of the annotations. They are purely electronic, and, in fact, have no actual contact with the pdf files being annotated. And yet, like the Livingstone Diary, the use of this annotation

software reveals that even the electronic document we're working with is not a flat, distant, and timeless object, but a location that has both three-dimensional space and a meaningful chronology that we only experience partly. Examining Hypothes.is also draws attention to the ways in which the different interfaces provided for looking at these annotations, whether from the document or the user page, is firmly rooted in time and the continuous intersection of other annotators.

The document interface is designed to be familiar to the analog methods of annotation, even using the traditional yellow coloration of highlighters and darkening in a similar fashion should a passage be highlighted twice-over. On top of that, Hypothes.is suggests layering though facilitating response comments to already made annotations, slightly indenting them beneath them, but as a sequential action, also implied to be layered on top of the original comment. In Figure 3, a dialogue between Maddie and Ted over Hugh Blair's *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* illustrates this point, particularly from Ted's comment joining a later section of the text to Maddie's immediate observation. Ted's response is obviously sequential to Maddie's, but it also implies a degree of backtracking—he saw her annotation while reading left-to-right, top-to-bottom, but then backtracked to her comment after coming across the later

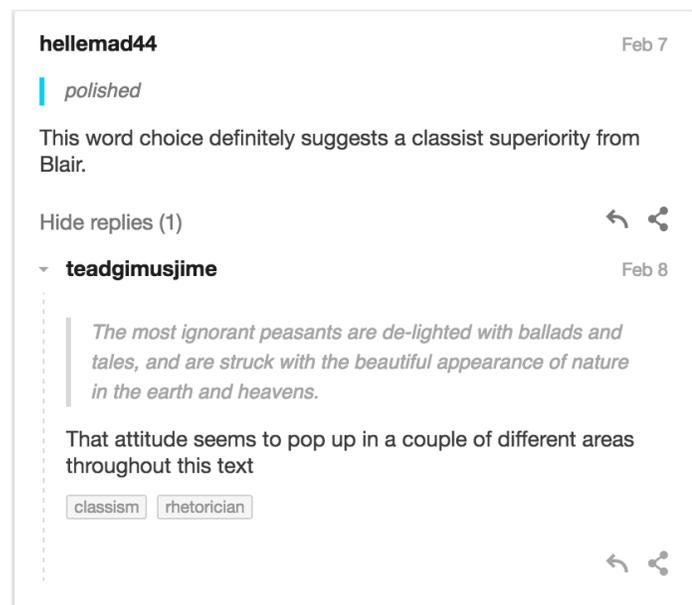


Figure 3 Dialogue between Maddie (Hellemad44) and Ted (teadgimusjime)

point.

I noted in my 8<sup>th</sup> MicroResponse (MR) that Biff's comment in Figure 4 on the excerpt from Gloria Anzaldua's *Borderlands/La Frontera* reveals of her reading process within a timeline of action and backtracking.

Unlike this Microresponse, which is edited and written after-the-fact of reading (you could not tell me if this parentheses was the first or last thing I wrote), the annotations have a chronology that is interwoven throughout the text. We can go back and edit, comment on other people's annotations, and then reply to those comments in text chains that draw up, down, and sideways through the original text.

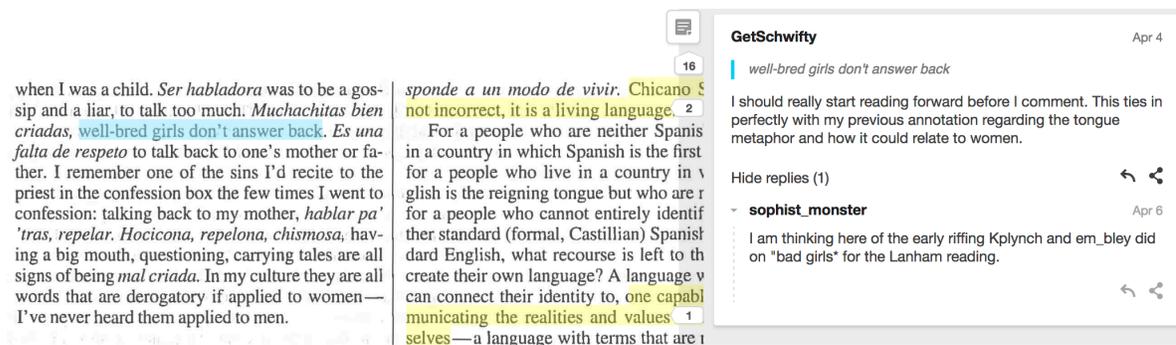


Figure 4 Biff (GetSchwifty) realizing that her earlier comment has already been addressed in the text.

The process of annotation is often a series of immediate reactions, written at the time the annotator had read to that particular point in the text. There is backtracking and annotations out of the text's hierarchical order, but the reader of the document interface only has the dates to tell them that the annotation on Page 1 could be written a week after another on Page 25, and even with that knowledge, the annotations are still read along the order of the text.

The document interface is the only format necessary for the function of this class. The annotator can only add their own annotations through it and can read others' annotations perfectly well

from the format, although with the above-mentioned assumptions that come with that. But the second format divorces the layering from the original text almost entirely. Hypothes.is provides a user page (a search page that brings up all posts under a users name) that lists the user’s annotations in an order that is grouped by texts, but is largely chronological. This interface reveals explicitly the chronological order of the annotations completely removed from the hierarchy of the text, and presents them as independent “slices” of text, as though the annotating layer had been scraped off, cut into its discrete parts, and repackaged in the order they were made. Figure 5, for instance, shows that my second annotation on the excerpts from Kenneth Burke was from the first page, a link to the book covers of two of the texts, because my first annotation was lifting a note from my own copy of the book to the pdf file. I do not know if other people in this class are making use of this format, but I use it for backtracking my own annotations, if I’m looking for something to quote. I better remember what I’ve written in a general order of when I made them then necessarily

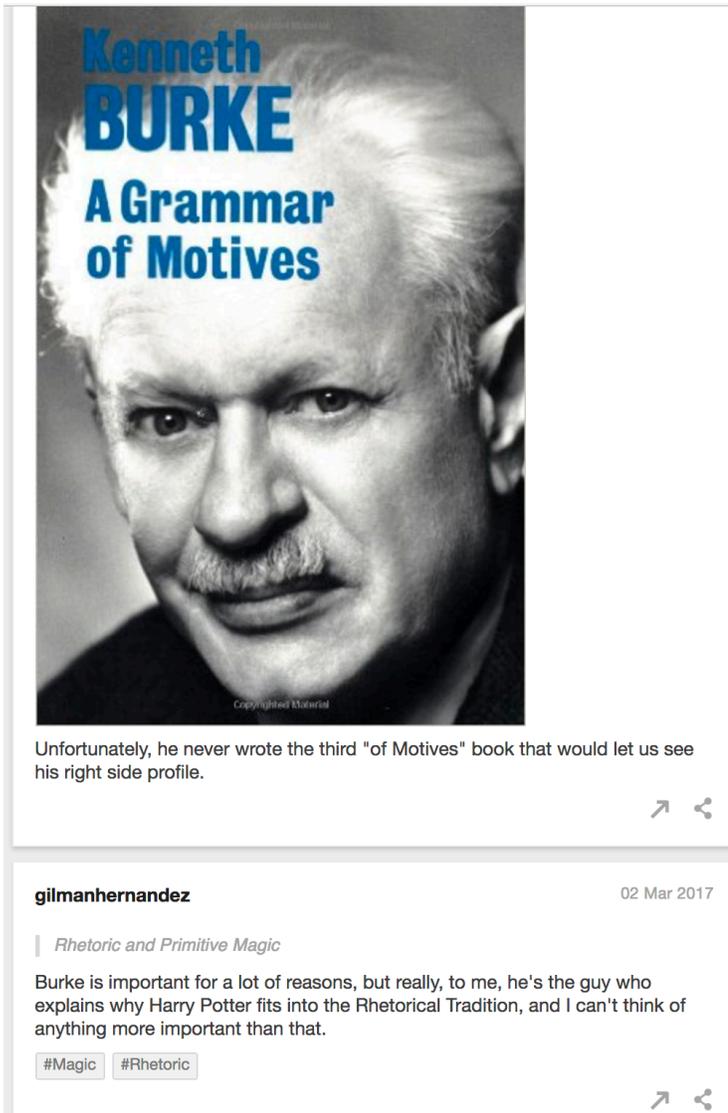


Figure 5 The chronologically earlier annotation is listed first in the user page

where they are in the text, and it also allows me to look at my own annotations from an approach looking at them as premade quotations—either mine or others—in order to fit them into MRs or for my pull quotes. My audio quilt largely relied on this form of reading, and it’s the origin of my quilting metaphor: the process was akin to stitching together scrap fabric into a new pattern, with the “scrapping” coming from Hypothes.is’ ability to rake the texts for quotes from Lauren or Kathryn.

It’s also, I believe, notable that the user page is really just a variation of the search feature. Keyword and tag searching works under the same raking mechanism as the name search, but ties the scrap annotations together in bundles across documents. Figure 6 shows how the interface

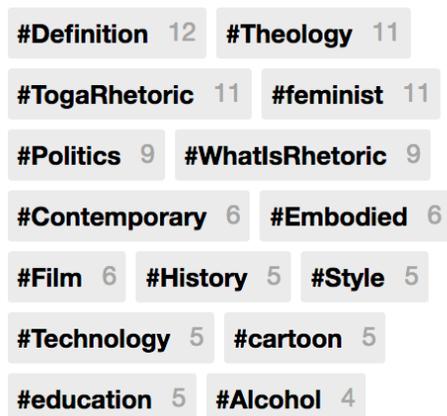


Figure 6 My own tag cloud on Hypothes.is, of my 15 most used tags

both makes these bundles apparent and weights them by use, and it allows me to look at my annotations from a distant view, getting a general sense of my topics of choice. I have noticed that these tags, particularly thanks to autocomplete, subtly guide me into certain patterns of thought—when I’ve written a post, I look to give it tags, and from punching in “#” (amusingly, symbol that started as a misunderstanding of how Hypothes.is

worked), I’m given a dropdown of my most common tags. Punching in letters at semi-random gives me a sense of other tags I’ve made before. Sometimes, this leads me to edit or redirect a comment to better integrate it into the tag network. Most of the time, I only add the tag with no edit, but by creating that linkage, I greater promote the tag in the hierarchy and I reshape the

network I've created on the user page. In a way, these paths of least resistance work like digital grooves, impressions my use has made on the system that shape my approach to my own writing.

### **MicroResponse: Dialogues**

While Hypothes.is opens its "About Us" page with a statement, "To enable a conversation over the world's knowledge." Three lines down, the project's stated aims are to build "an open platform for discussion on the web." If the audio quilt highlighted the foreignness of the ideas and arguments that made up my Elaboration, then looking at the annotations as a three-dimensional layer of multiple, intersecting ideas and contributors should highlight discussions and dialogues in those layers. But are conversations happening? The user page doesn't allow for this at all, since I cannot find responses from the dropdown, nor can I search them for keywords. And in some ways, the weekly annotations are limited in terms of interactions—self-consciousness about disagreeing or just the added scrutiny that comes with knowing that the annotator you're responding to *will* get an email with your annotation. But even without explicit back-and-forth conversations, Hypothes.is is still showing that we are actively leaving impressions on each other. We are not annotating into the void, the structures created through this overlay and network are actively working to build something in and amongst us.

As an illustration of this, I'd like to look at some of the MRs from early February, the second set assigned. My own MR from that week (which, as a side note, is what started the path to my first Elaboration from an abortive attempt to record karaoke) looks at a general trend in my annotations from that week towards eclectic pop culture references, structured around ideas I came across in Kathryn, Lauren, and Sean's annotations. This is fairly usual for my style of MR and can serve as a control group. However, that same week, there were more interesting

approaches of making use of Hypothes.is. Emily's "Taste and Rhetoric: Parallel Identity Crisis Re: How is Taste Rhetorical," shows an active conversation under scrutiny. The post takes a conversation across annotations from "a few weeks back, while annotating Lanham's 'The 'Q' Question'" and looks at it from the context of Hume, the subject of that week's MR. This response interweaves not only the two separate articles, but does so by returning to an earlier dialogue, in which Emily had been a participant, and reassessing the discussion under new terms. While there is obviously a dialogue as the subject of the MR, this MR takes those past ideas and brings them into the Hume discussion occurring on the class Tumblr page—and is then annotated again on that page. For an even more abstract example of these intersections, I also look to Raj's "How Is Taste Rhetorical," particularly his concluding point, "My entire post can be summed up by someone's annotation. I can't seem to find it, but it essential said that someone needs to practice their taste by trying a pizza or brisket and compare and contrast taste. Or they won't be able to zero in on a standard." This MR does not use the strict networking of annotations that Emily makes use of with citations and direct quotes, but shows that the annotation, from an unknown annotator, is still an undergirding part of his thought and approach to the work. By being unable to find it, Raj emphasizes that even without explicit interaction (such as by responding to the annotation or citing a name), these overlays are being read and, in turn, constructing new thought.