

## Participating in T.S. Eliot's "The Wasteland": A Synesthetic Experiment

The primary method I used to develop my idea for this second media project was based on a critique and an extension of my first media project. Indeed, in a very real sense, the concept of the latter project emerged out of the failures of the former. These failures were twofold. On the one hand, my first project's purely representational and/or interpretive engagement with T.S. Eliot's work in "The Wastelands" limited my contribution to a response rather than a participatory production of my own with the poem. On the other hand, my design for the first project was already conceived before I started exploring the possibilities and potentials offered by the technology with which I planned to implement this design. These critical insights led me to believe that if I actually wanted to participate with the poem *and* the technology, while at the same time eschewing an exclusive emphasis on merely representing or interpreting Eliot's text, I had to reduce my role in one aspect of the project and increase it in another. That is to say, for this second media project I felt my participation should focus more on the role of a director than that of an actor.

In consequence, I decided to assume a largely directorial capacity in collaboration with my four and two year old sons, William and Eliot respectively, who would take on the more active responsibilities. The three of us experimented with pairing textual fragments, images, and paint to participate with T.S. Eliot while he recites passages from section V of "The Wasteland": *What the Thunder Said*. As a director, I selected the materials we would use but I deliberately avoided instructing how they should be used with the exception of timing. For instance, I first used Audacity (free audio editing software) to establish the timing associated with quotes I wanted to display using text. I then selected photos that might support some of the imagery evoked by the poem. My sons then listened to the poem in segments, taking turns participating with the recording using paint, text and photo image. I took a photo of each visual element as it was added to our master collage/graffiti work. Once we had made our way through the poem segment, I downloaded the photos into iPhoto then imported them to iMovie, which allowed me to create a slowmotion film very easily. Finally, I overlaid the mp3 of T. S. Eliot reciting the poem.

My ultimate goal in completing both projects was to experiment with the concept of synesthesia, "in which the stimulation of one sensory or cognitive pathway leads to automatic, involuntary experiences in a second sensory or cognitive pathway" (Wiki – Synesthesia). However, I wanted to take the notion of synesthesia in a slightly different direction as I was less concerned with one sense stimulating another sense and more interested in one sense participating/appropriating the representational form of another sense. In essence, I wanted to explore the way in which I might represent a visual creative process stimulated by the constraints and movements of auditory rhythmic form. My notion was to imagine a method to visually participate in poetic diction such that I might map an alternative means to connect with poetry than through an analysis of a poem's thematic or semantic meaning. Instead, I wanted to illustrate meaning with a poem by visualizing the rhythm of its diction, thus making the presentation of the visual a rhythmic rather than a sequential affair. On a practical note, I do not feel that my project accomplished this synesthetic goal and nor do I think that this goal could or should be a theoretical approach that is used in the classroom. However, the element of my projects that I do think has merit in the classroom is the notion of helping to generate and support students in the practical exploration of their own theoretical pursuits and interests.

As such, my approach to assessment for a project of this nature remains the same as in the previous assignment, i.e., a form of assessment that requires students to participate in the “continuous cycles of design, enactment, analysis, and redesign” that comprise actual literary/media production (Cobb et. al, quoted in de Castell et. al 591). Rather ironically, the only aspect that has changed for me about assessment surrounding work engaging with technology after a little more *practical* experience is that I have nuanced my *theoretical* rationale for this form of assessment. For example, I now fundamentally categorize the “cycle of design, enactment, analysis, and redesign” as a method of assessment *as learning*, which is an aspect of formative assessment and refers to assessment tools and strategies that are used by teachers and students to foster intrinsically motivated self-regulated learning. As with other methods of formative assessment, assessment *as learning* occurs during instruction and is designed with the purpose of supporting and advancing student learning rather than for the collection of evidence for grades like summative assessment. Fundamentally, assessment *as learning* is achieved by involving students in the process of assessment. For example, when students and teachers establish the criteria and standards for an assignment through collective negotiation then expectations are transparent and performance is more easily self-regulated. In addition, a teacher can invite students to take a role in assessment by selecting and developing the task that will be assessed from class suggestions. In either case, active participation in the creation of an assessment tool or task can produce a sense of ownership and personal accountability that intrinsically motivates students to strive for difficult learning outcomes (Case 365). But perhaps the best method of assessment *as learning* is for students to engage in self and peer assessment exercises. Most importantly, though, assessment *as learning* demonstrates to students and teachers that correcting misconceptions, improving performance, and revising work based on constructive feedback are essential components in a life-long process of learning (McMillan et al 113). Indeed, assessment *as learning* conveys the message that assessment is a departure point for student learning rather than a terminus. In the same fashion, I consider these two media projects a beginning to my participation with digital media not an end.

#### Works Cited

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