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Humanizing Scholarship: Going Public Via Multimodality

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FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Miami, Florida

HUMANIZING SCHOLARSHIP: GOING PUBLIC VIA MULTIMODALITY

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of

the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

ENGLISH

by

Mario L. Avalos

2021

To: Dean Michael Heithaus
College of Arts, Sciences and Education

This thesis, written by Mario L. Avalos, and entitled Humanizing Scholarship: Going Public Via Multimodality, having been approved in respect to style and intellectual content, is referred to you for judgment.

We have read this thesis and recommend that it be approved.

Phillip M. Carter

Andrew Strycharski, Co-Major Professor

Vanessa K. Sohan, Co-Major Professor

Date of Defense: March 26, 2021

The thesis of Mario L. Avalos is approved.

Dean Michael R. Heithaus
College of Arts, Sciences and Education

Andrés G. Gil
Vice President for Research and Economic Development
and Dean of the University Graduate School

Florida International University, 2021

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my parents—especially my mother, mi mama: Elisinda Avalos. How can I not? Mom, your support in all of my endeavors throughout my life, I hope you know, has meant everything to me. You have been there for every step of the way and I hope that this new milestone in my life makes you proud—it is as much your success as it is mine. Te quiero muchísimo.

I also dedicate this thesis to Luisa Suarez. Without you, The Adjunct does not get made. Plain and simple. Despite your reservations, you took the role by the horns and came through for me big at a time when I was beginning to crumble. I can't imagine getting through the last year and navigating this pandemic without you. You inspire me every day to be a little bit better.

Last, but most certainly not least, I dedicate this thesis to my Tuesday night crew: The incomparable Jananias. Steph, Jannell, Maria, you are my biggest support group and I am not so sure I would have made it through the stresses and hardships of graduate school and teaching without those Tuesday night talks and treats to look forward to. You are all so very special to me.

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

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by

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Florida International University, 2021

Miami, Florida

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“Humanizing Scholarship” offers a look into the ways that multimodality can be used to make the scholarly conversations had within the academy more accessible to members of the public. This thesis acknowledges and echoes the responsibility academics have to bridging the gap between their research and the people who so often serve as the basis for the ethnographic work being done in academia. My project does two things: First, it brings together some of the conversations surrounding multimodality and public scholarship. Second, it offers some first-hand models of multimodal compositions—the short films *Don Armando* and *The Adjunct*, and the screenplay for *Huevos Revueltos*—which attempt to translate academic conversations through a narrative lens offered by the mediums of screenplays and short films. It is my hope that these models can help future scholars see the value in multimodality and the critical humanizing factor it can offer their research.

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Introduction

Multimodality is an approach to composition wherein a composer brings together multiple literacies and methods by which meaning can be created in a particular situation. Multimodality can be broken down into its two root words of “multiple” and “mode.” More specifically, multimodality is a means of composing texts that is embracing of the different means or modes by which people can communicate ideas and convey meaning, which can range from linguistic to aural to visual to gestural or spatial modes (Ball & Charlton 42). When discussing multimodality and multimodal compositions, the term “modes” refers specifically to the varied ways by which meaning can be created and delivered, which includes words, sounds, images, and even movements. More specific examples include films, photographs, podcasts, interpretive dances, zines—the list goes on. However, as far back as I can remember, I have long associated and considered a successful career in academia to be largely defined by the number of textual publications someone has been able to pump out throughout their time working and doing research in a particular field of study. Producing and eventually publishing well-founded and well-researched articles, chapters, or entire books require very specific and long-standing academic competencies and literacies. Academics build their careers off of these traditionally written texts because that is the expectation of what academic work is and looks like. Lost in these conventions are the many alternatives to the traditional and formal notions of an academic text (books, chapters, articles) and young scholars often feel the need to adhere to these practices in their efforts to be recognized or known in their fields of interest (Shipka, *Transmodality in/and Processes of Making* 251).

Sadly, I find that little mind is paid to the different ways some scholars compose and engage in the creation and sharing of knowledge. Of course, a professor with over a dozen published manuscripts or articles has put in a lifetime of work and deserves their earned recognition. But what about scholars who also host educative podcasts (look up the Politics and Polls podcast by Princeton University) or creates videos (see Michel van Biezen's YouTube page) to facilitate the passing of knowledge to eager minds? Much of what I aspire to do with my research on multimodality involves championing for multimodal compositions to become a more commonplace—if not *the* standard—practice in scholarly contexts because I feel academia presently does not take into account or really even value the many ways people *compose* in this 21st century world. Taking into account my own interests in screenwriting and the filmmaking process, a large part of my thesis work features my own sample texts to serve as examples for future students to engage with as they consider how they can incorporate multimodality and perhaps even narrative-driven stories to humanize their research topics of interest. I offer up an assortment of short films and screenplays that I made with the intent of exploring academic conversations of great personal interest to me and crafting what I hope are compelling narratives around these conversations and concepts.

There seems like no better time for me to make this push because something has been made clear in the last year, a period marked by people fighting for social justice on many different fronts. I have spent the last year looking on at the efforts from people to not only seek out resources and knowledge in whatever way or shape they can find it, but I have witnessed some of my very own peers use their learned skills to share knowledge on social media sites in an effort to make more accessible anything ranging from hidden or

lesser-known histories, specific and often multicultural terms, as well as relevant studies related to topics ranging from anti-racism to redlining to gender identity. This often pay-walled information being shared by younger academics through social media is not always simply accessible to members of the public off of a Google search, but often held behind the “bubble” surrounding discipline-specific academic studies and the conversations that take place inside classrooms which fail to always make their way outside of it. I want to help pierce that bubble so that people outside of the academy—the public— those with an earnest passion to learn more and contribute to the many ongoing conversations happening in the academy to be able to do just that through their engagement with more accessible scholarly work. Whether it is through the use of short films, podcasts, or paintings—just to touch on a small sample size of the potential modes in which people can compose and contribute to academic conversations—I believe that we all can only tremendously benefit by espousing multimodality to assimilate scholarly discourse into public mainstream culture (especially through popular modes such as memes, films, Tik Toks, etc).

Bridging the Gap—Public Scholarship and the Need to Go Public

Most of my peers and colleagues love engaging in a good and honest conversation around a topic of mutual interest. It just makes sense to share our own understandings of a particular topic with a willing audience and beyond that, to connect others with resources that they can then use to inform themselves more on a particular topic. These exchanges occur in casual settings like a workplace breakroom or coffee shops, but they also occur in other public forums such as curated discussion-centered events and on social media sites. Although he largely focuses on literacy and literacy-related

knowledge, Peter Mortensen argues in his piece “Going Public” that academics who believe their work can have a positive change on society *must* acknowledge their obligation to share that work “in the most expansive, inclusive forums possible” (182). Though he does go on to say that the task of going public is much easier said than done, claiming that academics in composition have little “intellectual energy” left at the end of the day, the efforts have to be made if academics are to honor their duty to serve the members of the public and communities they inhabit.

This is not to say this kind of work is not being done, but there need to be more of these concerted efforts to reaching the public. At our own Florida International University, the Center for the Humanities in an Urban Environment—led by its director, Dr. Phillip Carter—regularly organizes and curates public events that engage the local community and beyond—through the use of livestreaming tools on social media sites—in scholarly conversations on topics ranging from the term “Latinx” to racism in American sports to fake news and media literacy. While Mortensen mulled the obligations academics held as keepers of knowledge in society, art historian Laura M. Holzman offers an approach to uphold these obligations in her 2019 article “Isn’t It Time for Art History to Go Public?” where she notes that public scholarship offers academics a way to connect their vast pools of academic knowledge with community knowledge. While she focuses on public scholarship in relation to Art History in particular, many of Holzman’s claims are unsurprisingly applicable to other fields of study. Holzman says, “It [public scholarship] is a way to honor social knowledge. It is a way to share expertise, so that more people have access to reliable information” (2). University professors, after all, already go to great lengths to instill in their students a sense of information literacy,

but these considerations should extend to the members of the public, a demographic which, arguably, could stand to gain so much more from these acts of public scholarship. To be clear, when I refer to members of the public, I refer to anyone whose livelihood does not revolve around the academy, and these individuals do not necessarily need to have any overlap in terms of educational backgrounds or careers.

Honoring and advancing social knowledge—that is, knowledge pertaining to members of the public—serves as a way to support and demonstrate the ways institutes of higher education such as universities and museums are able to help increase the numbers of people who can use scholarly tools and findings on their own and consequently leverage those findings in ways that help these informed members of the public advocate for the issues they actually care about. For instance, in the case of my former boss and mentor, Dr. Glenn Hutchinson, I have personally aided Glenn in helping a community of Hispanics in the Little Havana neighborhood seeking to gain citizenship in the United States by working with them on preparing for the test and honing their skills in English. Dr. Hutchinson, too, has worked in local prisons to teach prisoners playwriting in an effort to allow them to have a means to express themselves. Mortensen, too, speaks about the duty academics have to their communities, which he notes are “likely much larger and more complex than the institutional ones in which we work” (195).

Attention should be paid to the ways in which scholars distribute their research. Mortensen claims that many academics are fully capable of sharing disciplinary knowledge with local audiences but have often done so in unengaging and inaccessible ways. Michael Warner argues that the “public” has something of an “ongoing life.” (qtd. in Rivers & Weber 189). That is, a scholar invested in public discourse and scholarship

would not simply engage with the public once and call it a day. No, Warner points to an important factor in the equation: circulation. He claims that it is the way in which different texts circulate and eventually become the basis for further representations or inquiries which really demonstrates that “publics have activity and duration.” In a sense, these publics have a life to them, something Paula Mathieu and Diana George touch on in “Not Going It Alone: Public Writing, Independent Media, and the Circulation of Homeless Advocacy.”

A lot of the work done in the academy has high stakes implications for different subsets of people and research can sometimes be driven by a desire to positively impact lives, but this cannot be done by talking to the same people in our respective departments. Mathieu and George offer up a few real-world cases in Atlanta, Boston, and even São Paulo, Brazil, where smaller groups of activists successfully went about collaborating with other local groups in circulating public writing-centered campaigns that advocated for homeless populations in these cities. Mathieu and George stress how these instances of success around a particular social cause are achieved through “networks of relationships, in alliances between those in power and those without, through moments of serendipity” (142). Mathieu and George also circle back to this idea about the circulation of a social cause or a relevant topic of discussion.

Societal change and social justice reform are not brought on by a single act of composition, but rather by a combination of how a particular text is circulated in the world, whether or not it fosters any conversation, whether it creates pressure, and whether it is successful in finding unexpected allies. To that end, we must acknowledge that the work being done in academic communities often fails to breach public mainstream

discourse when it is relegated and contained to scholarly journals and databases even the average student might have trouble navigating. As composers of knowledge and scholarly work that have the potential to enact societal change, we should do our part to remember Mortensen's plea that academics *must* acknowledge their obligation to share their work by owning up to the reality that the current modes in which scholarship is currently published do not always take on a life or circulation outside of the specific discourse communities they are written in. In my own scholarship, I use the medium of film to fulfill this obligation and engage the public in ways that integrate the humanizing capabilities of narrative filmmaking with academic fields of inquiry.

Multimodal Composition: The Key to Going Public

Multimodality is seeing some increased attention in the composition classroom and beyond. It is growing ever more difficult to deny the importance of embracing these multimodal approaches to composing that not only offer students freedom to explore and use their own creative literacies and competencies, but also offer students a means to use their voice and language in new and exciting ways in academic contexts. In order for public scholarship to evolve and facilitate a stronger sense of “communicational or compositional fluency” there need to be tangible changes in both disposition and practice—something multimodality is well equipped to offer academics (Shipka, *Transmodality in/and Processes of Making* 252). In his 2003 publication, *Literacy in the New Media Age*, Gunther Kress starts off by noting that it is no longer possible to think about literacy as something separated from various social, technological, and economic factors (1). Kress talks of these shifts in dominance presently occurring, the first notable shift being “from the now centuries-long dominance of writing to the new dominance of

the image” as well as a shift from the dominance “of the medium of the book to the dominance of the medium of the screen” (1). These tangible shifts are undoubtedly impacting the means by which people represent and communicate at every level and in every domain—academic discourses included.

Kress also emphasizes how the largely dominant practice of language-as-writing will increasingly (but surely) be displaced by the image in several domains of public communication. He does note, however, that it is likely that writing will remain the preferred mode of communication of the political and cultural elites. Given Kress made these observations back in the early 2000s, it seems clear to me that these shifts, while certainly intimidating to the dominant structures, are happening at a less than optimal pace. Institutions of higher learning already have something of a public relations issue, viewed by some as snobby or even self-aggrandizing to an extent. While the world around us has largely embraced and adopted various different semiotic modes of education such as video/film and podcasts—modes that are inherently more accessible to the public—the academy has seemingly clung ever so tightly to the notion that writing should serve as the dominant form of communication. That said, I am not advocating for anyone to stop writing traditional texts altogether—that work will always have its purpose. However, academics *should* continue begin thinking of ways that they can use multimodal compositions and public engagement to create new personal and institutional “technological ecologies” which can serve to enhance the reach of their research in new and inclusive ways (Heilig & Brewer 85).

Visual communication is slowly becoming less of a domain of specialists, and increasingly crucial in the domain of public communication. In *Reading Images: The*

Grammar of Visual Design, Gunther Kress and Theo Van Leeuwen point out that opposition to the emergence of visual modes of communication as a “full means of representation” is not entirely founded on an opposition to *visuals* per se—they also note how, paradoxically, writing can be interpreted as a visual medium—but rather derived from opposition to a reality or shift where visual communication takes form as a full-fledged alternative to writing (17). They note that the shift away from writing as the dominant form of communication “can therefore be seen as a potential threat to the present dominance of verbal literacy among elite groups,” echoing Kress’ own thoughts in his 2003 monograph (17).

Within the classroom, students are composing public-facing advocacy texts which deliberately involve multiple genres and media to “invoke the multimodal and collaborative aspect of twenty-first-century communication” (Weber & Rivers 203). They go on to explain that while the larger structures (or the elite groups Kress often cites) still adhere to these notions of writing as the dominant academic form of composition, instructors are encouraging their students to “navigate and negotiate worldly encumbrances and the conventions of their publics” (Weber & Rivers 190). These thoughtful negotiations being asked of students today are done, they say, by focusing on rhetoric as the means by which immanent, affective, timely, and contingent truths are invented—and perhaps even how these very truths are shared with the public.

Academics should consider that there is a better chance for their scholarship to facilitate social change when they embrace multimodal compositions and their timely/affective conventions. In John Trimbur’s *Composition and the Circulation of Writing*, he focuses a lot on the circulation and delivery of a piece of writing, though

these ideas of circulation and delivery certainly apply to other modes of composition as well. Trimbur warns of the dangers that come from teachers and students neglecting to consider the delivery of a piece, going on to say that this negligence of delivery can cause us to “miss altogether the complex delivery systems through which writing circulates” (190). He goes on to argue that delivery can no longer be thought of as a mere technical aspect of public discourse, but rather it must be understood as something both ethical and political, “a democratic aspiration to devise delivery systems that circulate ideas, information, opinions, and knowledge and thereby expand the public forums in which people can deliberate on the issues of the day” (190). It becomes clear that the ways in which academics compose should be, as Weber and Rivers note, timely and affective in order for the public to collaborate and join in on the deliberation “on the issues of the day” or what I interpret to mean the social justice causes at the forefront of daily life.

As a filmmaker and a student of film, I have seen the power that a narrative-driven story can have over its audience—to move them to action or discussion. Films and the themes that they convey are often historically situated or relevant to the zeitgeist or the “spirit of the age” of a particular moment in time. Filmmakers have the ability to look at the issues they perceive in our world and perhaps create timely and affective stories that can give marginalized groups of people a sense of recognition and agency they may not have always felt they had. In so many ways, the work of a filmmaker and the work of an academic researcher have similar goals and thus the union of the two fields, I believe, can yield some promising and insightful work.

As far as what these public-facing compositions that allow us all to highlight and share the work being done to tackle the “issues of today” might look like, Holzman says

it best: She explains how “traditional scholarship” generally is understood as the research methods and *modes of dissemination* that are already common across academia such as independent or collaborative research project which eventually go on to be presented or published in academic conferences, books, anthologies, and journal articles (3).

Conversely, Holzman notes, democratically engaged scholarship—the kind that is also very much interested in being public-facing and public-serving— is *purpose-driven* work that can ultimately lead to change within a community. This kind of public-facing, socially conscious work can be highly collaborative, often seeing academics and community partners share authority in an effort to “define project goals, create new knowledge together, and build a more participatory democracy.” (Holzman 3)

Guiding the Way: The Need to Create Sample Multimodal Texts

If this kind of multimodal, public-facing work is to become more commonplace in the academy, student composers—those that will go on to become the researchers of the next decade and beyond—will need and benefit from having a collection of ample references and samples of multimodal texts that will guide them and give them a sense of the varying ways they can approach the actual act of composing these kinds of academically unconventional texts.

Shipka does point to a potential difficulty scholars might face when composing multimodal texts, noting that the composing of these unconventional texts might often be “equated with playing, or with artist- or child-like expressions of feelings and emotions” which goes against the traditional modes of scholarship such as print-based texts and publications (*Sound Engineering* 356). Having had several opportunities now as a First Year Composition instructor that urges students to reconsider their notions of what a text

might be, it has become abundantly clear that the willingness to branch out and take the risk of composing a multimodal text is largely driven by personal interest in a particular mode of composition. However, even students that have expressed an interest or proficiency in a particular semiotic mode show hesitation because they simply are unsure of what a relevant scholarly multimodal text might look like. My project aids in filling the gap of relevant sample texts so that there is one less reason (lack of conceptualization) for students to not attempt to engage in the composition of a multimodal and scholarly text. In the sections that follow, I situate my sample films in terms of the contexts that inspired them and the academic conversations they seek to add to.

Don Armando: Literacy Narratives and Using the Reflective Voice

Synopsis: A short multimodal snapshot narrative that transcends time and space as the narrator reflects on his own writing practices throughout his life and the source of his lifelong inspiration: his grandfather.

Discussion: The short film *Don Armando* was a labor of love—an homage to my late grandfather and my scarce yet fond memories of him. The short film’s conception came from my time as a teaching assistant for an ENC 1101 course where one of the first significant assignments students are tasked with is called The Literacy Narrative. This first major unit project—one of my favorites—asks first year composition students to reflect on their own history with either writing, language, or literacy using narrative writing and descriptive, detailed language in a short 3-4-page essay. Students are meant to explore the use of their voice as writers and urged to approach the assignment in a conversational manner. I remember conferencing with my students and repeating the term

“show, don’t tell” as they mulled what instances in their life they wanted to draw on and include in their narratives. It is an assignment that really lends itself to be reimaged in multimodal contexts, either through aural storytelling or more visually evocative means.

In the case of my sample text, the use of a camera to capture meaningful real-world locations as well as the use of voiceover narration, which allowed me to actually show *and* tell viewers of my personal history as a writer, offer supplementary layers of meaning to what otherwise would have been a purely textual composition. Of course, parts of it are dramatized—my neighbors graciously played the parts of a younger version of me and of the titular character, who actually passed away when I was a teenager. The end result, I hope, adheres to the expectations and competencies meant to be taken from the Literacy Narrative assignment while adding layers of intimacy and personality to the narrative which may not always be so easily achieved through a conventional written text. Using multimodality to enhance the engagement in these reflective assignments can help drive the point home to the very students who compose them about the kind of impact reflective texts like these can offer an audience outside of the classroom and potentially lead to more thoughtful reflections about their own literacies.

The Adjunct: Humanizing the Plight of the Adjunct Instructor

Synopsis: A day in the life of Carolina Celaya, a strong-willed adjunct professor at a local university doing her best to do right by those around her while navigating the harsh realities of life after graduate school.

Discussion: The inspiration for this short film was two-fold. I recall coming across an article several years ago in *The Atlantic* which explored the particular case of an adjunct professor named Thea Hunter who tried navigating the challenging world of

academia while holding out hope for a full-time, tenure-tracked position that never came. Facing medical issues without adequate insurance, Thea died from health complications that may have been caught if she had adequate healthcare. The *Atlantic* article notes how Thea Hunter's "hopes and setbacks were compounded by an underlying reality that many adjuncts face: a lack of health insurance. She was a black woman in academia, and she was flying against a current" (Harris, "The Death of an Adjunct."). The article points out how adjuncts lack any sort of job security, benefits including health coverage, and overall a lack of authority and respect. It was a heart-breaking read.

Some years later, I met and befriended people at FIU who had worked as adjunct instructors. Their experiences were varied, though none quite as unforgiving as Thea's story. The former adjuncts I met generally had a strong familial support system and took secondary jobs to make ends meet—another sad reality. Although some of these former adjuncts did go on to receive full-time positions at other schools, one of my friends in particular had a story that stood out to me. They recounted a period of a few months after graduating where they had been given a few classes to teach, but being far from home and living in a city with such a high cost of living as Miami, they couch-surfed for about a year and often had to spend nights sleeping in their car as their money was spent paying off debts accrued while pursuing their higher education.

There is no shortage of these articles filled with personal testimonies and statistics that recount and offer insights into the challenges adjuncts and non-tenure-track faculty face (See the Newsletter of the Non-Tenure-Track Faculty Special Interest Group from 1998). These conversations, which date back decades, are being had and written about by people like socio-cultural anthropologists and academics who study higher education and

advocate for sweeping organizational changes in the systems that are complicit in these exploitative practices. That said, few other articles that I have come across really carry the visceral and disheartening effect that the article from *The Atlantic* pulls off.

I made *The Adjunct* in an effort to add to this widespread national issue from a local, public and accessible angle while also following a single (albeit fictionalized) adjunct instructor's struggle. In our digital content-driven world, my hope is that this easily dispersible and sharable short film might serve as a notice of sorts to those unaware of the hardships aspiring academics endure. It is a story about a very real and pervasive plight faced by adjunct instructors across the country—one that largely goes under the radar for most people—but it is also a very Miami tale of pride and the need to project an image of success. Carolina is not happy about her circumstances—she hates that she has to shower at a gym and eat her mother's *arroz con pollo* cold—but she would rather live her life out of her trunk than admit that she is not doing quite as well as she would lead her mother to believe, and she is willing to grind things out until she gets her shot.

Carolina's story isn't anywhere near as harrowing as Thea Hunter's—I do opt for a slightly ambiguous ending, as we can see a smile begin to form on our protagonist's face—but watching her put up garbage bags as privacy screens while she settles into bed in the backseat of her car in the final scene, I hope, drives home the point to viewers that adjunct instructors (or anyone for that matter) should not live in abject poverty after working hard to earn a degree in any given field of study. It is also my most sincere hope that viewers will be moved to do further research on the matter and find ways that they

can advocate for policy changes that might positively impact the lives of these crucial educators.

Huevos Revueltos: Language Shift and “Avanzando la Raza”

Synopsis: After being ridiculed for not speaking English, Jorge Palomo begins deviating from and resenting his mother tongue of Spanish. After moving away from home and leaving his family behind, Jorge slowly loses the ability and confidence to have even a simple conversation in Spanish. Upon returning home because of his mother’s advancing illness, Jorge has to overcome his insecurities and speak Spanish again if he hopes to enjoy what time they have left together while owning up to his past mistakes.

Discussion: The title for this script—scrambled eggs in English—was inspired by a story I once heard from a coworker that, like Jorge, had lost touch with his Spanish over the years as his family assimilated to their new country and he lost opportunities to practice his native tongue. He joked the only words he has never forgotten are his order at any Latin American café: *huevos revueltos*, *tostada*, and *café con leche*—scrambled eggs, buttered Cuban toast, and coffee with milk. To his credit, that coworker could stand his own ground as far as getting through a conversation in Spanish, but it was a physically and emotionally draining experience for him. He dreaded it, and the performance anxiety of speaking Spanish in even low stakes scenarios made him nauseous.

Still, I found myself relating in some ways, and it was not the first time I had someone share that lived experience with me. Growing up, I can recall sitting at family functions and hearing the phrase “*Hay que avanzar la raza*” which translates to “We have to advance the race” in the context of foregoing one’s roots to assimilate into American culture. That said, it is simply not completely uncommon for the second and third

generation children of immigrants to lose touch with the language of their parents and grandparents. An article by Phillip M. Carter and Andrew Lynch offered me insight into the linguistic concept of *language shift*, which is a gradual process in which a community of people that have historically and predominantly spoken one particular language replace it with another language. The phenomenon can be observed in communities where members of a particular speech community are bilingual—like our very own Miami. In their collaborative paper, Carter and Lynch assert that, “...cross-generational continuity of Spanish in Miami will likely remain very difficult in the years ahead, and that English is indisputably the language of preference and dominance among second-, third-, and fourth-generation bilinguals in South Florida” (373).

Research on the concept of language shift points to several contributing factors ranging from economic to social ones which push people towards the gradual shift in a dominant language. In the case of the Jorge, it is largely social factors from interactions with children his own age that incite his slow crawl towards losing touch with his Spanish. Drawing from my own relationship and communicative interactions with my mother, a flashback scene halfway through the script explores an exchange where Jorge and his mother communicate in completely different languages. Both understand each other’s respective dominant language, but both also lack the willingness and confidence to actively use it. Neither character quite forces the other to yield in terms of speaking one language or the other. This short yet touching interaction between Jorge and his mother during their car ride home begins to put into question if such a speaking pattern is sustainable in the long term as far as meaningful interactions between a mother and son go, but both characters love each other and will take what they can get.

Though the screenplay ultimately never entered production as a consequence of restrictions brought on by COVID-19, I hope that the script itself might serve as a compelling model for character-driven narratives that personalize academic concepts such as language shift in a way that someone without any prior knowledge or experience in a linguistics classroom can walk away from watching a short film like *Huevos Revueltos* or reading the script with a fundamental understanding of the phenomenon, the different factors that might cause it, and my personal take on what the long-term effects might be through the lens of particular character like Jorge.

Conclusion

Though it was over 20 years ago, Mortensen was right about the obligation academics have in “going public” to grant informational access to those members of the public that live their lives outside of the profession, outside of the academy walls. Mortensen mentions an “impulse” to go public which stems from an “evolving sense of ethical obligation to the individuals and groups whose literacies we study and to the publics we serve” (183). While I personally hesitate to use the work obligation here, I do believe that many academics feel that “impulse”—one which may innately be ethical—to serve and do right by the environments, communities, and groups of people which may often be at the center of the work done in the academy. Whether the focus of a particular research project are adjunct instructors who live their lives paycheck to paycheck or the second and third generation children of immigrants that feel societal pressures to assimilate and forego their mother tongues, academics have an ethical responsibility to make their work as public as possible.

It is my firm belief that multimodality and multimodal compositions can and will help bridge the gap between scholarly work and the general public. I hope that my project echoes Mortensen's plea to academics everywhere, all while also considering Holzman's guiding principle that we must engage in varying kinds of public-facing compositions that are made with the intent of honoring and advancing social, public knowledge within our local communities. The end goal, of course, is for these increasingly more public and accessible academic compositions to facilitate democratically engaged scholarship and discussions in the public realm which can help fight disinformation and offer individuals a means of adequately advocating for the causes and social issues which matter to them. Given my own interests in film, filmmaking, and storytelling, I can think of fewer mediums that have the public-facing reach and capabilities to weave educative topics and compelling, humanizing narratives than film. To that end, I will do my part to engage the public and answer that lingering impulse to do right by the subjects of different academic fields of study by continuing to search for the balance between the humanizing aspects of film and public scholarship.

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