

ABSTRACT

DISSERTATION: Investigating Student Identity Practices Across Material Spaces and Social Software—From the Classroom to Digital Environments

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DEGREE: Doctor of Philosophy

COLLEGE: Sciences and Humanities

DATE: May, 2013

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This study is based on a semester-long qualitative study that investigates student perceptions of and interactions with social software and mobile technologies, particularly as they move between digital and physical spaces. As digital technologies become more ubiquitous, both within the classroom and without, it becomes increasingly important to investigate the ways these technologies are influencing lived writing practices, particularly if instructors are incorporating these technologies into their teaching. In particular, this dissertation investigates constructions of student identities in technology-rich environments, and the ways that digital, mobile, social, and spatial factors both afford and constrain student identities.

This dissertation focuses on movement—of students and information—between academic and non-academic spaces. The research focuses on the lived practices of students as they use mobile technologies and social software as a part of their writing practices and habitus,

and this study explores in depth both their physical contexts and their habits and attitudes towards the ways the digital meets the physical.

This study is based on 10 semester-long qualitative case studies which followed students as they engaged in writing activities, both within class and without. The findings from this study point to the ways that contemporary students are rapidly embracing an existence which incorporates machines into their self constructions: their identities and their physical bodies. These students have adapted their writing styles to incorporate multiple kinds of physical technologies, and almost all interactions in their social sphere are mediated through social software and digital technology. This dissertation presents the findings from this study, arguing for a conceptualization of student as cyborg.