On the making of "The Things They Left Behind"

I knew, pretty much from the start, that I wanted an opening movement for the piece that placed the acquisition of stuff front and center. I shot the original footage for this segment this summer on August 26. It was to be a hot day, as I recall, so I wanted to get out and get things done as early as possible. I think I started pulling things out of the garage and setting them up on the deck around 6:30 that morning. I worked pretty quickly, in part because of the heat, and in part because I didn't want the neighbors to wonder, once again, what I was doing on the deck. The entire process from start to finish took me about two hours. Transferring and saving the files to the computer and editing together the various video clips and still images I took took much longer. A key component of, or focus for, this original piece was the typewriter. As I was originally imagining the opener for this piece back in August, I envisioned that the title of the piece would be composed with or on the typewriter. In the end, I opted not to use that part of the footage here, in part, because it wasn't as legible as I'd liked and, in part, because to watch the typing happen—even if it was sped up—would add too much time, time I didn't have, to the start of the video. With a mind to time, I decided that I would show the first part of this video—highlighting the setting up and accumulation of things—at the opening of the piece, saving the other part of video—highlighting the breaking down, removal and/or erasure of things—either while or right before running the credits at the end of the piece. I liked the visual and conceptual symmetry this offered. A way of signaling to viewers that the piece was about to end—and much in the way it began.

The segment of the video featuring the mini micro-viewer probably took more time, money, effort, determination, and certainly more patience than anything else I've tried to do with or for a piece of video scholarship. That said, it's probably the element of this video that I'm least happy with. I thought about doing something else—in fact, I had already come up with another way or two of accomplishing the same or similar ends for this segment of the video but I couldn't bear the thought of all that time, money and effort going to waste.

I came across this mini microviewer on January 2, 2015—my partner and I had stopped into a local junk shop, trying to find ways to kill a little time before meeting up with some old friends later that day. The battery-operated viewer looked to be in great condition, it even came with a carrying case and optional wall plug and it was affordable—the asking price was six dollars. I new immediately that if the viewer worked it might make sense to feature it in the part of the video where I talk about alternative archives. As of January 2nd, I knew that I'd be talking about alternative archives in the video, I just didn't have any ideas about what viewers of the video would be looking at or seeing as they listened to me talk about alternative archives. I began wondering what it would take—or if it would even be possible to make my own microfilm. This would allow me to feature on the screen of the viewer text taken from some of the scholarship I'd be drawing on here. At this point, I'd mention that I might

have instead achieved similar ends had I shot digital footage of the microviewer and digital footage of the scholarly texts I'd be quoting from and put these together in Premerie Pro. This wouldn't have cost anything to do and I could have completed the whole segment probably in an afternoon. Instead, I was determined to make my own microfilm. I ordered a rather costly black and white reverse developing kit and while waiting for that to arrive, I shot and developed normally a couple of test rolls of black and white 35mm film. I wanted to get a better sense of how the words I was photographing would look when projected through the viewer and this also helped with size or scale issues. Once the reversal kit arrived, I was surprised to learn how labor-intensive this process would be. There were far more chemicals to mix than I was accustomed to and the actual reversal process was, well, tricky and time-consuming. Without getting into too many technical details, I'll just say here that it was a two-step development process and one that required additional exposure of the film in-between. The film I shot and developed, I knew, was horribly under-exposed and barely useable, so I sent away for yet a second reversal kit—this one used for color slide film. The result with this process was only marginally better, exposure-wise, than the black and white reversal kit. In the final version here, I used an 8mm ap on my iPad to record myself running through the viewer strips of color slide film as well as both the normally developed and reverse developed black and white film.

In contrast to the micro viewer sequence—one that I had erroneously assumed would be much easier to accomplish and would look far better than it ended up looking—this sequence was one that I had long been wanting to attempt but one that I had prepared myself would quite likely fail. The trick here was to figure out how to coordinate the turning of the pages of the photo album and the timing of when and how each video would appear on, and then disappear from, each page before the turning of the next page. The technique and timing were relatively simply to figure out. To start, I shot footage featuring a couple of different hands, male and female, turning the pages of the photo album. In retrospect, this was a mistake because I'd not yet determined how many videos I'd be showing, or how long each would play on a given page. Once I created the voice-over and each of the videos, I went back and reshot the photo album footage. At that point, I happened to have one less pair of hands to work with, so instead of alternating between male and female hands with each page turn—something that would have, I think, been more interesting, both visually and conceptually—my hands are the only ones featured in the segment.

I'm not going to say a whole lot here about the process of making the title slides and epigraphs for the piece—they were done in Premiere Pro and in most I've layered text with video playing behind them. But I did want to say something about this particular one. Beyond feeling it was important to feature something of Dorothy's voice or words, I thought this line from the "Sugar Report" was a great lead-in for the segment where I'm talking about the various ways in which I have taken on or taken up Dorothy's work and made meaning from or with them. I had decided on using this quote and had constructed this portion of the video long before deciding whether to feature any audio

from the separate but related project Steph Ceraso and I will be working on—one focused on the various ways people inhabit, vocally and physically, Dorothy's ransom-style love letter. Those who have seen the video know that I ultimately decided to include excerpts from those vocal inhabitations at the end of the piece. Having already highlighted the "moo" line here, it seemed fitting to conclude the final segment of the piece—the one featuring the audio inhabitations of the "Sugar Report"—with some of the bloopers and outtakes associated with Steph's reading of this particular line of the letter.

When I started working on the Tru-Vue sequence, I imagined it functioning largely as a transition between what one has seen and heard so far—again, something of my use, uptake, or remediation of these found artifacts—and what they would see next, highlights from the Inhabiting Dorothy project. Like the microviewer and photo album sequences, this sequence also afforded me the opportunity to try something new—something I wasn't sure I'd be able to do well or even at all. I used the four frame option in Photobooth for this sequence and the trickiest, most time-consuming part of this sequence had to do with making sure that everything—well, everything but my eyes anyway—stayed roughly in the same place or position for all four of the photos. At one point, I tried to rig something up that would allow me to rest my elbows on something stable for the duration, but I was unsuccessful at that. So it mainly became a matter of trying this again and again and again, till I came up with a set of images where my hands, head, and the viewer were more or less in the same position. Once I had three or four images I was happy with, I pulled them into Photoshop, and made the two sides of the viewer transparent in each of the images. This would allow me to import the images to Premiere Pro and play home movies inside each side of the viewer.

The final movement or sequence of this piece was the one I was most excited about. I was eager to see how participants chose to inhabit the materials and excited about finding ways of highlighting some of these even though I hadn't a clue of what this part of the video look like or what, exactly, I wanted to do with it. With each of the other components or movements of this video I had a pretty strong sense—not only of the work each part needed to do, but how each of them would look, sound, move, progress or unfold. My main consideration for this part was to keep things as straightforward and uncomplicated as possible so as to avoid having viewers misunderstand or be confused about what, exactly, participants contributed to the Inhabiting Dorothy project. I didn't want, in other words, to nest the contributions in or project them through something else—a TV screen, the microviewer, a computer screen. Rather, the challenge became one finding ways to show (or let people hear) what other people created, how they took up the challenge of inhabiting Dorothy's materials. Another consideration was to highlight the contribution while, at the same time, providing some kind of reference point to, or reminder of, the text or image of Dorothy's that a person inhabited. My biggest obstacle here was time. I had a lot of things I wanted the audience to be able to see and experience, but not much time to do this. I regret, for instance, not being able share with viewers the two videos I received. I include a very

tiny bit of Emma and Patrick Berry's video, but am only able to mention Bill Derry's contribution in passing. Similarly, I'm only able to provide a glimpse of Christopher Varlack's poem. Also not represented here, at least not as fully as I would have liked, were participants' explanations of what they did, why, and how.

As I mentioned to start, I knew that the last segment of the video proper would mirror the opening segment. Instead of having stuff accumulate or pile up, these traces of other lives lead would be taken away and fade from view. I had initially envisioned this segment as a silent one. I wanted the focus to be on the materials disappearing and I thought that the lack of sound here would be really powerful. At the same time, and with a mind toward time constraints, I wanted to include as many inhabitations as I could, so I decided to feature the audio Steph Ceraso had been collecting, asking people to voice Dorothy's "Sugar Report from St. Louis."

The entire video had been completed when I received Pamela Kincheloe's submission—a video of her signing Dorothy's "Sugar Report." It was important to me to feature at least some of this piece, but I knew that to do so, I'd either have to cut something else or risk the video running over time. The decision to feature, in the last part of the video, audio of people reading the "Sugar Report" proved to be a fortunate one insofar as it afforded a tighter connection between the final segment of the video and the credits, behind which, or in addition to which viewers can see a bit of Pamela's video.

And I guess the final thing that I'd say here is that the, um, instrumental that you hear running behind the credits is a piece called "C Minor Blues" by Christopher Lopez. And it's a piece that I found on the Internet Archives and I've used in quite a number of my pieces of video scholarship, um, and I was glad to be able to feature it again here.