East Texas Activism (1966–68): Locating the Literacy Scene through the Digital Humanities

Shannon Carter and Kelly L. Dent

I always called Joe Tave the Martin Luther King of East Texas.
—John Carlos (Interview)

John [Carlos] and I met coincidentally on campus. I was drawn to and navigated in his direction because of his impressing me that he was intelligent, outspoken, his own man, who believed as I, wrongs must be righted, and to stand for what one believes in.
—Joe Tave (“Re: Video”)

Joe Tave and John Carlos arrived at East Texas State University (ET) in 1966, two years after the campus desegregated. Almost immediately, these African American students found themselves immersed in a rich local literacy scene in which campus events intersected with wider, global ones. They responded with activism—which drew extensive media attention, threats on their lives, formal responses from campus administrators, and, eventually, sweeping reforms designed to address the injustices persisting across this region long after civil rights legislation had mandated otherwise.

Local literacy scenes like these have much to teach us about the ways that historically marginalized rhetors garner rhetorical agency. Yet reconstructing these

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scenes requires more than a visit to the formal archives or access to a single narrative. The literate lives of historically marginalized populations are often underrepresented in formal archives and collective memories. Therefore, to reconstruct these scenes, we needed to reach out to community members, local libraries, and cultural centers. However, physical access alone is not enough. Local literacy scenes cannot be understood apart from national and global literacy scenes, and existing methods many times limit conceptual access as well. We suggest that the emergent digital tools offer a productive solution to such challenges. In the discussion that follows, we describe a digital tool we have built to better understand the ways that these two students used literacy for social justice during one of the most divisive periods in our nation’s history.

Called Remixing Rural Texas: Local Texts, Global Contexts (RRT) and funded in part by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) Office of Digital Humanities, this visualization tool expands the local literacy scene and the specific scholarly audience through two interlocking components—a digital remix and a data source annotation (DSA) framework. The remix takes the form of a documentary, assembled almost entirely from archival materials. The DSA combines with the remix to provide a mechanism that delivers additional information layers not immediately obvious in the remix itself. Together, these two components form a visualization tool for archival research on underrepresented people, places, and texts that emphasizes intersections between local and global forces. They also demonstrate rich avenues for meaningful collaboration with local stakeholders, as we will demonstrate.

Examples such as the remix and DSA speak to important concerns in contemporary literacy studies. They demonstrate a common problem in writing research that emphasizes the local: local writers and their texts come into being at a particular time and place (Pennycook), but rarely are literate interactions entirely local in origin or effect (Brandt and Clinton). Tave and Carlos did not invent the rhetorical moves they used on our campus, nor did they gain access to these public spaces through a sheer act of will (see Warner). Far more is going on here, the vast majority of which is difficult to discern and communicate with existing tools and given the limitations of print.

Remixing Rural Texas offers a potential solution to these ongoing challenges. As a visualization tool for archival research, RRT captures the literacy scenes that surround the creation of local, often ephemeral texts designed to enact desired change. In this start-up phase, RRT is largely expository, revealing the tool’s potential by communicating one research team’s interpretation of one research project. Thus, we focus this description on what users encounter when viewing this particular demonstration of our remix featuring Tave and Carlos in 1967–68. In the first section of this essay, we describe the remix itself and the role played by the juxtaposition of
archival materials that might be otherwise difficult to “see” together. Next, we offer an extended discussion of what we hope to communicate through the DSA tool as applied to this particular remix, offering information layers that serve to connect the local literacy scene under investigation to contemporary global contexts. Finally, we explore the various participatory elements emphasized in the RRT demonstration, highlighting throughout the ways RRT encourages and supports archival development and rich, interdisciplinary, community-based research, thus preserving local artifacts previously unavailable for future access by researchers and local communities. To conclude, we suggest that the promise of the digital humanities may be in its ability to establish networks among local-global forces, disciplinary frameworks, local communities, and our profession.

The Local Literacy Scene

The local literacy scene featured in RRT is dominated by unprecedented change. In 1964, ET became one of the last two public colleges in Texas to desegregate. Carlos and Tave enrolled two years later. Though Tave was a political science major from one of the area’s segregated schools and Carlos was a physical education major and sprinter recruited from Harlem, both saw their agendas as intertwined and fought for social justice in different ways.

Carlos is perhaps best known for his later activism on the global stage; he was part of the now iconic Silent Protest at the Mexico City Olympic Games in 1968. But that event did not occur in a vacuum. Early in his career at ET, Carlos made deliberate use of his athletic talents to gain the rhetorical agency he needed to speak out against ongoing injustices at the school. In December 1967, he triggered an immediate response from campus administrators when he told a Dallas News reporter, “Discrimination in Texas has hurt me personally.”

You go out of state to a track meet and you are representing not only your school but the entire state. Yet you come back and you find restaurants that don’t serve Negroes [. . .] you go into a place to shoot a game of pool and they tell you Negroes aren’t allowed.

I could wear an Olympic gold medal around my neck and that still wouldn’t entitle me to be served in these places. (qtd. in Stowers B3)

Embarrassed by Carlos’s statement, campus administrators—fueled by their determination to discredit his message and, in so doing, discredit him—responded quickly. Days after Carlos’s controversial comment appeared in area news, the athletic director called together all of ET’s African American athletes to “discuss” their positions on the matter. This two-hour, mandatory meeting resulted in an official “consensus,” which led to a “resolution” that appeared in the campus newspaper days later. “Negro Athletes Refute Statements,” declared the East Texan. “We did not
appoint Carlos as spokesperson,” explained fellow ET sprinter Dennis Dyce in his remarks on the meeting and official resolution that followed. “We are not behind Carlos” (Anderson 8). Effectively silenced, Carlos soon found it safer to leave Texas altogether.3

A few months after Carlos’s controversial statement appeared in campus news, Tave established the Afro-American Student Society of East Texas (ASSET). No evidence suggests a direct link between ASSET’s formation and Carlos’s statement, though we can assume some relationship between them: Carlos and Tave were friends; Carlos had just spoken very publicly about the inequities ASSET was designed to address; and a growing number of students across campus were supporting Carlos’s earlier, controversial statement. A little over a month after ASSET was established, the texts written by Tave and other ASSET representatives and circulated across the campus began to transform the local community, setting in motion a series of key hires at ET as well as curricular, policy, and community changes that significantly altered future access to local public spaces for area African American citizens. That access remained limited, irregular, and excruciatingly temporary, but it was nonetheless meaningful to local citizens decades ago, and to us today as well.

Local literacy scenes like Carlos’s comment and Tave’s “Declaration of Rights” (ASSET) cannot be understood apart from the global. Likewise, global rhetorical events such as the Silent Protest that Carlos participated in at the 1968 Olympics cannot be understood apart from the local literacy scenes, lived experiences, and material events that gave rise to them. While Carlos relied on the national and global stage provided by his Olympic exploits, Tave and ASSET operated on the local level, but benefitted from national and global events that created a general atmosphere of chaos and uncertainty in the summer of 1968.

A variety of literacy practices mobilized Tave, Carlos, and other activists with whom they worked. Many of the most influential texts originated elsewhere. For example, Carlos’s statement was in many ways catalyzed by an article in the November/December 1967 issue of Track & Field News that described the Olympic Project for Human Rights (OPHR), a group established by African American athletes to organize a boycott of the 1968 Olympics. Still other literacy artifacts represent a series of what Nathaniel Rivers and Ryan Weber call the “mundane texts” that are always a part of any public rhetoric and that are clearly in conversation with the events surrounding them (191). Tave initiated ASSET’s “Declaration of Rights,” for instance, on the night of Martin Luther King Jr.’s (MLK) assassination. The “Declaration” consequently garnered a direct public response from ET president D. Whitney Halladay. Weeks after being presented with the “Declaration,” Halladay delivered his public “Statement before the Student Senate,” which carefully and clearly addressed each of the key concerns issued by ASSET and promised action. A string of related documents and events emerged from this exchange, leading to unprecedented change for both campus and community.
These local literacy narratives have been uncovered, in part, through traditional research methods presented in traditional ways, including extensive archival research and oral history interviews. However, much of this literacy scene remains distorted and invisible, partly due to the limits of alphabetic text.

Since 2009, Shannon Carter has struggled against these limits as she has worked to make sense of this local literacy scene that has received so little scholarly attention. A couple of years ago, Kelly Dent, an MA student in political science, joined Shannon’s research team to help build RRT—a potential solution to these ongoing challenges. Together with the other members of our interdisciplinary research team, Shannon and Kelly have built a tool designed for historiography in literacy studies involving multiple texts, writers, and (often) competing narratives and influences simultaneously local and global in nature. RRT is the result of this work, and it includes two components: the remix and the DSA tool. In the following sections, we consider each one in turn.

The Remix

By *remix* we mean a narrative sequence established by stitching together artifacts that were originally created for other purposes, a definition inspired by remix artists such as Eduardo Navas and Keith Miller. The remix featured in this prototype is an eighteen-minute documentary about the local literacy scene already described—two rhetors, Carlos and Tave, their civil rights actions (in 1967 and 1968), and literacy artifacts that illuminate the intersections of the local and global scene. It requires a great deal of archival material to build a story like this, just as historiographic research does when it takes on more traditional forms. To build the first minute, for example, we drew together more than fifty artifacts from thirty different sources representing multiple places and a span of more than seventy-five years. Not unlike more traditional research, the artifacts directly referenced in our remix represent only a tiny percentage of those we called upon in the research phase.

The primary goal of the remix is to reconstruct the targeted literacy scene, helping users better understand the interanimating forces of the global and the local. As a genre, the remix provides a vehicle through which to demonstrate the ways the global shapes local literacy scenes and local scenes can impact the global stage. We do this by sampling representative examples of those local and global forces and juxtaposing them to produce a narrative about this literacy scene. Each artifact included in the remix is carefully selected for its potential to inform the literacy scenes in which these local activists were generating and circulating discourse on our campus, as well as offer relevant lessons to be extrapolated for similar literacy scenes today.

The various components of our remix include artifacts from our university archives, the Library of Congress, and the National Archives, together with excerpts
from speeches, commercials, debates, documentaries, and historical and scholarly texts. These images and arguments poured into this local context through television, radio, newspapers, and stories from students and citizens coming to Commerce, Texas, from around the world.

We “sample” archival materials produced by, circulated within, or otherwise informing the local literacy scene. The year 1968 was particularly significant in this respect. Not only was it the same year that Tave established ASSET at ET and Carlos took part in the Silent Protest in Mexico City, it was also a year dominated by unprecedented loss, including record casualties in Vietnam and assassinations of world leaders such as MLK and Senator Robert F. Kennedy, as well as student demonstrations unlike anything the world had ever seen. In the remix, we juxtapose these global samples against those representing the local scene at the time, including aerial images of this rural campus, the newspaper article “Carlos Hits Prejudice: East Texas Sprinter May Join Boycott” (Stowers), a photograph of Carlos on the ET track field, and images of the student demonstration Tave helped organize at ET on the night after MLK’s assassination. By sampling and then juxtaposing the local and the global throughout the remix, we demonstrate the essential role that Alastair Pennycook insists the local plays in all language use. The local is not an abstract concept but a fundamentally material one, the very space in which we experience our world. “Everything happens locally,” Pennycook insists. “However global a practice may be, it still always happens locally” (128). In this way, the local is deeply informed by global events, and local activist efforts can hardly be understood apart from these important narrative strands.

Take, for example, the artifacts presented together in just one small section of the remix. At 11:09, we present a photograph of the spokesperson for OPHR, Harry Edwards, then a doctoral student at San Jose State University (SJSU), superimposed over the cover of the national publication that inspired Carlos’s involvement in this movement. The audio juxtaposed with these images at this point in the remix is from a recent interview with Carlos, where he describes this literacy scene decades later on the critically acclaimed podcast The Kojo Nnamdi Show. “I was reading that [article about discrimination in sports] at the same time I was living that,” Carlos explains. “I was living that at East Texas State University” (“The John Carlos Story”). The narrative structure juxtaposes this section of the remix with relevant local and then global images that play equally important roles in illustrating what Carlos was simultaneously “reading” and experiencing—or “living.” Here we see artifacts that clearly represent the Jim Crow South: African American families in the back of a bus, water fountains with “White” and “Colored” signage. The remix juxtaposes national representations of segregation with local images of young Carlos in an ET jersey running in a local track meet in 1966 and in conversation with Delmer Brown, the track coach who recruited him and who was regularly characterized by team members and others as racist.
Represented in this sampling and juxtaposition is not only the intersection of global scenes with local ones, but also the material, physical, embodied forces at work in an identifiable literacy scene. In a recent oral history interview, Carlos notes that the national publication through which he was first introduced to OPHR was his respite from the daily struggles at ET with the legacy of Jim Crow (see Carter, “A Clear Channel: Circulating”). He looked forward to each issue of *Track & Field News*, which he picked up almost monthly at the local post office. The time he read about OPHR, however, was when he found more than the connection with the national levels of his chosen sport. He found a global movement. Through the genre of remix, which is multivocal and multimodal, we are able to emphasize the physical dimensions of this contact in a variety of ways unavailable to us in print. Unlike traditional, print-based arguments, each modality involved in a given remix (audio, video, and image) “occup[ies] different registers of meaning making [. . . .] There are multiple and overlapping claims made by the various components of the remix that are difficult to discern in text” (Kuhn). These interwoven audio photographic, and historical documents depict the people and places involved in ways that print simply cannot.

The local activism featured in our documentary was surrounded by—and, we argue, fueled by—the sheer volume and intensity of historical events on the global scene. The remix represents this important aspect of the original literacy scene by weaving samples from a vast array of source materials that were widely circulated both nationally and internationally alongside portions of this local narrative. The result is noisy, chaotic, and, according to many viewers old enough to have experienced it, quite accurate. Following the remix’s first public screening on our campus last summer, many audience members told us “It takes you right back” and “It really was crazy like that.” Tave’s oldest son, Charles, born in Minnesota a few years after these events, offers a particularly instructive response. Charles told his father he had no idea “all that was going on at once [. . . .] [Charles] said he knew [Tave] was dealing with a lot when [he] started ASSET at ET, but [Charles] had no idea how much was going on around the world at that very same time!” (Tave, “Re: Video”). Proximity—whether spatial or temporal—isn’t always evidence of influence, but it does provide useful information concerning the local context in which both Tave and Carlos were working to enact change.

The multivocal, multivalent narrative that emerges through juxtaposition of such a range of materials represents the local literacy scene in ways unique to the genre of the remix. Indeed, this is a core value of the remix within RRT. Through sampling and juxtaposition, the remix deepens our understanding of the local–global forces at work on a given literacy scene. Yet a reconstructed narrative alone can capture only so much. When combined with the interactive, dynamic information layering provided by the DSA tool, additional dimensions expand that local literacy scene far beyond the capacity of the remix alone.
DATA SOURCE ANNOTATION

The genre of the remix combines artifacts from a vast array of sources to deliver a single narrative to the widest possible audience. Like archival research that takes more traditional forms, our remix brings together relevant archival materials to deliver a particular interpretation of the object of inquiry. The DSA framework, by contrast, deconstructs what the remix unifies, calling attention to layers of additional narratives and information not obvious in the remix alone. In doing so, the DSA emphasizes the role played by each individual artifact making up the remix, illustrating that these separate artifacts were originally created by human hands in literacy scenes often far removed from the one under investigation. The result draws attention to the intersections where the local literacy scene meets its global counterpart.

The remix represents a linear narrative—albeit a raucous and somewhat frenetic one—wherein every artifact making up the remix follows the previous one in a sequence we’ve designed to serve our particular interpretations of the literacy scene. The DSA, by contrast, disrupts this linear narrative, opening up the targeted literacy scene to multiple interpretations by emphasizing the way that literacy skills, genres, texts, writers, readers, and, by extension, rhetorical agency travels into and flows from and through local literacy scenes. This dynamic interplay of local-global forces limits and shapes what is possible in a given local literacy scene, and the DSA enables deeper explorations of those forces. Where the remix forms one meaning, the DSA can offer multiple meanings.

Users encountering the remix when combined with the DSA see a framework populated by eight different fields, each providing relevant information layers that link the local literacy scene beyond its original context (see Figure 1). Although the remix portion of RRT is designed to stand alone, offering the initial narrative that drives our analysis of this local literacy scene, the DSA is designed for users who are familiar with the remix and interested in additional information. The work here is similar to how one would use endnotes in a scholarly article or the Blu-ray “extras” that often accompany a blockbuster movie.

Within the DSA framework, the remix appears in the upper left-hand corner. Surrounding the remix are seven other fields designed to provide additional information not obvious in the
remix itself. Upon playback within the DSA framework, nearly every second of our remix is programmed to populate each field with layers of related information. The fields audio source, video source, and image source offer complete citation information for the source content concerning all materials included in the remix, along with permissions for each individual use. The context field supplies additional interpretation and related information that expands the narrative of the remix outward in ways most relevant to the artifacts presented. The interactive Google map communicates key information about the origins of the artifact itself, the literacy practices represented, or even the lived experiences of the agents involved. The timeline features key events related to the interpretation, drawing together local events alongside national and global events of note. Through these interactive information layers, the DSA enables us to emphasize, interpret, and expand links across space (via the interactive map), time (via the timeline), contexts (via the context field), and the artifact’s original source (via the video, audio, and image source fields).

In these ways, the DSA pairs literacy’s capacity to connect with digital media’s own capacity to connect almost anything with a digital presence (people, ideas, objects, and/or places). Digital tools are logical alternatives to traditional, print-based methods when we understand that in digital media, “linking is a core value” (Ingram). The DSA takes full advantage of the available links by making extensive use of hyperlinks (in the various source, timeline, and context fields) and the interactive elements of Google maps (in the map field).

For an example of how this works in practice, consider Carlos’s introduction to OPHR described earlier. The materials coming together at this point in the remix (11:09) include two different images and two different audio tracks from three different sources. The audio track appearing at this point in the remix is an excerpt from Carlos’s October 2011 interview with Nnamdi; the image of Edwards is from the same national sports publication Carlos describes in this audio excerpt, and the magazine cover layered beneath Edwards’s image is from Sports Illustrated’s five-part series on racism in sports, which ran in the summer of 1968 and detailed OPHR, its demands, and the racism experienced by African American athletes across the nation. The other audio track is a haunting original piece of music we selected because it conveys the seriousness and trepidation of the era (Chew). We provide a direct link to this audio excerpt, and all others, to encourage full access at every level of this project.

At this point in the remix, complete citation information for each of these sources appears in the relevant audio and image source fields. Wherever sources are available, the citation provides links to the original materials, including the complete interview with Carlos, for example, or the article that inspired him. When that original source is not available online, the citation information offers everything users need to find the non–digital version. The appearance of Edwards triggers the map field to display San Jose, California, where Edwards taught at SJSU, where OPHR originated, and
where Carlos would be himself just a few months after leaving ET and joining the SJSU track team. The timeline reveals the date of this publication in relationship with major events in Carlos’s life that occurred within very close proximity to this reading. The context field provides additional information and resources relevant to the narrative, including background information on Edwards and OPHR.

The remix moves quickly, and the interpretation it offers relies on layers of narratives and resources largely invisible in the remix itself. The DSA, on the other hand, helps users better understand—or understand in a different way—the interanimation of the global and the local. They can find out more about OPHR, for example, including the project’s core principles and the proposed boycott. They can explore the national timeline of events in relationship with those Carlos experienced at ET. In these ways, digital tools emphasize the many connections between the local and the global as represented by one reader (Carlos) in a particular place (Commerce Post Office) at a particular time (1967) reading a particular text (Track & Field News).

The DSA also helps users examine intersections between the local and the global as represented in a local text written by local writers to be read by local readers on behalf of the local community. We are speaking here about ASSET’s “Declaration of Rights,” which Tave began drafting on the night of MLK’s assassination, a few months after Carlos left ET. This document is featured in the final section of the remix, which describes the local scenes in which Tave was working.

At the point in the remix when ASSET’s “Declaration of Rights” appears, the DSA’s context field includes a careful treatment of the “Declaration” itself, as well as the historical context in which the document was created and circulated. The timeline field settles on 1968, the year in which the “Declaration” was published, detailing the global and national events that created a local atmosphere and a campus administration that was perhaps more sensitive to their demands than it would have been otherwise. Indeed, that same year the genre of student demands had begun to dominate student-administrator interactions on college campuses, most notably at Columbia University via the demands of its Student Afro-American Society and Students for a Democratic Society chapter. For these reasons, the map features Columbia and the surrounding area in New York City. The map is interactive, encouraging users to explore more geographical relationships among targeted literacy scenes.

ASSET’s “Declaration” was a key point of contact between university administration and ET students who were agitating for change and for a recognition of their rights to equal opportunities for jobs on campus and treatment of student athletes, among other things. As ASSET president, Tave delivered this document to ET president Halladay, and when Halladay and other campus officials responded, they were clearly responding to far more than the local scene. Through content, links, and resources provided in the various fields, the DSA invites users to consider the very real role played by campus unrest elsewhere that was taking more violent forms, including
the occupation of university buildings at Columbia, where the university president was forced to call in the New York City Police Department to regain control of his campus. The most direct evidence for this interpretation of Halladay’s response to ASSET’s demands can be found in the context and source fields. The context field provides a relatively brief (250-word) interpretation of the global dimensions of this local literacy scene, followed by a list of references including citation information for relevant historical documents, such as Columbia’s “Our Demands” and Halladay’s public response to ASSET’s call for respect and equal treatment.

By demonstrating these links across space and time, we emphasize the fluidity of local literacy scenes. The DSA framework encourages users to make connections through various routes leading from the artifacts used to construct the remix and annotations. These connections invite still further examination by researchers seeking to understand rhetorical agency as practiced in a region generally overlooked, and those who seek to understand roles played by international and national events, like those from the summer of 1968, that are clearly influenced by and influencing the local literacy scenes under investigation.

In these ways, RRT combines the sampling and juxtaposition capabilities of the remix with the information-layering capacity of the DSA to help users explore intersections between local and global scenes. RRT’s core value is its capacity to connect, which helps address many significant challenges presented by the local literacy scene. As a visualization tool with a seemingly infinite capacity to create visible connections, RRT offers a productive solution to the limitations of the local as an interpretive frame (see Brandt and Clinton) and the limits of print. More immediately important than the tool itself, however, are the connections across communities that the very act of building RRT has made possible.

Making Connections with Local Stakeholders

At this point, RRT’s most significant contribution is not its potential for interpreting local literacy scenes, but rather how it approaches our discipline as a network and, in doing so, purposefully expands that disciplinary network to include local communities. As Jeff Rice has argued, “the network” should be the “central object of study” in the discipline (qtd. in Hawk 438). By this, he means much more than the Web and the representative links across virtual spaces we have discussed so far. Rice’s envisioned network is social, political, and, above all else, rhetorical: it is a system through which representations “suggest” meaning (see especially “Occupying the Digital Humanities”). By approaching the local literacy scene as local-global connections, RRT networks people from across the disciplines and the community with a common object of study—the local literacy scene.
RRT connects one local literacy scene across multiple disciplines. What unites the team building the RRT prototype described here is not the concerns of rhetoric and composition but, in fact, our shared interests in the preservation of local, underrepresented histories and the promise the digital humanities holds for such work. The project team includes archivists and oral historians who have been tireless in their efforts to help locate the artifacts most relevant to the local literacy scene. Though they have no direct investment or expertise in our discipline, they are deeply interested in building their holdings on African American history and thus heavily invested in a project like ours.

RRT brings together graduate students in political science (Kelly) and history (Adam Sparks) with PhD students in our English program (Jennifer Jones and Sunchae Hamcumpai) to build and test the prototype featured in this article. Like the archivists and oral historian involved, Kelly joined this project two years ago with a deep investment in the local scene but with limited understanding of rhetoric and composition’s key concerns. What brought her to the project initially was her research interest in the local voting scene, especially with respect to the role religion plays in rural African American politics. This shared interest in the local scene inspired her to contact Shannon about potential access to local activists in the Norris Community, the historically segregated neighborhood in Commerce that has played a significant role in Shannon’s related research. That contact, combined with Kelly’s impressive array of other credentials, led to an immediate invitation for her to join the RRT team that was just beginning to form at around the same time. Kelly’s contributions to investigating this local literacy scene have been significant, adding rich interdisciplinarity to our explorations and improving the resulting project in incalculable ways.

RRT connects this local literacy scene from the past with community members today. By far the most significant accomplishment of RRT has been its ability to help facilitate and guide more direct and sustainable work with activists such as Tave and Carlos, and other significant forces for social justice in those complicated years following ET’s desegregation. RRT gave us another reason to come together, remember, preserve, and celebrate this important work. The remix, in particular, provided a vehicle for public programming, which brought the community and campus in conversation to explore these significant issues. In August 2012, for example, our campus hosted the premier screening of the remix, with honored guests that included Tave and several other early ET African American students. Following this event, many of these alumni contributed their own relevant archives and oral history interviews about their experiences. The DSA, meanwhile, forced close attention to every single artifact sampled for our remix, which helped expand access to relevant materials in unprecedented ways. Taken together, RRT’s networking capability seems to be its most significant accomplishment so far.
However, we cannot overstate the role played by institutional support in establishing these networks. The credibility that comes with NEH funding gave university administrators additional reasons to provide extensive support, expanding Shannon’s research team from one graduate research assistantship to four and providing a small budget for supplies, refreshments, and travel. The fact that Shannon built the words interdisciplinary research team into her NEH grant application, for example, meant that funding for these graduate research assistants in history, political science, and English would come not from the individual department but from the provost’s office. This helped strengthen networks with these departments considerably because RRT was approached as an opportunity for the students most directly involved rather than as a competition for resources. On a campus of fewer than 13,000, with high teaching loads and ever-dwindling funds, the impact of such perceived challenges cannot be overstated, either. Our reliance on support outside any individual department significantly improved our networking capabilities among the departments involved.

At the same time that we celebrate the networks that emerged through this project, we must mention the important ways disciplinary boundaries, professional issues, and related concerns threatened to limit that network’s capacity or constrain network growth and diversity. For instance, the issue of “credit” continues to be significant for those of us in the humanities, where value is placed on single authorship and the process of building a digital tool therefore struggles for recognition. How do we ensure that those involved with building digital humanities tools receive credit for this vital work? In other words, who owns RRT? Shannon’s initial archival work and publications uncovered these stories and framed them for our discipline. She applied for the NEH grant that partially funds RRT, and she is listed as the PI. She also assembled the research team based on this previous work. However, as Stephen Ramsey and Geoffrey Rockwell insist, building itself is interpretive work of the highest order, leading them to ask us, “What happens when building takes the place of writing?” (82–83). How should “credit” be determined for the RRT research team members, like these graduate students who had such a significant impact on what RRT has actually become? Indeed, this tool could not exist without the insights of this interdisciplinary team, just as our understanding of the local scene would have been impossible without local community members.

One preliminary answer to Ramsey and Rockwell’s question is represented in the byline for this article. Given Shannon’s close work with Kelly throughout the building phase of this project, Shannon thought it vital to invite her to serve as co-author for this piece. At Shannon’s invitation, two other team members are serving as coauthors for a book chapter submitted around the same time as this article (see Carter, Jones, and Hancumpai). It is, of course, quite common in the STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics) disciplines for the PI to list members
of her research team as coauthors in publications resulting from their work together. It is quite a bit less common in our discipline, especially in our leading journals. Shannon’s tenure and her institution’s criteria for advancement make coauthorship a possibility. This may not be a viable solution for most of us, of course. And it is only a partial response to this important issue. As the “building” activities so much a part of the digital humanities become increasingly present in our discipline, we must continue to explore ways to ensure that “credit” for such work is not overlooked.

**Moving Forward**

In the lead article for *CCC*’s recent special issue on research methodologies, David Gold encourages rhetoric and composition scholars engaged in historiographic work to more fully engage with the now rich body of scholarship developed over the past two decades that complicate our historical narratives, challenging us to better connect the local to larger scholarly conversations. In other words, it is no longer enough simply to recover alternative histories. We need to explore what such studies might reveal about the key questions that align our discipline.

RRT responds directly to Gold’s call, taking this local literacy scene beyond the local and investing this rhetorical recovery project in the larger scholarly conversations of our field. We do this through strategic use of sampling and juxtaposition (remix) and information layering (DSA), as well as through archival development, more traditional scholarship, and public programming. Regardless of modality, the research associated with and demonstrated within RRT is always in deep and obvious conversation with our discipline. For example, early in the remix we challenge the insistence that “reason” and “order” are effective means for change. We present student protesters around the world alongside footage of Robert F. Kennedy announcing the assassination of MLK, juxtaposed against a report of and responses to Kennedy’s own assassination, with a spokesperson for Lyndon Johnson announcing the president’s plea to the nation “for reason and order.” In our analysis, we insist this plea is inappropriate by following it with a quote from Nancy Welch’s recent defense of “uncivil rhetoric”: “[C]ivility functions to hold in check agitation against a social order that is undemocratic in access to decision making power and unequal in distribution of wealth” (45). Together, these efforts form what Collin Brooke has called “citational networks [. . .] that organize and circulate research and knowledge into [. . .] patterns” (97–98).

The networks RRT has helped establish, we’ve argued, push us beyond the local by emphasizing not the fixed page and lone readers and writers in our analysis, but rather the networks that connect people, places, institutions, and events. RRT not only connects relevant archival materials and multiple disciplines in explorations of a local literacy scene, but also creates direct connections with our field’s scholarship,
our local communities, and other disciplines across campus as they may inform the local literacy scene.

RRT networks the local literacy scene with the profession through the remix and the DSA, as well as the wider “citational networks” referencing the larger research project from which RRT emerged. Yet each instance of this rendering is necessarily filtered through the interpretations of others. To truly get “beyond the local” and “beyond recovery” in our discipline, we need more opportunities to bring the community members featured in our research and recovery projects into direct conversation with other members of our profession.

One key way we have worked to achieve this end was evidenced at the 2013CCCC Convention. The conference theme, “The Public Work of Composition,” offered us an opportunity to bring the activists featured in RRT into direct conversation with our discipline, unfiltered through our various print-based and digital projects. Carlos, the most famous activist associated with this project, was our first, most obvious choice. As Shannon explains in the original program proposal for this featured session,

In 2013, as Howard Tinberg calls upon us to consider “The Public Work of Composition,” it seems only fitting that we should return to [the Silent Protest] in conversation with one of the protesters: John Carlos. Indeed, the Silent Protest and its aftermath graphically illustrates both the power of what Edward Corbett called “the Closed Fist” and the excruciating limits of his “Open Hand” (Corbett) [reference in original] [. . . .] More than forty years later, the Closed Fist of the Silent Protest resonates as never before. It is time for CCCC to return to this iconic moment and take stock. (Carter, “John Carlos Will Be a Featured Speaker”)

Yet Tave also has plenty to teach our profession, a fact that Carlos himself pointed out to Shannon on many occasions in the months between his invitation to serve as featured speaker and the actual event. In certain agreement with Carlos, Shannon asked her university to support Tave’s travel to participate in these events, and it did.

At CCCC, Tave and Carlos were able to engage our discipline directly. Both the digital products (such as our remix) and the print-based, alphabetic texts (such as Carter’s “A Clear Channel: Circulating”) bring these local literacy scenes into conversation with larger scholarly conversations. However, each instance discussed so far filters the contributions of these activists through the interpretations of others. By bringing Tave and Carlos to these events, we brought them into direct dialogue with the scholarly conversation as represented by participants at our field’s flagship conference. As a starting point for these conversations, however, we thought it necessary to foreground the local literacy scenes emphasized throughout RRT. Thus, we began each presentation with a shorter version of our remix discussed here, situating Carlos’s and Tave’s local literacy practices within a global context and framing potential implications their work may have for “the public work of composition” (see Carter, “John Carlos: Before Mexico City”).
At the Writing Democracy preconference workshop on Wednesday, Carlos’s featured presentation the following morning, and our panel presentation for “Racing the Local” on the final day of the conference, Carlos and Tave spoke candidly about the injustices they witnessed and the challenges they faced as they fought to mobilize those around them to enact change. As they have in other forums leading up to this event, they spoke about their friendship at ET, where Carlos called Tave the “Martin Luther King of East Texas” (Carlos, Interview). They spoke about their concerns for each other’s lives after Carlos left for California and the many consequences he faced after Mexico City. They talked about how it felt in May 2012 to be reunited again after more than forty years, when Carlos was back on our campus to receive an honorary doctorate for his work (see Carter, “John Carlos Is Returning”). As Carlos explains, “When we met it was like I had just gone to the store and come right back. We picked right up where we left off” (“Racing the Local”). A number of the attendees at these events were moved to tears when Carlos and Tave spoke of the ongoing challenges of racism that remain today. At the Wednesday workshop, they reminded us that racism is built into the fabric of everyday life in America, but they also insisted that things can still change. They share a concern over who will carry on with this fight. “Look,” Carlos told us, “we gotta clean this mess up” (“Political Turn”). Both are looking for someone to whom they can pass the baton. That metaphor of passing the baton resonated with many of us at the conference. In his featured session the next morning, Carlos inspired the audience along similar themes but with even greater impact, given the session format and the time provided for these important conversations.

Opportunities like these create a rich and deliberate network through which local sites and lived experiences can continue to inform our discipline in unprecedented ways. By sharing their stories directly with our profession in three different forums over the course of several days in Las Vegas, Carlos and Tave expanded our understanding of the local-global intersections far beyond what is possible through digital means alone. Of course every local site won’t offer such opportunities. We have a unique opportunity in our local literacy scene, in part due to the relatively young age of the participants (Baby Boomers) and the global profile of an activist like Carlos. What we learn from them, however, is enabled through the network a digital project like RRT can provide. In these ways, RRT asserts the following: local literacy cannot be understood apart from the global, and the global cannot be understood apart from the local literacy scene, lived experiences, and the material consequences that gave rise to them.

Like Gold, we insist on engagement with existing scholarship in our investigations of the local. However, we also have goals for locally driven studies that are, perhaps, even more ambitious. In their contribution to the *CCC* special issue on research methods, Carter and James Conrad argue that “a sustainable future for
our discipline” requires that “field-specific, local archives [. . .] be brought into conversation with other local, field-specific archives across the country” (100). This is the dream that fuels RRT. The tool itself may not yet be ready to facilitate these goals—certainly not by itself. However, we can say that given the networking it has already enabled, a tool like RRT offers a step forward. At the time of this writing, we are still building and testing RRT. We haven’t had the critical distance needed to determine its potential for use in other local sites among other users.4 What we can say about RRT, however, even at this very early stage, is that the act of building a digital means of networking the local-global scenes with local communities, multiple disciplines, and our own profession seems an important move in the right direction.

RRT is successful, we argue, only to the extent that it captures the tensions and context that brought these original texts into being and that make them matter—only to the extent that our prototype forces more sustainable, participatory, and reciprocal research processes equally responsible to every element in and beyond the local literacy scenes. These are the qualities it has exhibited for us so far. We hope RRT can continue to support such work. However, ours is only one very preliminary tool. The greater hope is that our discipline’s increased attention to the local combined with the innovative uses of digital tools elsewhere will help us explore local-global connections in ways unimaginable today. That, it seems to us, is the real promise of the digital humanities.

**Notes**

1. Visit the remix and prototype of the DSA at the RRT website, <http://faculty.tamuc.edu/RRT/>.

2. The Olympic Project for Human Rights forced attention to ongoing injustices represented by the 1968 Olympic Games. The demands included restoring Muhammad Ali’s title as heavyweight champion (stripped following his anti-Vietnam War efforts and subsequent arrest) and disallowing participation in the Olympics by South Africa, in recognition of its ongoing human rights violations under Apartheid. OPHR called all black, Olympic-bound athletes to boycott the 1968 Olympics until such demands were met.

3. We will describe this event and its aftermath in greater detail later in the article. His wife and their two-year old daughter received many threats, and other outspoken athletes were stripped of their scholarships days before Carlos decided to leave ET. He cites this particular event as the “straw that broke the camel’s back” (Carlos, Interview; Carlos and Zirin).

4. The current phase described here is purely an expository one. Our goals in this first phase are to build a prototype and to demonstrate a potential series of uses for it. The second phase will explore avenues for extensive participation within it.

**Works Cited**


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