

**How the Prospectus Defense Meeting Shaped My Dissertation Project**  
**or**  
**What I Learned Sitting at the Table of Truth**

By Lynn Koller

My prospectus defense took place on Friday, June 23, 2006, with Professors Bowdon, Blake, and Mauer, and a radiologist, Fred Monsour. Strangely, paralysis triggered by the meeting process apparently rendered me unable to record more than a single note onto paper, though the committee members' comments have made an indelible impression on my project plans. Several suggestions stand out:

- Provide a clear rationale for applying artistic methodology to scientific-medical issues;
- Avoid attempting to specifically answer the more esoteric questions of medicine as framed in the prospectus, such as whether digitization of records fragments the patient;
- Focus on medical issues that arise during fieldwork and are specifically related to the scan or radiology report – the documents produced by the imaging technologies;
- Consider whether the narrative approach is “reflexive” and reconcile that method with the overall project structure;
- Structure the content and form of the dissertation so that it meets my own professional needs;
- Be prepared to provide IRB with a comprehensive description of the project, along with several forms of release information for “human subjects”; and
- Make certain that the project can in itself answer the “So what?” question.

The committee members' input has significantly impacted this project in a more intangible way, in that it has helped crystallize my purpose in addressing issues in medical imaging technologies with an artistic methodology and understand the importance of explicating that purpose in the dissertation.

While I had anticipated that I must validate my unconventional methodology as a way basis for this rhetorical study of medical imaging artifacts, after the meeting, I see that as a

higher priority and am exploring ways to clarify the rationale without interrupting the flow or narrative effect of the final text. Initially, I planned to do this as transparently as possible – within the textual analysis itself. However, I can see where this might lead to a less credible result and plan to justify the methodology separately. Prior to the meeting, I believed more emphatically that the ends would justify the means, but will, alas, concede that it might be more effective to approach methods more critically. Having a tight focus on methodology may also help the project isolate specific questions that arise in the case studies, specifically as a product of the artifacts of medical imaging, and avoid the tendency to stray into areas less likely to produce new information or worthwhile results.

The narrative approach offers a form that lends itself to my writing strengths (as I perceive them, at least) and it was interesting to learn in the meeting about a *reflexive* way of writing, as one that considers its own form. This seems an important aspect of my project and is an area that I will further explore. The reflexive text format offers a provocative writing style and one that seems to define the approach and I am pleased to have a label for it. While I am excited about this approach and the possibilities for this project in both content and form, the issue of practicality was also raised in the meeting. It was brought to my attention that I might consider my professional goals and use the dissertation as a means to those goals. This is a rather sobering thought, which I admit to ignoring to some extent, as I have outlined a project that engages me on a very personal level, and one I see as commercially viable, with less consideration to its practicality as an academic calling card. The project combines medicine, storytelling, and art in a way that I find intriguing. I do recognize at this point that I should bear in mind that the text should be designed to appeal to either an academic or professional field and will work on ways to craft the text appropriately.

Before I craft any text, I will obtain proper IRB approval for my research on “human subjects.” I have learned from the committee members’ experiences that the obtaining the necessary approval takes a certain amount of tenacity and patience. I will certainly begin that process very soon, so that I may begin doing fieldwork as soon as possible. Perhaps dealing with IRB will, in some way, help me stay focused on the imperative “So what?” question. As I have talked with IRB representatives in the past, I have had to explain the purpose of my project and data collecting methods to an audience (of one) that does not seem to readily accept this project as rational. In any case, the prospectus meeting brought home to me that the final dissertation should prove itself to be worthwhile. The text describes a rhetorical study of medical imaging technologies based on patients’ experiences in a clinical setting as a blueprint for a way to address scientific question using methods derived from surrealist, literary, and theatre theories.

The committee has requested that I provide a small example of how I intend to use the methodology outlined in my prospectus. While I still have more work to accomplish before I can produce a solid example, I can point to several “fragments” or basic examples of what I intend to produce. I hesitate to do this, and wouldn’t if at all possible, as the examples will seem shallow and rather unsubstantial compared with what I intend to accomplish in the dissertation. However, I will point to a few documents for reference:

- “A Resurrection of Love: Fictional Phalluses in a Mechanical Age” (<http://cosmicscribbler.com/Visual/Resurrection.pdf>) – This two-part essay describes a patient’s medical procedure from inside the operating room, as well as analyzing a radiology report of my daughter’s chest, in such a way that includes methods as described in the prospectus. It specifically includes a brief rhetorical examination of the medical record itself utilizing both fragmentation and juxtaposition of texts.
- “Stones Removed – Notes from the Field” (<http://cosmicscribbler.com/Visual/Stones%20Removed.pdf>) – This essay conveys the role of the patient, physician, and technology in the operating room. It is more straightforward than “A Resurrection of Love,” but offers a small example of the experiential narrative as described in the prospectus.

- A response to Stanley's article "Women Hold Up Two-Thirds of the Sky" (<http://cosmicscribbler.com/visual/stanley.htm>) – This is a *very* informal example of juxtaposing many texts to come up with new meaning. Readers should keep in mind that this was simply a response to a reading in Gender in T&T and not intended to be a serious scholarly text. It does, however, provide an example of creating something new by opposing significant, but disparate – almost random – texts in a provocative way. While the dissertation may incorporate a component of this type of juxtaposition, it will most certainly take great care to fully develop the ideas and outcome of any such experiment.

I hope that these examples offer some sense of direction and help the committee members to better understand this project, which I realize is challenging. For future case studies, I will describe and explore three parts: the patient's experience, the scan itself, and the radiology report. In addition, the text may include interviews with the patient or physician; however, the primary focus will be on the artifacts of medical imaging technologies and the methods by which they are produced. If these examples and explanation are unsatisfactory, I can clarify further. Additionally, as soon as I have IRB approval to begin research and begin observing medical imaging procedures, I can supply each committee member with early drafts, so that they may be assured that the project is proceeding at the highest level.

I would like to thank the committee members with their patience in reading multiple versions of the prospectus and also being cautiously supportive of my desire to "produce new knowledge."