What has been my driving force and the catalyst to my greatest period of self-discovery, independence, and strength? Doubtless, it is my year abroad. My time at Kingston University in London, England will be the focus of my portfolio and will serve as a guide in my exploration of the theme, “The World as a Lens.”

In considering the methodology of the portfolio, I would like to explore the concepts of my identification and sense of self in relation to the world, and my growing independence and adaptability. These two concepts will be the rails on which my theme runs, and so all artifacts will support one or both of them. Because of this, the reflective essay will follow a categorical structure, rather than a chronological one. To conclude the essay, I will present how I exhibit these changes in the present moment and how I think they will affect me going forward.

First, I will draw from my paper, “A Worldview Seen Through Pronouns”, as a foundation for the extended metaphors I plan to use and as a source for my discourse on pronouns and how they shaped my experience abroad. I wrote this paper specifically to illustrate how my identity changed as a result of extended interaction with people very different from myself and as a result of being a foreigner, which was something I had never experienced before. This artifact directly ties into my theme (and is the inspiration for it) because pronouns are now a permanent lens through which I understand myself and the world surrounding me, whether in England or in the United States.

My second artifact is my t-shirt from the International Festival at UNCC. Before I travelled abroad, I thought it was simply a fun thing to do with friends. However, after I
have lived elsewhere and adventured in many more places besides, attending the International Festival only serves to fuel my wanderlust. It also gives a unique perspective on the concept of pronouns and the “other.” UNCC provides a wonderful opportunity for all nations and their representative students to come together in peace and camaraderie. This is similar to the feelings that I experienced in England, where I became a part of a greater whole and not just an American.

This concept is also evident in another artifact, a photo of the New Year’s Eve fireworks on Victoria Embankment. Only a few times in my life have left me speechless and overwhelmed; this was certainly one of them. A half million people along the Thames, accompanied by millions more in the city and around the globe, joined together to sing Auld Lang Syne. In those few moments, our various ethnocentricities and individualisms disappeared, smudged out underneath the unity of humankind’s “us.”

My fourth artifact is a select two theories learned in my media studies courses. Media is a huge force in our lives, and I am learning just how strong a grip it has on us. I will incorporate theories from communication studies as support for discourse on “us” and “them,” as well as support for my observations regarding stereotypes. I will specifically look at Symbolic Interactionism, a theory that considers how meaning is constructed through language and social interaction. A second theory that is extremely applicable to my essay topic is Accommodation Theory, which studies how people who are different communicate with each other. It considers the adaptation of communication styles, the accentuation of differences, social identity, and cultural orientation (Griffin 2012). Media does not stop with theory; I used media extensively in a personal sense while abroad. I purchased a DSLR camera specifically for this trip, and my family gave me a journal to use
as well. The texts I created with these two tools will serve as a source of evidence for my artifacts and personal growth, and these tools will also be metaphorically considered as lenses through which my views have changed.

Public transportation was crucial to my adventures; discovering new places paralleled my self-discovery. This connection led me to choose a map of the London Underground as my fifth artifact (Transport for London 2014). I missed buses, got lost on strange routes, and memorized the Tube system—there was no better way to become independent and adaptable! As I mapped out my journeys, so I began to map out my life and my growth.

My next three artifacts are thematically similar to my experience on New Year’s Eve. All four deal with my relationship to the wider world and humanity as a whole. The first of these is a video blog entry from my visit to Stonehenge. It was very humbling to stand next to the trilithons that were miraculously erected thousands of years ago. It reminds me of my very small place in the course of time. In the same way, another artifact, a photo from my visit to the Eiffel Tower at night, made me feel extremely small. In fact, I was awestruck by the millions of lights spread out as far as I could see. It showed me that I was a part of something much bigger. However, my next photographic artifact urges me to discover what exactly my place is and how to improve it and make a difference in the world. I saw pieces from two street artists, Invader and Clet Abraham, in various cities—London, Barcelona, and Rome. They inspire me to leave a positive mark wherever I travel.

My next artifact is a picture with the closest friends that I met at Kingston University. Tom, Dave, Alex, and Felicity all helped me to adapt to life abroad and were instrumental in helping me define my own “otherness.” My relationships with them are
what inspired me to write “A Worldview Seen Through Pronouns”, and their treatment of me revealed the importance of terms like “we,” “us,” and “you.”

Two of my Honors classes, History of the Imagination and Global Connections, primed me for critically thinking about the world and serve as artifacts (Maisto & Swisher, 2013; Arnold 2013). The notes from these serve as my last artifact. First, History of the Imagination introduced me to philosophy and taught that nothing can be assumed; the world is constantly in flux, much like myself and the environments that I personally have traversed. Global Connections introduced me to concepts of globalization and how the West has a weighty cultural presence. Though we studied African globalization, I can see parallels in my experience abroad, especially when considering how I was perceived as an American.

The major steps in the production of this essay begin with the selection of a theme and artifacts, which have been completed. Next, I will work independently throughout my final semester at UNC Charlotte, with guidance from Dr. Crane from the Department of Communication Studies and Dr. Lunsford from the Department of English. These professors will serve as my advisor and reader. I chose Dr. Crane for his knowledge of mass media and communication theories, which is representative of my Communications Studies major. I also chose Dr. Lunsford due to his expertise in my other major, English, and because he has been my guide in a previous long-term writing project.

I will create the online portfolio using the blogging platform Tumblr, which I selected because of its familiarity and customizability; I have over three years’ experience on the site. I want to develop the portfolio and the essay simultaneously so that in creating
the site, I may be inspired to speak in my essay about new discoveries or details found during the website creation.

The proposed Honors Project deadlines are as follows:

- January 4-10: Begin Portfolio design
- January 12-16: Complete first outline draft
- January 26-30: Complete second outline draft; present outline to advisor and reader
- March 7: Complete the first Project draft
- March 8-13: Meet with advisor and reader to present first Project draft
- March 22: Revise and complete second Project draft
- March 23-27: Meet with advisor and reader to present revised Project draft
- March 29: Complete final revisions and the third Project draft
- March 30-April 3: Meet with advisor and reader to present final Project draft
- April 5: Finalize the online Portfolio
- Mid-April: Defend Honors Project and Portfolio
Bibliography


