

the Gregory L. Ulmer Remix
issues fo cigo!!!

Edited by Darren Tofts & Lisa Gye



Illogic of Sense: the Gregory L. Ulmer Remix

Edited by Darren Tofts & Lisa Gye

Preface: Gluetube

page 2

Introduction

Darren Tofts & Lisa Gye

page 3

The King and I: Elvis and the Post-Mortem or A Discontinuous Narrative in Several Media (On the Way to Hypertext)

Niall Lucy

page 12

StudioLab UMBRELLA

Jon McKenzie

page 22

Surface to Surface, Ashes to Ashes (Reporting to U)

Linda Marie Walker

page 28

The Two Ulmers in e-Media Studies: Vehicle and Driver

Craig Saper

page 42

Diagrammatology

Rowan Wilken

page 48

From Mystorian to Curmudgeon: Skulking Toward Finitude

Marcel O'Gorman

page 61

Soliciting Taste: How sweet the lips of salted bream

Teri Hoskin

page 67

On Hip-Hop, a Rhapsody

Michael Jarrett

page 68

Appendix

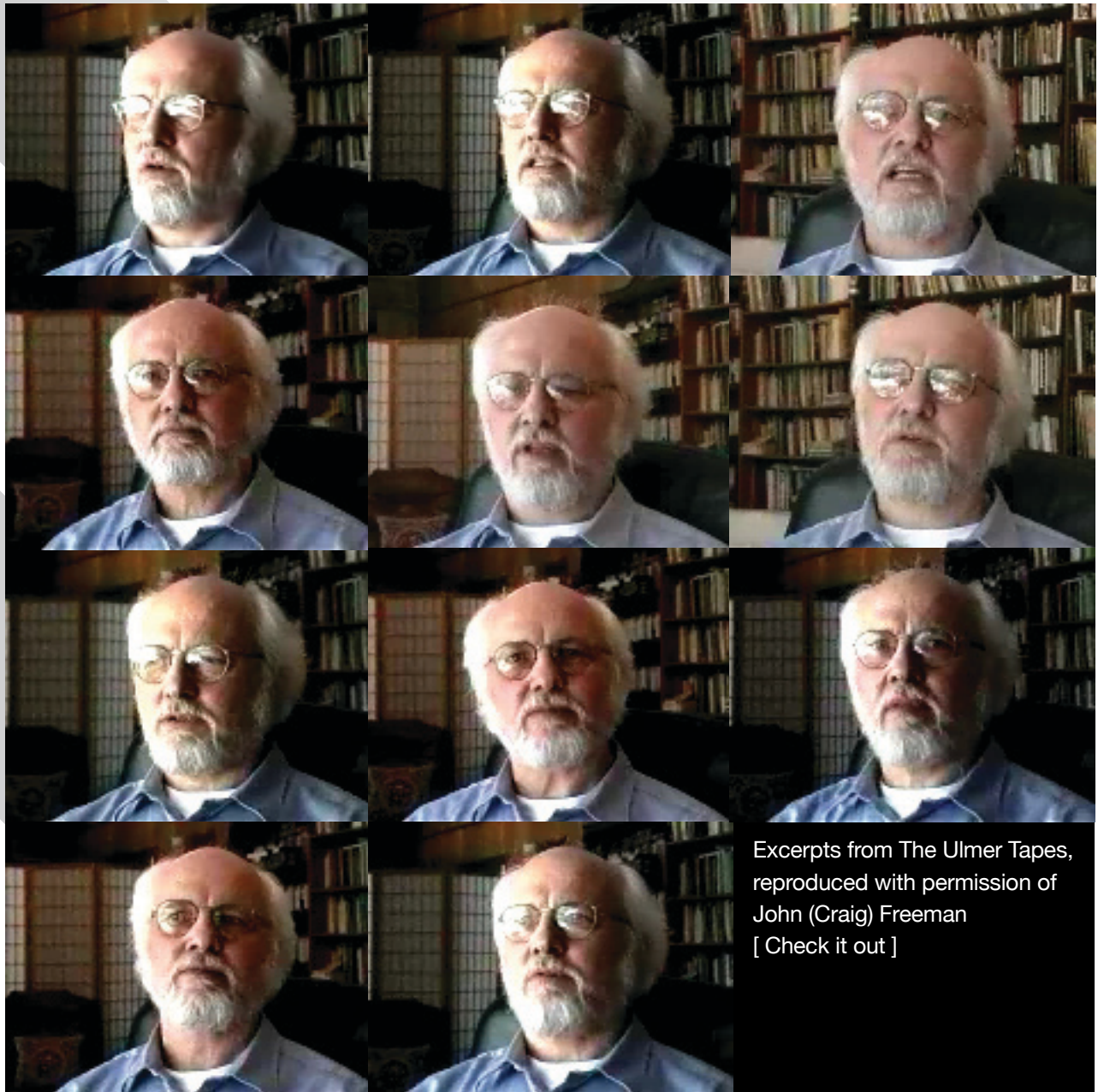
page 77

Bio Notes

page 78

Preface: Gluetube

Click images to play videos.



Excerpts from The Ulmer Tapes,
reproduced with permission of
John (Craig) Freeman
[Check it out]

Introduction

Darren Tofts & Lisa Gye

Focus for now on the concrete experience of this story, as a simulation of a more abstract practice to be tested at another time' (Ulmer, 1990: 96)

Gregory Ulmer has been at the forefront of thinking about new cultural formations as the paradigm of literacy converges with digital culture. His work has, and continues to be, central to contemporary thinking about the future of writing, of schooling and paradigms of learning, the dynamics of creativity and the poetics of invention. A barometer and force of cultural change, Ulmer has taken the very notion of creativity into the 21st century.

As an educator, theorist and practitioner of experimental approaches to writing, Ulmer's work has influenced a generation of students, academics and artists, whose work traverses the vectors of writing as it has merged with video, the computer apparatus and the Internet. His work incorporates cultural studies, informatics, cybernetics, post-structuralist theory and the avant-garde arts. Ulmer's project demonstrates how all forms of knowledge and inscription (painting, dance, installation, literature, film) relate to writing and the convergent apparatus of alphabetic and electronic literacy.

Ulmer's theoretical exposition of a transition from literacy to "electracy," to use one of his many neologisms, enables us to glimpse and understand technological convergence as a scene of writing. For Ulmer, electracy is not the end of the literate paradigm, but rather an extension and re-definition of it. His theoretically informed coinages have given us a lexicon of convergence for the possibilities of

writing beyond the book. Moreover, they gesture to what he has called 'anticipatory consciousness,' the intuition that the apparatus of writing entails a different kind of sense, an illogic of sense apposite to the age of hypermedia.

Terms such as applied grammatology, mystory, heuretics, post(e)-pedagogy, textshop, chora-graphy, are offered as generative concepts for the making of new and experimental work, or what Ulmer has called 'electronic rhetoric.' Ulmer demonstrates examples of potential compositional practices that are unique to the composer and to the place or space of their invention. He always shows rather than tells, performing choral writing or making mystories, rather than explaining them. The concept of the finished work is always, in advance, unknowable, since the logic of invention, the illogic of sense, takes the performer and the performance in unexpected directions. Chance presides over choice, abduction over deduction, metaphor and metonymy fuse into the flow of syncopation and collage. Association and the audacious conduction of its threads guide the creative act as an ongoing process of discovery and assemblage. Whatever the finished work might be, it is ostensibly an archive of the creative act itself. Ulmer has never advocated the prescription of a method to be mimicked or simply emulated. Rather, his ideas are offered as a means for enabling others to make creative work of their own, to use his work as raw material for invention. It is this solicitation of invention that inspired this book. The eight authors assembled in this collection have each, in their own way, responded to the call of Ulmer, to treat his work as a relay rather than a model. They have

been encouraged by his example to ‘turn to their own archives’ and discover their own inventio.

For the purposes of an Introduction to this book, the editors have interpreted Ulmer’s work as a contemporary re-make of the Rosetta Stone. Ulmer’s interest in the Rosetta Stone is multi-faceted and references to it recur throughout his writings, particularly to its ‘intertranslatability’ of different types of writing. Principally, he is interested in it as a kind of literary machine, or more appropriately a vehicle of literacy that unlocked previously lost knowledge of hieroglyphic texts. The key to the Stone of el-Rashid was its transliteration of the same Ptolemaic decree in different scripts (hieroglyphic, demotic and Greek). It was this understanding of the triscript that enabled Jean-François Champollion to crack the code in 1822 and revive the lost art of reading hieroglyphics, thereby opening up the ancient world to the modern age. In a similar application of method, we can situate Ulmer’s ‘popcyle’ (the interrelations between popular, explanatory and expert knowledge) as a triscript.

The triscript structure will be used as a method for introducing *Illogic of Sense*. All scholarly texts are palimpsests, archives of their authors’ engagement with and intertranslations of the discourses of academic inquiry and everyday life. They are also provisional, written out of the context of a specific time and place in the author’s life; or what Ulmer describes as their ‘personal periodic table of cognitive elements, representing one individual’s intensive reserve.’ (Ulmer, 1989: vii) This relation between living and artificial memory is rhetorically woven within a space, or chora, of significance to the composer (hence choragraphy). The provisionality of chora and its emphasis on unforeseeable processes of discovery and association, echoes the contingent nature of the Rosetta Stone itself, which is a product of chance operations, in this case accidental breakages and damage over time (a big hunk of quartz, it is, in the Duchampian sense, definitively unfinished). Residing in the British Museum, The Rosetta Stone is a remainder, an irregular fragment of a larger, monolithic stela that

once featured a rounded lunette at its peak. It is both the memory of a whole and an archive of its fragmentation. As with the compiled elements of any choragraphic inscription, the Rosetta Stone is a found artifact, a discovery that yielded various processes of invention, the most famous being the *techne* that enabled scholars to read Ancient Egyptian culture as a code. Perhaps less well known, until now, is its intimation of the present volume in the title of the actual text featured on the Rosetta Stone itself, known historically as the Memphis Decree.

This first section of the Introduction is written in the explanatory register, describing the context of the project and discursive framework of Ulmer as subject. The second section (popular) draws on the editors’ encounters with Ulmer and is anecdotal in tone. The third section of the triscript deals with expert knowledge and presents brief descriptions of the assembled essays. These are not so much summaries as overdubs, the layering of multiple tracks, as in a process of audio-visual editing. They add a further stratum of disciplinary writing to the authors’ inscriptions, extending as well as enframing them in *Illogic of Sense*. And perhaps, in the context of this place, this scene of writing, they too are best considered as fragments, chips off the old block.

Fragments, or the year I went back for the chocolate

Darren Tofts

 To: Darren DTofts@buster.swin.EDU.AU
 From: Greg GLULMER@nervm.nerdc.ufl.edu
 Subject: re: Re: Address
 Date: Tuesday, April 12, 1994 at 8:52:46 am EDT
 Attach:
 Certify: N
 Forwarded by:

Hi Darren
 about the shared 'heuretics' -- I jumped a bit when I saw it in your essay, and I took it as a sign that the time is right for this supplement-alternative to hermeneutics. I used it in teletheory, but spelled 'euretics.' The reviewer for the press complained that the name evoked something vaguely urinary (which I thought was ok, in the line of Diogenes -- the scandal of urine in the academy).
 Heuretics has just now appeared in the states, and is supposed to be published simultaneously in England.

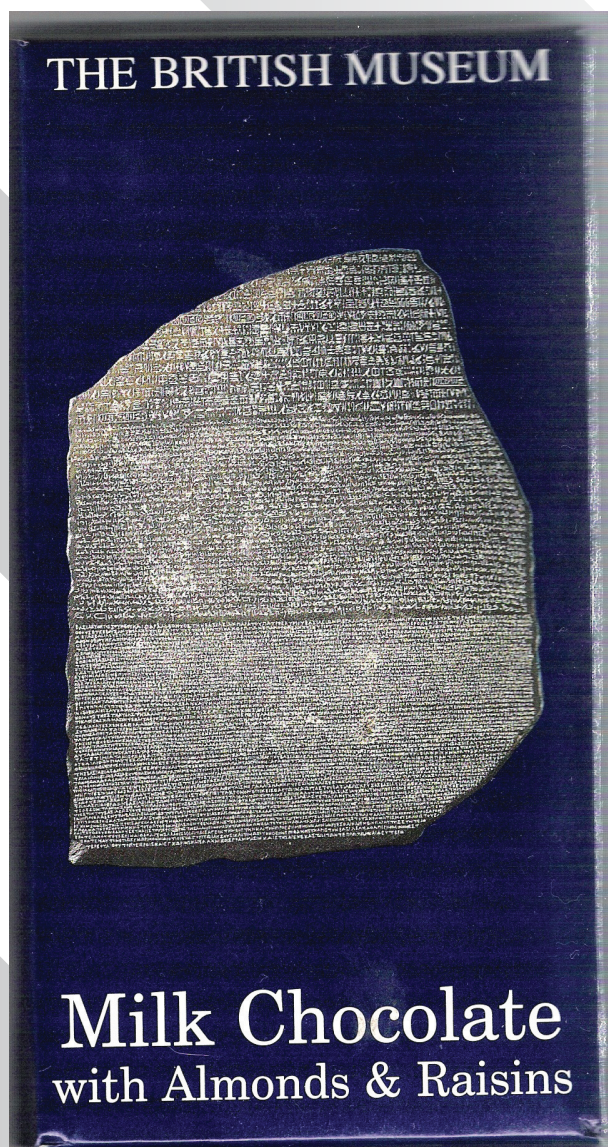
The post-critical essay, especially in its heuretic form, is useful only insofar as it dramatizes a process of engagement with concepts, texts, practices, contexts. As an exemplar of a post-modernized pedagogy it can also have benefits. (Tofts, Kinnane & Haig, 1994: 257)

Thomas "Phenomenon" Young began working on the Egyptian script in 1814. In the same year Jean-François Champollion wrote to Young, then Foreign Secretary of the Royal Society, requesting a cast of the Stone. Both Young and Champollion worked from facsimiles in their respective efforts to decipher the elusive code. Copies, in the form of papyrus scrolls, engravings and the official French *Description de l'Égypte* (1809), stood in for the real thing. The Stone had commenced its historical duplication and dissemination.

In 1999 the British Museum staged a major exhibition to celebrate the bicentenary of the discovery of the Rosetta Stone. It was called *Cracking Codes: The Rosetta Stone and Decipherment*. This included a new installation of the Stone in an upright position, which restored its grandeur as a monumental stela. A fine volume was published by the British Museum Press to accompany the exhibition. Rigorous, serious and authoritative, the assembled essays and exegetical chapters represented the best traditions of epigraphic scholarship. An appendix featured a translation of the Demotic text by R.S. Simpson, author of *Demotic Grammar in the Ptolemaic Sacerdotal Decrees* (Oxford, 1996). The final lines of text offer an astonishing insight into the conception of the triscript and the very foundations of literacy:

[...] and the decree should be written on a stela of hard stone, in sacred writing, document writing, and Greek writing ... (Simpson in Parkinson, 1999: 200)

This weighty tome was complemented by an array of merchandise, from scarab beetle pencil cases and mock Egyptian jewelry, to cartouche coloring books and postcards of the higher gods. But by far the most striking item in the British Museum shop that stood out amid this overwhelming spectacle of pop was the Rosetta Stone chocolate; a 100 gram block of milk chocolate with almonds and raisins. But this Rosetta Stone chocolate transcended kitsch. It was an emblem of the malleable intertranslatability of history and popular culture. To this day it remains unopened and un-tasted. It has passed its use by date (28th April, 2001) and sits on a bookshelf in my home as a monument to the commercialism of antiquity. I intend to endow it with the auratic grandeur of the Rosetta Stone itself by keeping it immersed and untouched in its casing; a postmodern age mastaba to be plundered at another time. I can feel something that might be bas-relief hieroglyphics on the surface of the chocolate through the outer covering of stiff paper. Or perhaps it is a cartouche of indeterminate import, or worse, a curse awaiting anyone



who gazes upon it. But these tactile impressions remain vague, undecipherable and mysterious. For all intents and purposes, it is the Rosetta Stone as it was found and excavated by M. Pierre François Xavier Bouchard at Fort St Julien on the west bank of the Nile in 1799. Its secrets once again concealed, it awaits its Champollion and his avatars, as well as unknown feats of invention to come.

On that visit to the British Museum in 1999, for some reason I find now unfathomable, I failed to actually buy this sublime block (perhaps it was the £3.99 price tag). On a return visit to London in 2000 I made a pilgrimage to the British Museum in the hope that this stellar object would still be available, no doubt made more precious by the passing year. To my absolute delight I found it in a basket of remaindered items.

Lost in Translation

Lisa Gye

My first encounter with Ulmer's work in 1992 coincided not only with my first academic appointment but also, as I have only lately discovered, with the release of the Rosetta Stone®. The Rosetta Stone® is a piece of software that claims to be able to teach users a new language without recourse to "tedious translation or memorization." "With Rosetta Stone, learning a new language is easier than you ever imagined," the manufacturers assert. This is, they say, because of the trademarked "award winning" technique of Dynamic Immersion™ employed by the software. Unlike the partial plinth of antiquity, this Rosetta Stone® lets you crack the code of not one language but thirty!

Despite the disdain with which the Rosetta Stone's® makers treat memorization and translation, they comprise two key principles of computing. Yet, while computers have undoubtedly excelled at memorization, precise translation has always been difficult. The use of computers for translation can be traced back to the late 1940's when Warren Weaver, an American scientist working at the Rockefeller Foundation, in a letter to cyberneticist Norbert Wiener, proposed using cryptographic techniques, statistics and universals of language to mechanize the translation process. This led to the publication of a memorandum entitled "Translation," which he wrote in July, 1949. This memorandum was the single most influential publication in the early days of machine translation.

Weaver's memorandum argued that a simplistic word-for-word translation approach had grave limitations. He argued that any form of machine translation needed to take into account the following four factors: that the problem of multiple word meanings could be countered by examining the immediate context of any communication; that there are logical elements in language; that cryptographic methods were possibly applicable; and that there may also be linguistic universals.

At the end of the memorandum, Weaver emphasized the importance of the fourth factor with what is one of the best-known metaphors in the literature of machine translation:

Think, by analogy, of individuals living in a series of tall closed towers, all erected over a common foundation. When they try to communicate with one another, they shout back and forth, each from his own closed tower. It is difficult to make the sound penetrate even the nearest towers, and communication proceeds very poorly indeed. But, when an individual goes down his tower, he finds himself in a great open basement, common to all the towers. Here he establishes easy and useful communication with the persons who have also descended from their towers. (Weaver, 1955: 18)

Machine translation still falls a long way short in terms of an accurate rendition of a face to face exchange, as anyone who has used Babeliser or Babelfish can testify. Getting language and those that use it out of the towers and into the basement has proved to be more difficult than Weaver believed it could be. Take, for example, Simpson's translation of the final lines of the Demotic text of the original Rosetta Stone:

[...] and the decree should be written on a stela of hard stone, in sacred writing, document writing, and Greek writing ... (Simpson in Parkinson, 1999: 200)

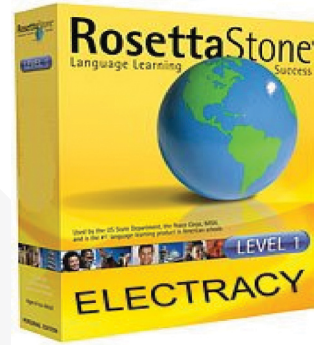
Run it through Babelfish, from English to French to German to Japanese and back to English and you get the following translation:

If and with the stone whose 1 stela which coronation are done are hard, the letter is written, the letter of writing and Greece of rule and the document.

While not strictly accurate in terms of sense, there is a kind of poetry to this. Computers may not be able to accurately translate yet but they are

capable of the most remarkable transformations by bringing together the seemingly disparate determinate elements in unexpected, aleatory ways. These transformations are still a kind of translation in the sense of things (ideas, words, bytes) being borne across from one realm to another. It's just that in the process they become something other, something unexpected.

Ulmer's work demonstrates to us the way that computers, by distributing rather than storing memories, allow for a recombinatory poetics that favors illogic over logic, ambiguity and surprise over clarity and surety. This must be why the makers of the Rosetta Stone® eschew translation in favor of immersion. They recognize, like Ulmer, that the computing interface functions more effectively 'by means of pattern making, pattern recognition, pattern generation' (Ulmer, 1989: 36) and that we can no longer expect to be able to control illocutionary force – 'to preserve intact the intent of the author during the event of communication' (Ulmer, 2002: 113) – as we could during the era of print. Our translations do not compute. And in terms of the Latin translation of translation (trans, cross ... *latus*, to bear), this is our cross to bear – to learn not what things *mean*, what we make *of* them, but rather what can be made *with* them.



Essay Overdubs

It is important to stress at the outset that the following texts have not been written according to an Ulmerian formula or prescription. As indicated previously, Ulmer's work is an invocation to invention, an essay on method designed to inspire others to pursue acts of invention. The only common feature among them seems to be the application of what Ulmer has called 'compilation scripting,' a structural language that eschews beginnings, middles and ends, and instead prioritizes the organization of different kinds of material by juxtaposition, analogy and thematic extension. It is an appropriate logic for an age contoured by recombinant media. The following observations can be read as liner notes to an eclectic compilation album of mixed-media works. The texts themselves must, of course, be read at maximum volume.

Niall Lucy's *The King and I: Elvis and the Post-Mortem* enacts a kind of writing that weaves critical and theoretical speculation, rock journalism, hagiography and autobiography. A sustained speculation on the question of identity and its other, or in this case mistaken identity and its fetish, Lucy's text engages with the problematic relations between originals and copies, origins and destinations. In this it is an incursion into writing and subjectivity, with its problematic interplay of presence and absence finding its analogy in the author's chance identification as a reluctant successor to a dead King. The post-mortem of Lucy's title elicits not only suggestions of activity after death (be it pathological examination, resurrection or hallucination), but also invokes all postal systems of transmission and the signals they are capable of circulating. The reliability of their reaching their destination, as well as the cultural fallout of their issue, is indeterminate. Consequently, the author succumbs to Niallism and is driven to the edge of apocalypse: the King is dead. Long live the King.

Jon McKenzie's *StudioLab UMBRELLA* traces the relations of influence and mentorship. A former

student of Ulmer's, McKenzie's autobiographical reflections on his time spent with him studying at the University of Florida reveal the true meaning of what it means to follow someone else's example. The pupil/aspirant and teacher/sage cross the road in search of a King, an amalgam of an entire mythic tradition of quest narratives. During this conversation much wisdom is imparted. Its application is no mere copy, but rather an original creation that extends those ideas into new formations. McKenzie's StudioLab is one such formation, an approach to pedagogy that adopts a collective practice akin to performing in a band or being a member of a guild. This multi-spatial approach to learning suited McKenzie's challenge of teaching an electronic performance course at New York University. In a subsequent volume to the present one, we should not be surprised to see McKenzie cast as Old Lodge Skins himself, leading his student into uncharted territory.

Linda Marie Walker's *Surface to Surface, Ashes to Ashes (Reporting to U)* is an involved meditation on the concept of the interface and its relation to place. For Walker the interface is a way of conjoining place, or chora, and subjectivity. She is interested in the strangeness of the everyday, of that with which we are surrounded. Implicitly, she is fascinated by how this is perceived by another person within interfaced situations. This other person, this unidentified U, is at times anonymous, unknowable, an ambiguous presence on shifting ground, which is there, always not here. At times it is unmistakably Ulmer, who is also you, intimate yet distant, in acts of exchange. Writing for Walker is the fragile yet capable medium of this exchange, the provisional sign of the desire to supplement presence, to enable U to see what she sees, and vice versa.

Craig Saper, in *The Two Ulmers in e-Media Studies: Vehicle and Driver*, ingeniously interprets Ulmer as an object of study, as both a vehicle and driver of signification. Ultimately Saper's goal is to offer a critical approach to understanding Ulmer's work, particularly in relation to its historical devel-

opment. How he does this is an act of invention that adapts Ulmer's peripatetic 'philosophy over lunch' motif (also glimpsed in Jon McKenzie's piece) as a way of analyzing Ulmer as Ulmer analyzes his subject matter. Written in the style of a school handbook, Saper's discussion takes the reader through a series of lessons. There is guidance and didacticism, but this is complemented by dramatic cues and prompts that require a more active, performative engagement with Saper's assemblage of 'intellectual montage.' In following his leads and making connections, the reader will make their own journey and get to know the two Ulmers.

Rowan Wilken's *Diagrammatology* takes its lead from Jacques Derrida's maxim that deconstruction 'is inventive or it is nothing at all.' From this provocative non sequitur Wilken sets himself the challenge of theorizing the unrepresentable in relation to the architectural model of the diagram. Likening his project to poetic thinking, Wilken is interested in a way of thinking that is diagrammatic. This challenge builds upon the infrastructure of literacy itself, since it posits that conception is as much an act of construction as it is a scene of writing. Drawing on Ulmer's use of Derrida's 'choral grid,' Wilken proffers a heuristic interpretation of diagrammatic thinking that is concerned with discovery and prospecting rather than proof and exactitude. This interface between speculative thought and the diagram's will to representation, allows Wilken to take his inquiry into the broader technocultural discussion of the relations between actual and virtual states of being.

Marcel O'Gorman's *From Mystorian to Curmudgeon: Skulking Toward Finitude* offers a candid account of what it means to introduce the computer apparatus into teaching in the humanities. O'Gorman mixes memory, anecdote and theoretical speculation in small, measured lexias that resemble possible entries in some as yet unwritten Dictionnaire d'Ulmer. This provides a rudimentary navigational guide for the reader to explore his sense of exhaustion with the infinitude of hypertext

as a compositional mode. The allure of hypertext as unbounded territory prompts a very personal account of the relations between the body and technology, the things we forget and have forgotten during all the years of our prosthetic technombrace. For O'Gorman, mystories may bear the traces of the electrated paradigm. But they are always, to use a very Beckettian phrase, frescoes of the skull.

Teri Hoskin's *Soliciting Taste: how sweet the lips of salted bream* approaches the question of writing and design, of writing as design. The phrase, as chance would have it, is Hoskin's creative principle, as she is interested in the interplay between design (of thought, writing, visibility) and accident (intuition, inspiration, intrusion) as a compositional mode. The motif of the moiré pattern, as an inevitable condition of the scanned image, captures for Hoskin the precarious balance between will and interference in all creative and conceptual pursuits. Hoskin deftly uses hypertext to enact Ulmer's contention that the electronic apparatus is the perfect vehicle to dramatize poststructuralist thought, since it is a matter of solicitation, of invoking the possible. Hoskin makes inventive use of the charged, poetic force of the aphorism to create a matrix of solicitation, of unexpected paths and divagations.

Michael Jarrett's *On Hip-Hop, a Rhapsody* revels in the possibilities of appropriation and sampling. Jarrett is interested in the creative potential of the ready-made, the inventive suturing of available culture. Rap and hip-hop are his ostensible subjects and he wants to take us on a journey to encounter their valences as a historical compositional strategy. An appropriator himself, Jarrett does what he says, shows what he tells. Jarrett develops a stream of inspired consciousness that links the epic story-telling of the classical rhapsodists, the art of memory and its mnemonic devices and contemporary hip-hop freestyling. Out of this jagged wall of sound, Jonathan Swift, erstwhile Dean of St. Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin, emerges as Grandmaster Rapp, the godfather of hip-hop.

References

Simpson, R., (trans) "The Demotic Text of the Memphis Decree on the Rosetta Stone," in Richard Parkinson, *Cracking Codes: The Rosetta Stone and Decipherment* (London: British Museum Press, 1999).

Tofts, Darren, Kinnane, Ray & Haig, Andrew, "I owe the discovery of this image to the convergence of a student and a photocopier," *Southern Review*, Special Issue on Teaching the Postmodern, (1994): 252-260.

Ulmer, Gregory. *Teletheory. Grammatology in the age of video* (London: Routledge, 1989).

_____. "Theory Hobby: 'How-To Theory,'" *Art & Text*, (37, 1990).

_____. *Heuretics: The Logic of Invention* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1994).

_____. "Reality Tables: Virtual Furniture" in Tofts, D., Jonson, A. and Cavallaro, A., *Prefiguring Cyberculture: An Intellectual History* (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 2002), 110-129.

Weaver, Warren. "Translation" in Locke and Booth, (eds.) *Machine Translation of Languages* (New York: Wiley, 1955), 15-23.

The King and I: Elvis and the Post-Mortem or A Discontinuous Narrative in Several Media (On the Way to Hypertext)

Niall Lucy (For David McComb)

The other day I picked up the phone and a voice said hello is that Pete and I said no you've got the wrong number and the voice said how do you know I've got the wrong number and I thought, wow ... a media theorist!

Music: The Black-Eyed Susans, *Viva Las Vegas* [Check it out]



I can't sleep nights for feeling paranoid. I used to think it was just the sideburns, but now I'm not so sure. Not after putting it to the test.

I tried to leave nothing to chance, even deciding to order macchiatos instead of my usual long blacks. To disguise myself I went barefoot in a pair of loose-fitting Yakka trousers (green) and sloppy T-shirt (black), and bought a packet of Drum. I took with me a Kathy Acker novel and a notepad, for

my own writing, and sat around at Gino's waiting to see whether it would happen again. [1]

It did.

I hadn't finished my second mac when someone, a stranger like all the rest, walked over to my table and asked for a light. I nodded at the Zippo in front of me. Suddenly I was angry with myself for not having bought a Bic, but I couldn't imagine a cigarette lighter as the object of my undoing. It had to be something more essentially connected to who I am ... something about me that no disguise, however careful, could conceal.

Then it happened.

The stranger lit his cigarette, a Winfield, handed back my Zippo and said:
'Great lighter, Elvis. Thanks.'

Elvis? I couldn't have looked more Fremantle, I thought, but there must have been something about me that was saying "Las Vegas". To the stranger, at any rate, who was dressed indistinguishably from me. Even when I looked like a writer, somehow I still looked like the King.

I can't sleep nights for feeling paranoid.

For some time now I've been the subject of Elvis sightings, in and around Fremantle. Either I don't know who I am any more, or the people who think I'm Elvis don't know who Elvis is. Or I'm imagining that I'm the subject of Elvis sightings — in which case I might be in need of an analyst. Or there's a

conspiracy, among (some) people in Fremantle, to make me imagine I'm the subject of Elvis sightings. Or I'm imagining there's a conspiracy among some people in Fremantle to make me imagine I'm the subject of Elvis sightings. Those are my choices, tormentingly like the ones put to Oedipa Maas in *The Crying of Lot 49*.

Oedipa calls them 'those symmetrical four. She didn't like any of them, but hoped she was mentally ill; that that's all it was.' (Pynchon, 1979) Of course that's what she hoped it was, a psychological disorder. Far better the Oedipus than the Oedipa complex, after all. Better that your mind be bent by patriarchy, or some other disturbing force, than to discover the patriarchal as a discourse with no outside. If all plots are boys' games, and plots are everywhere, how could they be unravelled? Indeed, how could they even be recognised as boys' games in the first place? How to get outside the patriarchal, if patriarchy is the source and means of your oppression, in order to be critical of what's determined the range and facility, and set the agenda, of your thinking — if you've been taught to think yourself (always unknowingly) only as the oppressed?

How, in other words, to think otherwise?

Which isn't quite Oedipa's dilemma, of course. But close. Her problem is that she can't decide whether an occult postal system called the Trystero, whose operations may have determined the course of Western history, is real or not. If it's real, then our history isn't — for what we think of as historical reality would need to be rewritten in the light of Oedipa's "discovery." If, on the other hand, the Trystero isn't real, then Oedipa must have imagined it into some kind of determinate existence, at least inside her head. Either it's outside her head and real, then, or not and therefore a fantasy. On the other hand, again, it might be outside her head, but as someone's idea of a practical joke. After all, it's in her role as the executrix of her ex-lover Pierce Inverarity's estate that Oedipa first comes across the Trystero as plot. So if the

plot's a practical joke it must be of Pierce's doing, requiring the collusion of his friends and lawyers to make it work. A conspiracy, then, to get Oedipa to believe the Trystero is real. On the other hand, yet again, she could be imagining such a conspiracy. Hence 'those symmetrical four'.

By the same token there would be nothing to stop this sequence ('there is a plot ... there is a plot that there is a plot' ... and so on) from repeating and multiplying itself, although Oedipa's made to feel paranoid enough without having to put that to the test (Thwaites, 2000: 269). She finds just four alternatives quite sufficient to be unable to decide.

Me, too, for that matter. You try getting to sleep at night not knowing whether you've been mistaken for Elvis, or whether there's a plot, or you've imagined there's a plot, to make you imagine you've been mistaken for Elvis. Seems simple enough: the Elvis sightings are real, or there's a plot. It's happening, or I'm crazy. Cross-paired (real/imagined; Elvis sightings/plot), these four terms constitute a closed system, a choice between opposites: either the real or the imagined; either the sightings or the plot. But what if the sightings themselves are part of a plot, even if they're 'real' (however hopelessly inadequate that term has become in the present context)? Surely if I am being mistaken for a dead man, what else can I be but the subject of a grave plot? A case of the postmodern as the post-mortem, perhaps.

Music: Elvis, *Edge of Reality* [check this out]

Chances are that those in Fremantle who keep on mistaking me for the King never met Elvis personally. Nor could it be very likely that many people in Fremantle ever saw Elvis in concert. Whatever stands in for a knowledge of Elvis by such people couldn't have derived from outside representations — let's call them media representations — in the form of records, movies, posters, calendars, greeting cards, interviews, TV shows, concert footage and the like.

That's how most of us "know" any pop star, of course. But we'd hardly call Elvis Presley just another pop star, if only because the fluidity (or perhaps the vectorality) through which his name circulates across divisions of class, gender, age, ethnicity (there's a Chinese and a Hindi Elvis impersonator doing very nicely in London at the moment, apparently), education, taste and so on puts him (or should that be "it"?), like "William Shakespeare," in a category apart from his peers. [2] (On which score I'm reminded of a "test" once performed in an undergraduate lecture I attended in a course on Jacobean drama. The test was designed to 'prove' that Shakespeare is the greatest dramatist of all time. It went like this: ask a Russian to name the world's two best playwrights and he'll tell you Chekov and Shakespeare. A Frenchman will say Molière and Shakespeare. A German, Goethe and Shakespeare. Someone from Scandinavia will say Ibsen and Shakespeare ... and so on. Ergo, Shakespeare is the greatest dramatist of all time. End of lecture.)

The conflation of the best known with the best is a commonplace of cultural criticism. Let's face it, 50 million Elvis fans can't be wrong, and all those high-school courses everywhere devoted to an appreciation of the Bard just go to show the timeless quality of his plays and the essential genius of the man himself. So the argument runs. Paradoxically, however, it can also be made to run the other way — against an artist or an object considered to be too popular to be of genuine aesthetic worth. Those 50 million Elvis fans, for instance, precisely because they do transgress so many demographics, serve to demonstrate the ephemerality of Elvis's appeal, based as it must be on an all too common aesthetic denominator to warrant serious intellectual and moral attention — except by way of disapprobation. Which has nothing to do with Elvis, either. Before Elvis, straight society was freaking out at Frank Sinatra — just as, before Sinatra, it had got hysterical about jazz. Nowadays the fear and loathing brigade is made to feel righteous by hip hop and heavy metal bands — not by Elvis, who really hasn't scared anyone

(except during the hour-long broadcast of his 1968 NBC-TV special, often called his 'comeback' special) since he came out of the army in 1960. By that decade's end, his audience lost to Dylan, the Mersey beat, and the psychedelic sounds of San Francisco, EP was well and truly out of touch with the Woodstock generation. He'd become too rich to be radical, too much of a public figure to be hip. Worst sign of all, perhaps: everyone knew the name of Elvis's manager, Col. Tom Parker.

Dream sequence . . .

I'm alone inside Gino's at night. Only it isn't Gino's: it's what Gino's would look like if Salvador Dali had been hired to do the decor. Everything's liquid and warped. Suddenly, a man wearing a gold lamé suit walks in and sits at my table. I start feeling paranoid. I can sense that he wants me to look into his eyes, but I look down at my hands instead. Then he starts to sing. He's got a powerful voice but I have to strain to hear the words. 'I must have been mad', he's singing like he means it. 'I didn't know what I had/Until I threw it all away.' I recognise the song from Dylan's Nashville Skyline, but the voice is pure Elvis. I stop feeling paranoid. My body shivers in pain and delight. The voice has me enraptured. My God, I'm listening to the greatest Elvis impersonator on earth! I look up to see his face, and find myself staring into the vacuum of a woman's eyes.

I wake all nervous and exhausted in a pool of sweaty fluids.

There's a great story about Col. Tom, surrounding one of the most bizarre moments in American politics of 1970: Elvis being made an honorary Federal narcotics agent by Richard Nixon in the Oval Room of the White House. That part's true. The story's told by rock critic Stu Werbin, but I know it only from a footnote in the 'Presliad' chapter of Greil Marcus's *Mystery Train: Images of America in Rock 'n' Roll Music* — still one of the best things ever to be written on Elvis:

It seems that the good German who arranges the White House concerts for the President and his guests managed to travel the many channels that lead only in rare instances to Col. Tom Parker's phone line. Once connected, he delivered what he considered the most privileged invitation: The President requests Mr. Presley to perform. The Colonel did a little quick figuring and then told the man that Elvis would consider it an honor. For the President, Elvis's fee, beyond traveling expenses and accommodation for his back-up group, would be \$25,000. The good German gasped.

'Col. Parker, nobody gets paid for playing for the President!'

'Well, I don't know about that, son,' the Colonel responded abruptly, 'but there's one thing I do know. Nobody asks Elvis Presley to play for nothing.' (Marcus, 1976: 137-8)

Apocryphal or not, such stories had a very real effect on what Elvis had come to mean by the mid-1960s. They served to reproduce for his "life" what the hip public had come to understand of his work: that it was emotionally crass and driven by a lust for power and money. Listen to this description of Graceland, for example, as sent to me by my friend Rob Snarski, from the Black Eyed Susans, on a postcard of Elvis's grave:



Dear Niall,

Well I've seen it. The King's final resting place and his home of twenty odd years. In fact Jason, Mark & I spent a good 6 hours at Graceland & the various museums and giftshops. The "jungle room" filled with Hawaiian furnishings which the big E chose and purchased in 30 minutes and the very same room he recorded 'Moody Blue' was particularly tasteful. The T.V. room with 3 wall-mounted television sets, so as 'Tiger' (as his closest friends called him) could watch three football games simultaneously had a rather striking color combination of yellow and blue and a delightful mirrored ceiling. And who could forget the gorgeous white ceramic monkey on the coffee table?! The music room, the pool room, his living room, The Lisa Marie (the very same plane he took some buddies to Denver in to eat peanut butter sandwiches) and his automobile collection ... yep we saw it all. Then the following day we visited Sun studios and drove to Tupelo to see E.P.s birthplace. O.K. I think Graceland is a zoo but Sun was really enjoyable, especially hearing snippets of conversation between the 'Million Dollar Quartet' [that's Elvis, Carl Perkins, Jerry Lee Lewis, and (although there's some debate about it) Johnny Cash]! Then to hear The King imitate a black man he heard singing 'Don't be cruel'...



And so it goes. The one called Mark, Rob's brother, also sent me a postcard from Graceland — a picture of Elvis and Priscilla's wedding costumes displayed museum-style: sans heads and bodies. Ghostly simulacra of the real. I think even my friends are trying to tell me something.

To return though to the postcard of the grave. What exactly does Elvis's grave plot commemorate? Why must visiting it take the form of a

pilgrimage? Why is a man whose corpse is said to have contained 14 known drugs, who so clearly seems not to have treated his body like a temple, buried in sacred ground? (Think about that: you start losing count after awhile. I mean, how many dangerous substances are there? Coffee, alcohol, cigarettes, uppers, downers, dope: that's only six. At Elvis's post-mortem, they found another eight.)

Easy. Because the fucking hippies killed him. Elvis died, not for being a poet but for not being a poet. He died because he could sing.

**Video: Elvis, *If I Could Dream*
[Check this out]**

Never mind that what we've just seen and heard isn't rock and roll in any pure stylistic sense, that it's more indebted to black gospel than white hillbilly: its mass entertainment status is enough to condemn it, in certain quarters, for being trivial and sentimental instead of exuding a richness of feeling, complexity of thought and performance, and a serious moral tone. Nor is this account of rock as trivial and trivializing alone in its articulation of a lost origin, its nostalgia for the real, for a lost organic community based on authentic and authenticating experience arising from a stable moral order. Old style lefties, too, condemn rock as "false" culture.



So much, in other words, for Elvis's utopian dream of 'a better world' in the clip from his NBC TV special. Proof positive of the falsity of his politics, performance and art, indeed, came with the single release of 'If I Could Dream' in late 1968 which sold enough copies for Elvis to reach number twelve on the US charts, his highest position in years and a sure sign that he was back in commercial action. His very purpose in recording the song, and the TV special it closed, was therefore to boost an ailing career, a career made to suffer from a serious lack of recognition-effect between performer and audience as a result of all those lousy movies Elvis had been churning out for nearly a decade with all those would-be starlet bimbos whose names no one could remember and whose cleavages all looked the same. How could the expression of that dream, to refacilitate the profit-turning wheels of his selling power, to make money at the cost of consumer exploitation, not to mention at the cost of labour — how could that dream be democratic, utopian, shared?

Here, if it were needed, is the proof that it could not:



In this photograph of Elvis looking a lot like Count Dracula on cheap speed and Nixon, as always, looking shifty, is commemorated one of the most bizarre events surrounding American politics prior to Watergate. On 21 December 1970 Elvis was shown into the Oval Room at the White House, bearing gifts for the President of a Colt .45 handgun and a supply of silver bullets. In return, Nixon

gave the King a pair of White House cufflinks. Elvis, who is reputed to have been drugged to the eyeballs at the time, totally off his face on some chemical cocktail of otherwise lethal proportion to commoners, then entered into conversation with Nixon on the dangers to American youth of drugs, communism ... and The Beatles; and finally revealed the purpose of his visit. He had recently got himself appointed as an honorary agent of the Federal Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs, and what he wanted from the President — all he wanted — was a Bureau badge. So Nixon gave him one. Their meeting lasted only half-an-hour, enough time for 28 photographs to be taken of one of the most surreal moments in American history. Adding to the surrealism of that event, or perpetuating it, is the fact that copies of those photographs are now the most requested, by tourists and visitors to Capitol Hill, of the ten million pictures in the US National Archives.

Dream sequence . . .

*I'm standing outside the Fremantle Markets, my attention caught between two buskers. Only it isn't me. I've got a Scouse accent and the twisted brain of McKenzie Wark, but thankfully it's my own hair. One of the buskers is singing Elvis songs, the other is reading Derrida out loud. They're both women. 'Genres are not to be mixed', the Derrida busker reads. 'I repeat: genres are not to be mixed.' A small crowd is gathered in front of the Elvis singer, thrusting copies of Catharine Lumby's *Bad Girls* at her and screaming: 'Traitor! Traitor! Woman hater!' But she just keeps right on singing. Her voice is filled with love and passion, although it has no strictly musical qualities to recommend it — and she's one hell of a lousy guitar player. Meanwhile, the woman reading Derrida has gone on to 'Of an Apocalyptic Tone Recently Adopted in Philosophy'. 'Kant speaks of modernity', she reads, 'and of the mystagogues of his time, but you will have quickly perceived in passing, without my even having to designate explicitly, name, or pull out all the threads, how many transpositions we could surrender to on the side of our so-called*

modernity. Not that today anybody can be recognized on this or that side, purely and simply, but I am sure it could be shown that today every slightly organized discourse is found or claims to be found on both sides, alternately or simultaneously, even if this emplacement exhausts nothing, does not go round the turn or the contour of the place and the sustained discourse. And this inadequation, always limited itself, no doubt indicates the thickest of difficulties.' [3] She, too, has attracted a grim crowd of protesters, equally determined to shout her down. Still she reads on, against her would-be interlocutors, dispatching her apocalyptic words in a tone of voice that's pathological. But the crowd noise prevents me from receiving the full text of her delivery, and what I hear is filled with gaps: '... as soon as we no longer know ... who speaks ... the structure of every scene of writing ... of all experience itself ... it is first the revelation of the apocalypse ... of the divisible dispatch for which there is no ... assured destination....' Straining to hear, even so I feel I'm on the brink of an epiphany, of some great revelation scene about to be; at last, the coming of the end, the moment of demystification. Beyond philosophy, outside writing, past play: Truth laid bare! But not yet. The Elvis singer, who's been marked by her absence for awhile, suddenly starts into a new song. Just as suddenly, the crowd goes quiet. 'If you don't believe I'm leaving', the Elvis singer sings, 'You can count the days I'm gone' — and disappears in a mushroom cloud of smoke. Suddenly, at last ... the end approaches. The very end. Not a moment of epiphany after all, but of eschatology. I wake up feeling paranoid and, cursing my luck in a voice that isn't mine, fall out of bed.

Fall out. The aftermath of that event (that plot?) that will send us all to our graves. The post-mortem, perfectly. The final end awaited as if it were the realest real. The realist real? A fiction, then; as morphological as any myth? For nuclear war, as Derrida remarks, 'has not taken place: one can only talk and write about it [...] some might call it a fable, then, a pure invention: in the sense in which it is said that a myth, an image, a fiction, a utopia, a rhetorical figure, a fantasy, a phantasm, are

inventions' (Derrida, 1984: 23). But, at the same time, very serious shit. After all, no one's going to want to push too hard for a strict equivalence between nuclear war and narrative fiction. (Between missiles and missives, there's just gotta be a gap.) A choice, then, as it were, between deterring and deferring. Detente versus denouement. But not quite, or not quite yet. Up against the limits of reason, caught in a moment of perpetual paralysis engendered by the nuclear threat (the end of the Cold War notwithstanding), the logic of nuclear deterrence is unthinkable within a system given to producing sense through context. Simply (monstrously), the fiction stakes increase each time that one side or the other invents a new weapon, some new (however trifling) device, that continues to defer the end from happening but also brings it endlessly closer. Deterrence and deferral at the same time. According to this game, what's real is what is most fantastic: a game played out between storytellers, storytellings. It's not a question of scientific know-how, military might, political clout, or diplomatic bargaining but (and this is the gravest plot, the most heavily weighted) of all of these competencies at once, and more. And so Derrida writes:

The dividing line between doxa and episteme [between opinion and knowledge, that is to say] starts to blur as soon as there is no longer any such thing as an absolutely legitimizable competence for a phenomenon which is no longer strictly techno-scientific but techno-militaro-politico-diplomatic through and through, and which brings into play the doxa or incompetence even in its calculations. (Derrida, 1984: 24)

The final end is thus the ultimate simulation, the perfect media event ... the absolute referent of everything that is, suspended before our eyes in writing, through texts. This, though, as Derrida writes, is the condition of all writing:

as soon as we no longer know very well who speaks or who writes [he writes], the text be-

comes apocalyptic. And if the dispatches always refer to other dispatches without decidable destination, the destination remaining to come, then isn't this [...] the structure of every scene of writing in general [...]: wouldn't the apocalyptic be a transcendental condition of all discourse, of all experience itself, of every mark or every trace? And the genre of writings called 'apocalyptic' in the strict sense, then, would be only an example, an exemplary revelation of this transcendental structure. In that case, if the apocalyptic reveals, it is first the revelation of the apocalypse, the self-presentation of the apocalyptic structure of language, of writing, of the experience of presence, either of the text or of the mark in general: that is, of the divisible dispatch for which there is no self-presentation nor assured destination. (Derrida, 1982: 87)

Writing is always threatening to arrive at an end; it is always, in this sense, apocalyptic. It is always in the act of answering the nuclear question. What counts in the weighing up of what kinds of writing matter, then, is not so much the putative differences within writing itself (it can't be that) but who does the counting. Tough shit, in other words, if you happen to write like a postpolitical white boy — if what you write is up itself rather than outside itself.

Me? I'm a greenie, I'm a feminist, I'm a woman, and I'm black. Christ, I'm a fucking goddamn germ liberationist! All God's creatures should be free. I'm also a nigger-baiting, bible-thumping, mother-fucking bastard. That's just the kinda guy I am. I wear secondhand clothes and drink VB, like the rest of the hip crowd, and listen to a lot of Elvis records: sure signs that I'm a style Nazi, not an activist. You guessed it: I'm a Niallist. On the brink of the apocalypse, I preach the fetishization of a self-made king.

Inside narrative

I remember when I lived in the inner-Sydney sub-

urb of Newtown in the late 1980s there was some graffiti that always caught my eye as I walked along the top of Erskineville Road to King Street and the shops, which I did virtually every day. It was just three words, but as much a part of Newtown for me as the cafés, the weirdness and the train station. The words were do not frolic, painted in black foot-high letters, all in lower case, on the back wall of a women's clothing store, I think. But just that: do not frolic. I used to take friends there to show them the words, or tell them to go there themselves. And in all this time it's never occurred to me to wonder about who wrote them or what they mean. Because what they mean is not only what they are, but where they are, and where I was then. As for who put them there, I can well imagine what they were wearing at the time and what they'd been doing: op shop clothes from King Street, drinking. That's what everybody wore in Newtown and we all did a lot of the other. But apart from this very general description, which is more or less a pure fiction, I know nothing about their author or what he or she might have meant by the words. That's probably why I've always like them, and also because I like the sound of the word 'frolic'. In run-down come-alive Newtown, 'frolic' was a word that seemed bizarrely out of place and old-fashioned, a sardonic reminder that the grand old buildings of King Street stood now in decaying honour to a lively past, when whole families came to Newtown at weekends to visit the cineramas and amusement parlors and the vast indoor aquarium (you can still see the original façade of moulded fish and seashells above a secondhand furniture store, at the Chippendale end of King Street), and men came every day and at all hours of the night to visit the brothels. There used to be quite a lot of frolicking in Newtown back then, and so I always thought the admonition not to frolic, if that's what it was, was wistfully ironic. And I always loved the fact that it appeared to have no context, even while it was steeped in a context of the everyday and the not so very long ago.

I've heard a rumour that David Malouf, who spends half his year writing in an out of the way village in Florence, Italy, returns to Newtown for the final draft which he finishes (according to the rumor) in a renovated four-storey mansion that used to belong to an ex-officer of the Parramatta Regiment, granted, as was then the custom, for a pittance on retirement from the military.

There is no "pure" Elvis. It's just a myth to suppose that Elvis sold out to Colonel Tom and Hollywood, leaving his roots behind. What's so bad about Hollywood, anyway? Why is what Elvis recorded for Sun more "authentic" than his recordings for RCA, or his movie soundtracks? Blame it on the hippies. As Greil Marcus writes: 'At RCA, where the commercial horizons were much broader than they were down at Sun, Elvis worked with far more "artistic freedom" than he ever did with Sam Phillips.' (Marcus, Tell it to the 1960s, because that's when selling records became a dirty business. Everyone got so goddamn serious in the 60s (and the 90s were just the 60s upside down, if you lived in Fremantle), that commercial success came to represent creative loss of control. There were exceptions, of course, or blatant contradictions: like, it was OK for Dylan to go to number one with *Like a Rolling Stone* and still be hip, but all those dates that Elvis was playing in Vegas, man — that was very uncool. Of course, Dylan wrote 'Like a Rolling Stone' from the heart and for himself; whereas Elvis was performing for the masses. Besides, the money Dylan made didn't show: he still dressed like he didn't care — in faded jeans and worn-out boots, his hair done up like a fright wig. Elvis, on the other hand, was going camp, thus committing the most unpardonable of 60s' sins: he didn't look like his audience any more. He wore stage clothes, not street clothes; and all those fake jewels and sequins could mean only one thing: he was faking his emotions, too. Like, all you had to do was listen:

Music: Elvis, *An American Trilogy*
[Check this out]

This morning, while I was still writing this, I had a crisis in the shower. Just as I was about to step out, I couldn't decide whether I'd remembered to wash my feet or not. Right away, I got paranoid. Should I postpone returning to the computer in order to make sure my feet are clean, thus running the risk of not finishing my paper in time for this volume's deadline; or do I step out of the shower now and risk overpowering all I encounter with foot odor later on? In the end I decided to stay under the shower and wash myself all over again, being especially careful to wash my feet. That way only my prose would stink. Afterwards, my body purified, I went next door to my neighbor's house to borrow a couple of Bob Marley records and purify my mind. But then I remembered that Bob Marley belonged to a religion (of sorts) that believes that menstruating women are unclean. So much for tribal purity. I told my neighbor that if he ever played a Bob Marley record again, I'd set fire to his wife's hair with my Zippo and burn something blasphemous in the bellies of his children. Then I went home and played Elvis records for an hour, feeling really good about myself, and wrote a postcard to Rob:

*Dear Rob,
Tell Mark he's a bastard. What do you mean, 'Graceland is a zoo'? You were expecting an opulent palace after the fashion of Versailles, perhaps? When was the last time you took a visit to the Western Suburbs? Maybe they don't have mirrored ceilings, but they've got mirrors in more rooms than just the bathroom and more TVs in the house than you or me. Graceland city, mate. Poor white trash made good. Earth rapists. Environmental vandals, all. Elvis is their god — they just don't know it. Why wouldn't he be? The hippies killed him, which is what they want to do to them....*

The rest is personal.

No, not the end. Not quite, not yet. There must be something more I can say about a man who's sold more records than anyone else, made 33

Hollywood films, and during his lifetime was the highest paid performer in the history of Las Vegas. Everyone knows that the songs Elvis cut for Sam Phillips at Sun studios in 1954, with Scotty Moore playing guitar and Bill Black on upright bass, are rock's most precious artifacts: because they're its origin. The real thing, an absolute beginning. All you have to do is see Jim Jarmusch's *Mystery Train* to find this out. But you might remember an early scene from that film, set inside Memphis Central station, where an old black man holding a cigar comes over to the Japanese couple who've just got off the train and asks for a light. The boy, pure rockabilly stylist, obliges with a flick of his Zippo. He and his girlfriend have come to Memphis on a pilgrimage, to visit the sacred sites of rock's origin — especially Sun studios (or the Memphis Recording Service as it was known before 1952) where Elvis and Carl Perkins first sang in front of a microphone. It isn't until the credits roll (or perhaps until long after), however, that we find out the old negro in the train station was Rufus Thomas, who'd been cutting discs with Sam Phillips at the Memphis Recording Service, and later at Sun studios, for quite awhile before Elvis or Carl Perkins showed up. Should we ask, then: how can rock have a beginning if that "beginning" isn't over yet? For there to be a rockabilly "revival", for instance, doesn't rockabilly first of all have to have passed away?

So ... no beginning: no post-mortem. No after words. I mean it. If you want to ask questions, you're welcome to call me at home. Just ask for Pete.

1968 revisited

Those of you who've seen Steve Martin's *Roxanne* might recall a great scene at the beginning of the film in which Darryl Hannah, who's completely naked at the time, locks herself out of her house one night. Briefly: Steve Martin, the local fire chief, agrees to break into her home and asks if meanwhile she could use a towel. Looking utterly surprised, Darryl Hannah says no. A few minutes

later she asks him: where's the towel? 'You told me you didn't want a towel', Steve Martin says. 'I was being ironic', Darryl Hannah replies. 'Oh ... irony', Steve Martin says. 'Oh yeah. We don't do that anymore. There hasn't been any irony around here since 1968.'

Notes

[1] Gino's Café in Fremantle, Western Australia — favored haunt of the local hippies and the alternative set.

[2] See Wark, McKenzie. *Virtual Geographies: Living With Global Media Events* (Indiana University Press: Bloomington, 1994) — and everything since.

[3] Jacques Derrida, 'Of an Apocalyptic Tone Recently Adopted in Philosophy', *Semeia*, Vol. 23, 1982, p. 78.

Bibliography

Derrida, Jacques. 'The Law of Genre', trans. Avital Ronell, *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 7, (Autumn, 1980).

_____. 'Of an Apocalyptic Tone Recently Adopted in Philosophy', *Semeia*, Vol. 23, (1982).

_____. 'No Apocalypse, Not Now: Full Speed Ahead, Seven Missiles, Seven Missives', *Diacritics*, Vol. 14, No. 2, (1984).

Pynchon, Thomas. *The Crying of Lot 49* (Picador: London, 1979).

Thwaites, Tony. 'Miracles: Hot Air and Histories of the Improbable' in Niall Lucy (ed) *Postmodern Literary Theory: An Anthology* (Blackwell: Oxford, 2000).

Marcus, Greil. *Mystery Train: Images of America in Rock'n'Roll Music* (E. P. Dutton: New York, 1976).

Wark, McKenzie. *Virtual Geographies: Living With Global Media Events* (Indiana University Press: Bloomington, 1994)

StudioLab UMBRELLA

Jon McKenzie



Ulmer: who (or what) else?

One day in the mid 80's, Ulmer and I set out across the University of Florida campus, headed for lunch. We walked along the Plaza of the Americas, then past Library West, talking theory and life as we did. Pretty soon all that lay between us and Burger King (his choice, as I recall) was University Avenue, one of the busiest streets in Gainesville (which also happens to be my hometown). Before us, traffic whizzed by left and right, but Ulmer stepped right out into it, and I followed, incredulously.

Suddenly, I'd become Dustin Hoffman's title character in *Little Big Man*, the 1970 post-Western film epic by director Arthur Penn. One scene is based on General George Custer's infamous 1868 surprise attack on a Cheyenne winter camp located on the banks of the Washita River. As the



attack unfolds, Little Big Man sits in a tipi with Old Lodge Skins (played by Chief Dan George), his adopted Cheyenne grandfather, now blind from old age. With soldiers massacring men, women, and children all around them, Old Lodge Skins calmly states that they'll escape by simply walking down to the river. 'But Grandfather,' I say, 'they'll shoot us!' 'It's okay,' he responds, 'I'm blind, so they won't be able to see us.'

Somehow, we made it. Ulmer ordered a Whopper. 'Make it two.'

My_story? StudioLab.

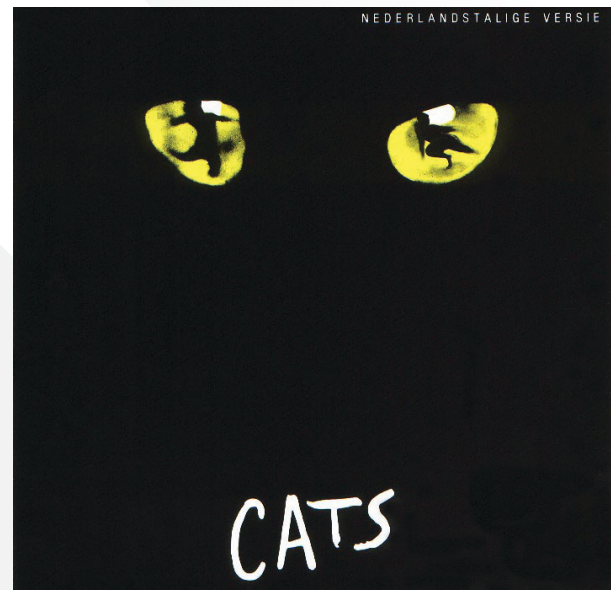
I first encountered Ulmer as an undergrad painting student in 1983 or so. I'd heard about these "theory" courses over in the English Department and signed up for a film class with Robert Ray. It was full, so by chance the registrar's computer placed me in Ulmer's section. This class changed my life. I'd studied the avant-garde "art historically" (effectively, from a formalist perspective) but never as cases of experimental research informed by theories of relativity, psychoanalysis, Marxism, etc. Soon I was immersed in Barthes, Lacan, and most importantly, the deconstructive and grammatical projects of Derrida. An MA in English soon followed.

What I didn't know at the time was how unique this Floridian immersion would be: I later realized that elsewhere, most folks studied theory as exclusively concerned with critique, whereas I was also taught to approach theory creatively. One of the first "lessons" Ulmer taught me was that even the most critical of theories must first be invented: Marx, Freud, de Beauvoir — all had to first create their critical, analytical theories. Theory has thus become, for me, a form of applied conceptual art: theory creates concepts applicable to the critical problems of our time. To paraphrase Deleuze and Guattari: if you're not creating concepts, you're not doing theory. And to paraphrase Marx: theorists have thus far critiqued the world, the point is to change it — to create something else.

A second "lesson" Ulmer taught me was to approach the classroom as a performance space, a site where materials (bodies, ideas, media) can mix to create pedagogical events, events registered by 'ah-hah...', 'wow!' and sometimes a shrug or 'what the -?' (Experiments, after all, entail risks: they sometimes fail.) After receiving my doctorate in performance studies at New York University, Una Chaudhuri invited me to teach an electronic performance course in undergraduate drama. It was here that I began to formally articulate my own pedagogy, trying out things I'd learned at both Florida and NYU. I've come to call this pedagogy "StudioLab."

As the name suggests, StudioLab is designed to take place in both studio and computer lab environments, allowing students to develop critico-creative projects and digital skills using models drawn from cultural performance: theater, performance art, ritual, and practices of everyday life. Here's how it works: In studio, students work in "bands" to collaboratively conceive and develop the performative aspects of their projects. Like rock bands composed of drummer, bassist, and guitarist, StudioLab bands contain specialized players; one student might focus on imagery, another on text, another on interactive elements. In the lab, however, the same students work in

different groupings called "guilds" to develop the electronic elements needed by the bands. Guilds are technically monochromatic, as it were, composed of similarly specialized players, such as Photoshoppers, Hypertextualists, and Interactivists. Here specialists work together to hone their respective trades (much as drummers, bassists, or guitarists of different rock groups might get together to share licks and tricks). Individual guild members then bring their skills back to their bands in studio, integrating them into the projects. Moving between studio and lab, band and guild, these projects unfold through the interlacing of bodies, ideas, and media.



In sum: StudioLab is characterized by the circulation between studio and lab environments, by collaborative learning in different sociotechnical groupings, and by the mixing and fine-tuning of physical, conceptual, and multimedia elements.

Brecht and CATTs Forever

In an early Electronic Performance course (1996), I combined Brenda Laurel's *Computers as Theater* with Ulmer's *Heuretics: The Logic of Invention*. The challenge for my undergraduate theater students: invent and embody a poetics of electronic per-

formance by replacing Laurel's guiding theorist (Aristotle) with a modern or contemporary theater director. I assigned each band of students one of six directors: Artaud, Boal, Brecht, le Compte, Novarina, and Schechner. For further guidance, we used Ulmer's CATTt, his metapoetics for generating new manifestos or analyzing old ones. Briefly put, the acronym runs:

C (contrast), A (analogy), T (theory), T (target), t (tale)

One band astutely took as their Contrast the premiere Broadway show of the time, *Cats*. It was already a long-running hit, and New York was plastered with advertisements that proclaimed 'Cats Forever.' Needless to say, these students had other ideas and fattened their CATTt with Brecht's theory of epic theater. To embody Brecht's contention that scenes could function on their own, as if cut up and performed in any order, they had the audience pull letters out of a hat, letters corresponding to a sign strung across the performance space which spelled 'Cats Forever' on individual sheets of paper. When a letter was called, a student would grab the corresponding piece of paper, on the back of which was the title of a short scene



they'd written. The student would read out the title, and then the group immediately performed it. 'O!' 'T!' 'C!' 'V!' The pace was frantic, as the students bounced around the space recalling and performing scenes on the fly. A mainstream musical made epic.

Ray

After having settled for Ulmer in that first film class, I eventually studied with Robert Ray, who was also teaching theory experimentally. Though his first book, *A Certain Tendency of the Hollywood Cinema*, had been an ideological critique of Hollywood cinema, he would later embrace the filmic pleasures he critiqued there, writing *The Avant-Garde Finds Andy Hardy* and *How a Film Theory Got Lost*, two books that theorize and practice experimental film theory using techniques drawn from the avant-garde, especially the Surrealists. He readily admitted that Ulmer had influenced this transformation of his work.

Ray's courses were amazing, for he enthralled students with the intensity of his intellect and teaching style, and also because he incorporated music into the curriculum, handing out cassettes with mixes of Erik Satie and the Velvet Underground. He later joined the Vulgar Boatmen, a rock band started by some of my art school friends (Walter Salas-Humara, Carey Crane, John Eder, and Rick Ellis). A professor with a rock band—every college kid's dream.

Ulmer and Ray were a pedagogical tag-team for me and many other students. We'd study with Ulmer one semester and Ray the next, the one cool, the other hot. Ray took things in a different direction: more Marx and Brecht, less Heidegger and McLuhan. Both, however, were mainlining Barthes (who often wrote fragments based on letters of the alphabet) and reflecting on teaching while teaching. Today, it's difficult for me to separate the UlmeRay strands of my own pedagogy.



EPCOT 21

Another StudioLab course (1997), this one taught as a graduate performance studies seminar at NYU, was called ‘Performing Bureaucracies.’ Here the goal was to actualize ideas about other performance paradigms that I’d begun to research in my dissertation, research I later expanded in my book *Perform or Else: From Discipline to Performance*. All too quickly: in addition to the cultural performances studied by performance studies scholars, there are organizational performances studied by managers and organizational theorists and technological performances studied by engineers and computer scientists. While cultural performance research concerns activities such as theater and ritual and stresses their efficacy, their potential to maintain or transform social structures, research of organizational performance focuses on such things as the performance reviews of individual workers and improving the performance of entire organizations. Here the guiding value is efficiency, the minimaxing of inputs and outputs. Research of technological performance concerns such things as high performance stereos and missile systems, and its practitioners value effectiveness, the sheer technical capability of a device or system.

Looking back, this multi-paradigmatic research can be seen as following one of Ulmer’s suggestions in *Teletheory: Grammatology in the Age of Video*. That “lesson” is to write using *all* the meanings of a given term, however contradictory or nonsensical the results might first appear. This directive, based on Derrida’s notion of the gram,

regularly produces uncanny results: through iteration, arbitrary associations become motivated, nonsense becomes sensible (and vice versa). The Performing Bureaucracy class explored what can happen when cultural, organizational, and technological senses of performance are recombined, when efficacy, efficiency, and effectiveness get remixed, when performative *values are reevaluated*.



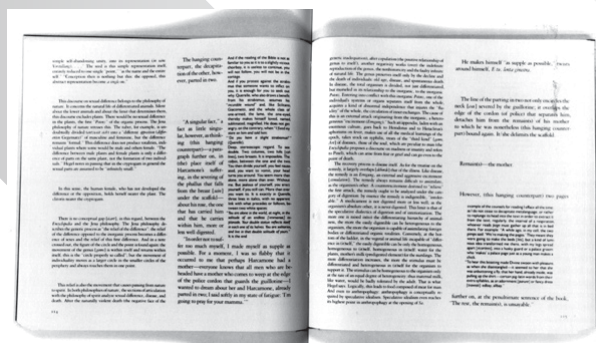
Laurie Anderson

I remember the first time I heard her music: a student of Ray’s had created a short film, a close-up of someone turning the pages of a book or newspaper, shot in slow motion. The soundtrack was Anderson’s *Born, Never Asked* from *United States Live*. It was mesmerizing.

It was the early-mid ‘80s. I’d never heard of performance art, but soon was immersed in it and realized I’d done some already for a video piece. But the complexity and simplicity of Anderson’s work fascinated me: small pieces, often composed of a story, some images, and a song, pieces that bit by bit created complex patterns of ideas, emotions, and imagery. The elements were drawn from personal stories, philosophy, pop culture, art and literature.

Under Ulmer’s direction, I wrote my master’s thesis on Anderson’s *United States: Parts I-IV*. Ulmer forgot to tell me that master’s theses generally run about 70 pages: I rambled on for over 200, but

along the way I explored Anderson's multimedia performance art using Derrida's notion of grammatological, generalized writing, while also trying exploring the relation of experimental performance and the highly normative theory of performativity articulated by Lyotard. This intersection of Anderson and Lyotard forms the Ur-site of *Perform or Else*; of my essay "Laurie Anderson for Dummies," which analyzes Anderson's performance *Stories from the Nerve Bible* and her CD-ROM, *Puppet*



Motel; and of my interest in performative pedagogies.

Leavey

Besides Ray, John Leavey was another Florida professor who shaped my pedagogy, though in a very different way. Leavey is a translator of Derrida, having worked on *Glas* and *Edmund Husserl's Origin of Geometry, an Introduction*. Ulmer contributed to Leavey's *Glossary*, a companion text to *Glas*. While Ulmer took great imaginative leaps with Derrida's texts and provided "big pictures," Leavey stressed a certain fidelity to Derrida and close, detailed readings. In some sense, I studied one Derrida with Ulmer (grammatology) and another Derrida with Leavey (deconstruction).

The StudioLab pedagogy probably owes more to the grammatological than the deconstructive (and here I hear Leavey questioning if one can really make such a distinction), and yet Derrida's deconstruction of the university called for an intervention in the concrete practices of the academy, while still respecting certain norms of scholarly rigor and

discipline. If one can understand Lyotard's performativity as the postmodern displacement of the modern disciplinarity described by Foucault, then perhaps StudioLab participates in an anticipatory way with emerging norms and rigors of post-disciplinary pedagogical practices.

While it is crucial to invent experimental and resistant practices, one must also resist the simplistic tendency to valorize "transgression" and demon-



ize "norms." One must also recognize that some transgressions are regressive, even reactionary, and that the real challenge lies in articulating new, progressive norms.

Anagrammatology

Late last fall, Ulmer passed through the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, where I now teach. I'm up here in cold north, where he grew up. He's sweating it out down south, where I'm from. I can't take the heat and humidity any more, he can't take the snow and the cold. The day after doing a symposium with me, I took him out for breakfast, me wearing a light jacket, he bundled up like Old Lodge Skins. We cross the street from the parking garage and head toward our destiny: bacon and eggs at the Pfister Hotel (I kid him that, despite its name, it's not that kind of place, so he shouldn't get his hopes up).

The years at Florida shaped my approach to theory and life, and Ulmer's teaching in particular left a big thumbprint on my mind, as it did with many of my peers. In some sense, I'll always be in the lab, though it changes as I move from place to place. Different institutions, different disciplines, different student bodies, different resources: what's constant is the experimental approach to theory, the emphasis on generalized writing, multimedia, mixing thing up. Anagrammatology.

One night in the mid 80's, I was hanging out in Gainesville with fellow students Craig Saper and Bonnie Sparling in her second-story apartment on SE 2nd Avenue, drinking, smoking, talking theory and life. At some point, I got up to go to the bathroom, and as I returned, I noticed that on a table in the hallway Bonnie had placed one of those small trays used in the board game Scrabble. On it were eight wooden letters arranged to spell out the word "UMBRELLA." I paused a moment, and suddenly there it was: I quickly recombined the letters, spelling out "ULMER LAB," and then moved on.

Bibliography

Laurel, Brenda. *Computers as Theatre* (Reading, MA.: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1991).

Leavey, John P. Jr. *Glassary* (Lincoln, New England: University of New England Press, 1986).

McKenzie, Jon. *Perform or Else: From Discipline to Performance* (New York: Routledge, 2001).

Ray, Robert B. *A Certain Tendency of the Hollywood Cinema: 1930-1980* (Princeton: Princeton U.P, 1985).

_____. *The Avant-Garde Finds Andy Hardy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995).

_____. *How a Film Theory Got Lost and Other Mysteries in Cultural Studies* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001).

Ulmer, Gregory L. *Teletheory: Grammarology in the Age of Video* (New York and London: Routledge, 1989).

_____. *Heuretics: The Logic of Invention* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994).

Surface to Surface, Ashes to Ashes (Reporting to U)

Linda Marie Walker



The Way of Stories

if worlds were stories, their inhabitants storytellers,
not just the living beings, but all, all things, all
telling their stories, all being told
there would be room for worlds
where contradictions could be true
where I could say “you live, you’re dead”
and with a laugh, you would reply.
(Roubaud, 1995: 29)

1. It’s A Far Cry To Morning

Gregory Ulmer once mentioned to me the (idea of the) “interface” between (this) here and (that) there; between my world/planet here, where I live, and his world/planet there, where he lives (across the seemingly same world/planet) — or between any “you” and “me” — and how “your” worlds might face, or interface with, each other — and what knife, or other method/instrument, could be found in some dangerous abandoned “shed” (or tower or story) to subtly slice open the place where

“your” feet touch the ground, so that ‘I’ could step through – and be there, touch my feet to your ground, and you could follow me back through (if you wanted to) and touch your feet to my ground. (The text we wrote together years ago called *The Wishing Way* was a trembling attempt between “us” to write this “interface,” which was, in the end for me, as if my own place was [too] strange [to speak of] [<http://www.altx.com/au2/lmw.html>]).

(Here, in my writing-world, I have used the letter ‘U’ and the word ‘you’ (“U can get under my skin”; “my *take* on you”). The sound of each is the same of course, and yet in appearance and sense each is completely different; it is simply a compositional move to bring them face to face, to the edge of an interface: U/you. The letter “U” stands in for Ulmer (as an addressee); this writing imagines a direct-line to U(lmer); U though is imaginary; therefore it is an imagined direct-line – impossible and fictionalised (that is, it is thought nevertheless). The “you” is the anonymous “you” of writing; the one (person/many people) who is always unknown to



the writer and who, with the writer and the writing, “completes” the interface (in as much as the surface of the address, its passage, appears: me/you). The “you” is always “there” – wherever “there” is – and never in a position to see/be “here” (with the presence of me-here). Writing makes-up these surfaces; the U/you sound allows slippage along the / of the interface; it is a small move that “hears” the voice of the interface (a musical note, almost); and, as well, it raises, ever so slightly, the question of who it is that one writes to (addresses); it’s never no-one-in-particular, as everyone is particular. The surface of this writing, within this paragraph, is close to the idea of the missive (an official letter to you) – the surface to surface missive/missile is all we have to speak with each other, and it can easily stray and end in ash. The “U” and the “you” come into play through the remainder of this writing, the “you” more than the “U”, and at each point the “interface” is at work.

The “interface” is a strange place — like a no-man’s-land (where hostilities are suspended, and the enemies lick each others’ wounds). What the interface is, or does, in and with writing – in writing from/about one place to another place in a desire for (or an obsession with) “letting you know” (something, someone, anything, eg., How I Am), or as an excuse/longing to find out “How You Are” — or even to discover if you are still alive — is show, in a banal and infinitely exquisite(ly) painful way how impossible this desiring-for, obsessing-with, the interface is, how “plain-as-day” it is that I cannot tell you what my “here” is (or how I came to be “here”) — how it is/I am moment to moment — the loud rhythmic scraping that is going on in a house across the street, the hot wind blowing in the window through the billowing cobweb, the large spotted dog (a voice: “are you dressed yet?”) sniffing along the front fence, the young couple painting their newly acquired house (yellow and brown) — in its specificity, in its shades and shadows, temperatures, foods, plants, news, rumours, dreams, hopes, sadnesses, joys, losses, births, deaths, laughter, stupidities, crimes, politics,

decisions, and so on (and how now, as I type this up it is night and cool, and the Saturday traffic is light, and the weather mild for summer, etc). The stories are stones and leaves and words and sounds — and sights so fleeting and illusory and unsettling that one calls them ghosts and angels and thoughts; or, in a leap of faith, surfaces.

“Surface,” here, means (as a medium [diviner] by which to touch the word) the appearing of the world before (in the presence of) the world — an appearing in (the) face of the world — as if there could be a first instance, a coming upon the seemingness of what “is” (the world as it “is” out my window [as I sit inside and gaze outside], this, another, day, the very matter of it — including the drifting sounds of a child crying, birds calling, cars on distant roads, the odd deep thud — and the difficult oddness of taking-in the matter as it is, as not re-presenting anything at all [nothing]). The sur/face hides nothing. Instead it mutates before our eyes (beautiful, like I’ve seen the spectres portrayed in films as “filmy,” “smoky,” “cloudy” wafting shapes and colours — almost taking on form and then coming apart and re-arranging), weightless, and we encounter it continually in speeds, rhythms, flows, and densities.

The surface, each surface, touches the air, rubs, and is rubbed into, the invisible relentlessly moving changing condition of “atmosphere.” The surface offers itself up as inter-face, the very middle of “every”-thing, the between, the world of negotiation, of endless work, forever *en route* (“every” thing at the same time), the impossible impossible-always and impossible-already, vertical and horizontal becoming passings (thoughts, images, sounds) — the vertical density of the horizon when it cuts the sinking sun, or melts into the ocean (we could proceed like this): ‘The middle has nothing to do with an average, it is not a centrism or a form of moderation. On the contrary, it’s a matter of absolute speed. Whatever grows from the middle is endowed with such a speed’ (Deleuze & Parnet, 1987: 30). Absolute speed is the movement between the speed of one movement and the

speed of another, as one is perceived by the other (an appearance of movement as it seems to appear). Absolute speed is the movement-between, a potential movement, a movement going nowhere fast, nomadic, geographic, involutorial.

The skin is our interface (the living tension between “an” inside and “the” outside); it is not considered a “surface” but a state, an organ, an envelope, a plane, a volume, a filter, a casing, a carnality. The skin, our face (of orifices) to the world, our tactile, nerve-full, sense-full, receiver of the other’s face — animate and inanimate, our “between” (mobile, flaking, political, machined) state, keeping the insides in and the outsides out. My skin is my very very thin, aging, dead-give-away, weather proof/prone, intimately registering hereness, and this hereness more than any other is one that writing cannot touch — even though U can get under my skin (and infect my mood, my *take* on you and on me and on our trip to yet unknown places). (This naming of things [surface, interface] is like this day: one minute it’s warm, the next cool, the wind rises and falls, the sky is overcast then clear, the overcast is dark grey and cloudy or light grey and misty, and then the North is stormy and the South vivid blue, a few seconds of light rain and when the sun comes out it’s sharp and stinging. This day is named Sunday. It’s a noisy Sunday and then it’s silent; there are shadows and then there are none. (This named day makes my skin tingle/crawl with anticipation and anxiety — it’s moving, and memory is stirred to tears.) [1]

Involution is, for Deleuze, ‘... neither regression nor progression ...,’ and ‘... the opposite of evolution, but ... also the opposite of regression, returning to a childhood or a primitive world’ (Deleuze & Parnet, 1987: 29). Instead it seems a form of restraint, a paring back, an abandoning (a minimalism of sorts), and an inventing of ‘... new elements and new relations ... Experimentation is involutive, the opposite of the overdose. It is also true of writing; to reach this sobriety, this simplicity which is neither the end nor the beginning of something. To involute is to be “between,” in the middle,

adjacent. Beckett’s characters are in perpetual involution, always in the middle of a path, already *en route*’ (Deleuze & Parnet, 1987: 29-30). Involuting is an act of “involving” — of being in the mix of the complex. This makes what “is” then *volatile* (fleeting, transient: evaporating rapidly, vaporising; moisture: liquid into mist/steam; a damp air, a watery air). (It’s not uncommon to feel chilled and sneeze). [2]

“Is” turns into an event — writing is an event, a play upon the process of “is,” a working that cannot (at any given moment) trace, catch, relay, or dwell upon the physicality and temporality of an “is” as “is” is worked on by so many things seen/unseen, solid/phantastic, past/present (the event, this writing event, has no decided purpose, no pre-set outcome, no lesson or demand — although, as a loving of what happens as one goes along, it might bring a fragile calm): ‘Making an event — however small — is the most delicate thing in the world: the opposite of making a drama or making a story’ (Deleuze & Parnet, 1987: 66).

This report comes to you from “here.” And it is “here” that I’ll be guilty of abandoning/leaving/betraying. This report is a surface abandonment — a report of make-believe.

The interface is ‘a surface regarded as the common boundary to two bodies or spaces’ and ‘the point or area at which any two systems interact’ (to exchange ideas or plans, etc); in chemistry it’s ‘the surface which separates two phases;’ in computing ‘it’s the point at which an interconnection is made between a computer and a peripheral device ... or person’ (Delbridge et al., 1999: 1111).

In sewing there is interfacing: it is fabric laid between the outer material and the inner material to give body to the garment. The body, the interfacial fabric, given to the garment tenses it — makes it a little more taut or rigid: gives it tension (it doesn’t collapse quite so easily, it stands up for itself a little). And if the fabric is, in a manner of speaking, liquid/fluid it could be called the ‘interfacial sur-

face tension' ('the surface tension at the interface between two immiscible liquids') (Delbridge et al., 1999: np).

2. Among The Grass

All (the) stories are "liquid" (in some form or another — mist, fog, snow, dew, cloud, steam, rain, river, vapour, ocean, lake, frost, and each subtle quality of these) or fluidal (soluble, molten, fusible, humid, mushy) at the interface. The interface is the venue of stories, the site of tenses where "here" is given some (semblance of) body, where "here" becomes a body (a composition of bits and pieces; [molecules] 'which move freely among themselves but do not tend to separate like those of gases; neither gaseous or solid') for "there" (Delbridge et al., 1999: 1252).

"Here" is abandoned for "whatever" comes to constitute the momentary surface at the interface, which is everything (which is my "lot," the lay of the land, how it goes) I can tell you in the time or space provided (in the scheme of things). Each tiny watery story is a passage (a trickle), a way of getting through the limbo-land (the realm of hauntings) of neither here nor there, a way of appeasing the terrorising "Harpy" who makes the unholy screaming row when the story is "a lie" (against oneself and the "here," and therefore against the "there").

Lyra (the girl in Philip Pullman's trilogy, *His Dark Materials*) and Will, her companion, are trying to get into the underworld, to the ghosts of the dead, and they have to get past the Harpy called "No-Name." Lyra offers to tell her a story in return for getting through the door. Lyra is an expert at making-up stories about her life, 'shaping and cutting and improving and adding: *parents dead; family treasure; shipwreck; escape ...* (Pullman, 2000: 309). The Harpy 'launch[ed] herself at Lyra, claws outstretched ... one of her claws caught her scalp and tore out a clump of hair.' She was screaming 'Liar! Liar!' Eventually they get through into the endless plain of ghost-people ('a place of

nothing', a young ghost-martyr calls it) by using another 'gift'/instrument altogether, Will's 'Subtle Knife;' but the Harpy and her cohorts follow ('thick as blowflies') (Pullman, 2000: 336).

The ghosts beg Lyra to tell them about the world, the sun and wind and sky — stories — and so she does. She tells them her story, as true as she can. And the Harpies grow silent and listen too. They feed on the news of the world. So a treaty is made with the Harpies. In exchange for ghost stories (of the future dead) — if they tell the truth of their life, if they don't hold anything back — they will guide them through the land of the dead out into the world again so that they dissipate (dissolve, melt) in the air and become 'part of everything alive again' (Pullman, 2000: 335). The Harpies are given an honourable task.



3. Choleric Atmosphere

The Harpies are irritable, choleric (their bile rises, and they spit out foul words 'jeering, mocking, cackling, deriding' (Pullman, 2000: 313): 'They know all the worst things about you. They know how to make you feel horrible, just thinking of all the stupid things and bad things you ever did. And all the greedy and unkind thoughts you ever had, they know 'em all, and they sum you up and they make you feel sick with yourself ... But you can't get away from 'em.' (Pullman, 2000: 323); they rile against the "made-up" because this is what they

“believe:” ‘If they [the ghosts] live in the world, they should see and touch and hear and love and learn things ...’ (Pullman, 2000: 334). That is, the world is enough, the world as it appears and “is” is exceedingly strange, grotesque, fascinating, and “liquid” ‘... if they come down here bringing nothing, we shall not guide them out.’ (Pullman, 2000: 335) That’s some threat! I’ll tell (U) (I’ll tell (U) (no comma) this then, just in case, to cover my hot skin (and given that this is about “love”) ...

4. ... but first things first ...

... Jacques Derrida writes: ‘I will have to be satisfied, an obvious procedure of failure, to *tell* — like a story, ‘One day, once upon a time ...’ ... the story of a text that for a long time, I have dreamed of writing ... (a muddled, baroque, and overcharged text which resembles what has always been my relation to such incredible words as ‘soul,’ ‘spirit,’ and so forth) ...’ (Derrida, 1993:123).

(And I pause, waiting, and nothing happens, I am still here, and you are still there; my writing gets me nowhere fast, and Psyche, the life breath, breathing, souling, dispersing/dissipating her body in the air like a story — *tells* her body in the world amongst “everything.”)

The goddess Psyche is spread so fine and intricate and spidery that she’s in-touch without you/me. (I call you on the phone, but you’re not home; I write you a letter, and will not see you open it, or watch your eyes drift over the page, and you may never reply; a white cat jumps over the side fence and my heart shoots into my mouth — will I remember to tell the Harpy of the trembling at my nerve ends).

‘Psyche is outstretched in the shade of a walnut tree, as evening falls. She is resting; the slight movements of sleep have partly uncovered her chest. Eros contemplates her, with both emotion and malice. Psyche knows nothing of this. Her sleep is so deep that it has taken from her even the abandon of her pose’ (Nancy, 1993: 393).

She is there despite us and our longing for her touch — and when her touch comes we call it/her names (divine names like whore vamp siren vampire witch tramp wolf demon — all of them sacred crowds). We worry she will swallow us with her kiss — the scent of frangipani floats on the warm air, despite us too — and she must, how else will we stop to know her pressingness (her mouth, her juice):

‘Yes I loved them, those gatherings late at night — the small table, glasses with frosted sides, fragrant vapor rising from black coffee, the fireplace, red with powerful winter heat, the biting gaiety of a literary joke, and the first helpless and frightening glance of my love’
(Akhmatova, 1985: 25).

The interface looks both ways (like Akhmatova’s poem: ‘Yes I loved them ...’), but what of the interface, it (it-she) itself. There is no speaking *for* here or there ... or the interface, even. There is speaking only *for* oneself instead, the grass (and then it’s only moment to moment — in the sun or the shade, wind, rain, on the shore or path, in the kitchen, bedroom, lounge, before the friend, student, lover, tv, painting, surrounded by music, weeping, laughter, perfume, bells, mist, though ...) -

- I feel⁽¹⁾ like making⁽²⁾ “cont(r)act”⁽³⁾ with everyone who ever really loved me⁽⁴⁾;
this might mean some force, some strategy of intent; a kind of practical love, and it might mean abandonment, or the collecting of stones.

(⁽¹⁾Feel: what is “feel” here, is it a reaching out into the wild-blue-yonder; is it a sensation [“The immediately proximate topo-ontological surface of sensation comprises distance and depth. Distance and depth are creatures of the surface. They unfold from it, in furtherance of the encounter. They are processual continuations of the surface. They are in the twist of it,”] (Massumi, website).

(²)Making: can making be a movement like walking or singing or dreaming, or is it a work with materials like string or ink or paint, or is it speech — a longing to say something or hear something, and to have an unimaginable thought as a result).

(³)Cont(r)act: if I send a letter, will a reply come back; a phone call might be tactless; a notice in a newspaper might be desperate; an email could alarm you — “like a shot out of hell;” and, is cont(r)act literal touch, a pressing, impressing, of hands together, or bodies).

(⁴)This whole sentence [above, beginning with “I feel” and ending with “the collecting of stones”] is a litany, an eulogy, a requiem, a memorial: one archive/here craves another/there).

The interface is a writing way (via), a way (a getting there: a trudge, a glide, a slip, a climb) *to* writing (not a direction or a style though, no, rather a relation to the matter at hand), a very close proximity, a “liquid” process (a whey/weight: a weighing of outer and inner — the face to the world, the face to the other flesh); via: swinging from side to side, touching the appearance of the world (wherever one is) and the appearance of the flesh (whatever its condition), moving relentlessly with a waggish demeanour — being waylaid along the road, ambushed (and ambushing), being worn down/out, and carried away/off (falling in love, being besotted, hot-headed, and invective).



The interface can be an ugly place, tacked on, invisible, cheap, and practical. Still, it's a place, tough and plain. The interface though can be an exquisite silk, a fine cotton, or delicate wool; it can be cut with precision and stitched in the candle-light by hand. Beautifully plain.

5. ... ‘first things first’ is done ... now ... ‘I’ll tell you/U this then, just in case, to cover my hot skin (and given that this is about “love”) ...’: *The Ear Of Never* (a story for U)

You asked me, very quietly, as if not wanting me to answer, or, as if not wanting me to think you were asking a question, something I was expected to answer, so I almost didn’t hear a question, just your voice speaking to me, and your voice is the voice of a lover, so I didn’t mind, even as I knew I would fail with my answer, and so you asked me: what did you write about Marguerite. You asked as if you had known her. And I know you didn’t, that before I spoke of her, you had never thought of her. Even though you’d heard of her, as everyone has.

Perhaps you were being kind, as you mostly are, by showing interest in my interest. In trying to show your kindness. And so I tried to tell you, kindly, about the space between the firing of the guns and the moment of her death; the space between one moment and the next, between the sound of living and the silence of death; the space of the last wound.

I said, that’s what I tried to fill in ... with writing. That’s what I tried to write — that instant, that last long wait, eternity.

Was it enough, what I said? Did you believe me? You sat still. You said nothing. So, I’ll write it all down, “say” it, again.

We were together just a few hours; in our long lives, all we’ll ever have is a few hours. It’s not enough, or it’s too much (in making evident that it was “not enough”). Never should have been, those

hours. Not sure who decided what, who chose to be nowhere else.

I'm writing now to stay with you, to be in the absent company of you — sitting on the couch while you smoke a last cigarette before bed.

I recall a touch with terrible longing — it was brief, light; you will not remember giving it; we were watching the sea and a woman began telling us about the old rooms under the sand, and you put your hand on my back. I did not expect it; the woman kept talking, we kept looking at her, and looking back at the sea, and the touch came and went. I was still alive, and so were you.

I dedicate these words to that touch; only to that touch; not to you; I'm sorry; words, though, will never 'touch' the delicacy of that touch — or my shock.

Days and days have passed, there's no word from you; today, your voice on the phone.

Where to begin then, with this woman, Marguerite Gertrude Zelle (who was known as Mata Hari); I close my eyes and think of you asking: what did you write about Marguerite? And it seems now that that was not a question at all; you used those words as an *endearment*; perhaps they stood for something that you couldn't say, or give — affection; you were giving me "sensation" — like paint on a canvas.

She was executed on October 15, 1917. I wrote her as fiction, it's all I could do. I touched her like you touched me, on her back, so as not to press or push her (backwards, into the dark), or bruise or break her; so as not to change the course of her destiny. I write slowly, slower than ever. Outside the wind blows in the palm tree, and the bamboo beats against the iron fence. I wrote Marguerite-music, moving by phrases, tones, and repetitions.

I find old notes written to myself about her, directing myself: 'essays on dying', I wrote, and, 'a new

waved-and-bobbed hairstyle emphasizes the ovularity of her features.'

(I need a table to work on. Soon I will light a fire each evening. Perhaps I'll turn into a fish or a bird, something's bound to happen, perhaps I'll turn into a blue glass bowl.)

The war began this damp morning. I write about a woman to a man; to you about her. I write also to the woman I write about, Marguerite — as if I truly could. I write to her, to her burial especially, to the moment she crumpled to the ground.

I wait in someone's house while they speak on the phone in another room. The back door's open to the very slight breeze (could be anywhere; in the tropics even). There are mosquitoes, and loud music on the stereo. This is the life one leads; it goes on; I've told you little about Marguerite. She was my excuse (she is still my excuse, here, to write). I would have preferred to write you a letter, but you are out-of-reach. "Here" though is always available, ready; I make a space, lose it, find it, lose it, find it, and so on. Now, as I remember the remembering of Marguerite, I am (ever so) slightly (almost indiscernibly) different — and that too makes me write: she is no excuse now (I've abandoned her); who was she once, in her aliveness, that I've written about. Perhaps that's why I hesitated to answer your question — then and now; she was once-alive, and nothing can touch that.

Tonight someone called her "notorious". I'd never thought of that word for her. A "notorious" woman. It doesn't seem to matter — and I can't say a thing about "you" either. Can't liken you to something I've known. Can't say I miss you, or long for you. I mean, I can't say it, out-loud, to someone else, can't name you, can't tell the tale. This silence, of not saying, of holding my tongue, is under my skin. I whisper, to myself, the crisp cut word "never." There is not even a request by you for this silence (you are the ear of never). I knew it instantly, as a "discreet affair," and knew too to keep it unsaid (to hold it in abeyance, to save it from escaping, to keep you safe), as if having agreed to do so.

A plane passes low, across the damp garden. The war started this morning, that's a fact. It's been a fact all day. Someone walks down the corridor. I am not alone, for a moment; the same sense anyway, of song, of an insistent beat (I call that beat "your eyes"), compelling, hand-to-hand, and murmuring — but surely murmuring. Of course there are her, Marguerite's, facts too. Where she was born, for instance, and when, and to whom. Are you interested, was your interest true. For me, it began when she was arrested. It's from there, that room, that something out-of-the-world began. Although, every single moment up until that "knock knock" lead to her death, a death that hung over her like no-death-at-all (she did not see it coming). Fate is compelling; it could be named, that, fate, as an object, like plastic, vinyl, wax, or plaster (plaster-fate). Does a woman come into the world plastered with her path/fate. Is everything one says already ready to be said (is she "plastered", drunk to her core). It might be true, as here I write you what I have already written, elsewhere ... and what would you be doing this mid-Friday-afternoon. Would you be drinking coffee. Perhaps, perhaps not. I'm alive too, aliveness continues. What I remember is bare(ly) memory; I can't even recall in detail how it was to be with you, but I was touched (madly). It's something though, material even, and a matter of urgency — fungal, fugitive, finite; a disposition which is simple, a mere phrase: listening like a leaf.

6. 'Whatever its complex elements, the pleasure felt by most of us in good ruins is great.' (Macauley, 1984: np)

I live in the older part of Adelaide, next door to the Port. The Port has gone to wrack-and-ruin; it's rundown, neglected, deserted, desolate. It's in the throws though of rejuvenation. Its ruinous state is being erased — like the pub around the corner; the Ethelton Hotel, built in 1879, was demolished a couple of weeks ago despite much opposition from local residents; there was nothing they could do as it was not 'heritage listed' (the hotel had been renovated in recent years and "was in good

nick"). The local paper reported that: 'The spokesman [for the hotel owners] said the Carlisle Tavern [which will replace the hotel] would contain a plaque and a photo dedicated to the history of the Ethelton ...'-[3]

(In the middle of the Port (Port Adelaide) is a worker's cottage saved from demolition by a local historian. In the backyard an archaeological dig was undertaken by a doctoral student from Flinders University. [4] Urban archaeology is relatively rare here. I'll return to The Little House later.) Rose Macauley, in her book *Pleasure Of Ruins*, writes of the host of minor ruin-pleasures:

... looting, carrying away fragments (a treat enjoyed by great looters and small, from Lord Elgin and the Renaissance nobles and popes to the tourist pocketing stone eggs from fallen Corinthian capitals). There is the pleasure of constructing among the ruins a dwelling or a hermitage ... of being portrayed against a ruinous background ... of writing or cutting one's name, as all good tourists have done in all times, of self-projection into the past, of composing poetry and prose, of observing the screech owl, the bat, and the melancholy ghost, and the vegetation that pushes among the crevices and will one day engulf. (Macauley, 1984: np)

The land (beneath our feet) — its very matter and material — is the "ground" of narrative (of durational inheritance, in the scheme of infinite things — and yet somehow invisible, as if we walk on air); and the built structures are easily parted with, their ordinary efficacious designs deemed (judged, nominated, rated, appraised) "eye-sores." [5]

The interface is in the middle, the ruin is in the middle of the world, letting us think of other things, of secrets, as if the ruin sets the secret off, identifies itself sooner or later as the generator of assemblages, of speculative collectives — the ruin is "with" us, ruin with ruin; middle (interfacial) all the way. The secret though is right out in the open (in the face of the interface)- the Port with all its

roads, streets, alleys, bridges, shops, warehouses, museums, wharfs, factories, people, houses, offices, animals, hotels, tunnels, equipment, ships, boats, barges, and so on.

7. The Little House

The Little House is “here,” so is the woman who wants to live in it. The house is cracked and broken. Parts of the ceiling have collapsed. There are bolts in the walls (windows were sealed up for growing marijuana). One room is painted dark red — we call this the Gerhard Richter room. [6]

During the excavation in the backyard, old footings were uncovered, and all the rubbish that had been buried for a hundred years was dug up, sifted, bagged, and labelled — glass, metal, pottery, plastic (a music cassette), cloth, leather, bones (a dog).

We’ve brought many artists to bear upon the house — upon its photogenic ruinous state, its surfaces and ambience; as if to nourish the ghosts, and to haunt it with our own ghosts — an outside wall of various materials looks like a Rosalie Gascoigne mixed media work [7]; a particular patch of paint looks like a Mark Rothko painting [8]; an arrangement of the excavated fragments on a table top reminded us of Joseph Cornell’s boxes [9]; the fine lines in a piece of wood look like an Agnes Martin drawing [10]; all this to help (us) bring the house into the world again, to take other living/dead beings (and their work) to its heart. [11] And yet to do this, to attend to its ruin, to attach ourselves to its specific and multiple surfaces, we have touched our own reflections — we have invaded it like a swarm of ants, eating its absolute dis-interest in our marginal obsessions.

What we (think we) are doing is creating an inter/face — a story — composed of fragments of other stories (lifetimes of art making, talking, criticism, despair, acclaim, neglect, misunderstanding). Still, there will be, at some future time, and momentarily, three (condensed) parallel, inter-acting, infecting “houses,” residing together — not enveloping each

other, not superimposed, not montaged; but, with tense, invisible, independent presence (ghosts-in-arms). I imagine the three ghosts/angels as: the house we “took;” our obsessions (the interface); and the house we “give” (or, come to be with). The interface will be our own instability and sadness and pleasure (an inter-lace/a lashing); in fact three seams, three (condensed) interfaces. [12]

The Little House will have a ladder in the one new room. We call this room The Tower. It is slightly irregular in shape, and taller than the other rooms. (We planned that it extend downward too — as if recalling the excavation and the burying of matter before that event, and as if honouring the ground beneath our feet and its capacity to hold the past (literally and metaphorically); this downward move would be modest — perhaps one or two steps; and then a step or two back up into the garden (this may still come to pass).) The ladder will lean against the wall facing into the house. At the top of the ladder will be a low door (about half the usual size). The door opens onto a small flat rooftop space that lays above a transitional inner space — almost kitchen, almost laundry, almost bathroom. It’s a ladder to (see) the sky (and to watch for shooting stars). The Tower is the house’s “stranger;” a place where the occupant — the human stranger — has only herself to bring (a place for new ruinous beginnings; although it rests of course upon the earth where others have stood and reckoned with themselves). In The Tower there are no standard openings — there is a high window, a low window, and a thin window, and the double glazed doors to the garden will be a little narrower and taller than usual.

From the front The Little House will look, more or less, as it does now.

The thinking toward the ruin of The Little House has little to do with heritage or conservation in terms of restoration or authenticity (with a return to what was imagined, as if a lesson). It does have something to do with both though in terms of forgetting and wondering. ‘How can we build

the future from ruins, or make the present evolve by using the knowledge of past ages? Re-write, re-inscribe the memory of strata that have disappeared, like a palimpsest or a magic slate. To transform history into life demands forgetfulness and the irrational. And instinct too. Selective choice is based on subjectivity and individual will, and refers to the senses and not reason. The re-use of older strata does not amount to a servile imitation but a transposition. As Nietzsche said, we must “be able to transform and incorporate the things of the past, to heal wounds and scars, replace what is lost, re-make broken forms” (Hladik, 2000: 56).

There is nothing to prove this project “a good project,” or a particularly rigorous or instructive way to pay-attention. It’s written about *here* as an a-methodical, a-historical practice; a practice that, in the spirit of ruin, is intermediary (interfacial) — not a this or a that, or a here or a there, but a making of face (or of facing/turning) that faces two (or more) non-opposing imperfect ways (not north south, back front, up down, east west, and so on). [13]

8. ‘She resumed / *The Mind of God*, by Paul Davies, who assumed / Laws of nature were coherent and binding, / bestowing a deep, universal unity – / and so, in that limited sense, might be divine. / She looked around at their corner of chaos, / and sighed’ (Jenkins, 2003: 70).

What do I see when I see my world, and “see” that it’s a continuum of your world, and is (too) a world amidst worlds (definite and indefinite, and accessed via a nod, a wink, a call, an invitation, a loss, a subtle knife); and is what we “is”/are, in our difference, because of you/I in your/my difference; as if born inside a world (our very own), and as if knowing it (its *itness* all wrapped up inside me like a time bomb) by “feel,” by its coming to “us” — as if in a dream; our place as “divine,” as infinite appearing, before which writing (to you/U) appears too (as yet more — ever more, forever-appearance), writing, that is, with its own *seeing*

(writing in the dark). This divine is (the gentle art of no-thing) a constant making in the presence of the world’s making of itself moment to moment, unexpected and sensational — the thing before you (divine manifestation): ‘... the bare thing, which you see before you, that and nothing else is the god. (The ‘thing’ can be an animal, a person, a stone, a word, a thought.) God is never anything other than a singular, bare presence’ (Nancy, 1990: 127). It’s weird, odd, confounding, to think of the “life-of-appearance,” to think that appearance has a life-of-its-own; that it’s a kind of flickering (an interface of glimmer and sparkle and dimness) between “us” appearing and “it” appearing; and our facing it (this life) in every-which-way — in our restless movement and contemplations — makes us unreliable witnesses and mythmakers. Yet *there* ‘it is’: what you cannot know, *here*; and ‘here’ is everywhere in all directions — radiant (painful, death-giving, ruinous) appearingness. [14]

(A break, an arrival, a departure, tears, a deep hollow breath, a tap dripping: ruined places are not abandoned to an utter barrenness, to a vanishing point, instead they are occupied by themselves, by an obvious insecure, indetermined mood; there should be no certain reverence, no more so than elsewhere — here, “hereness” is anyway, despite a thinking of hereness past — glory over [sadness]. To write of ruins, abandonment, and appearance [dis]appearing as “here” — reporting to “there” — calls for a wanderlust writing ... writing held up (interrupted, stalled, slowed, delayed, broken) by the sheer ‘...brilliance of the sun on the sea: millions of scattered places ...’)

“Here” is local, “there” is local — everywhere is “here” and “there;” the “and” of the interface, of the endless multiplying conversation of time-on-earth: in a sense “here” dis/appears in the telling of it to U; the report is more like a sound — a dog barking, a train passing, a siren, a footstep, music, an explosion — that cuts the air, hangs all around for a stunning moment, then ebbs, like a tide, to a knowing, ready and willing, in memory, of what the report has not yet reported. Yet it’s of its place,

not a part of *the* place it reports on — that's all, in telling of the place, it be-comes place itself, and in another report might be mentioned only in passing. The interface collects "ands:" 'What defines [the multiplicity] is the AND, as something which has its place between the elements or between the sets. AND, AND, AND — stammering. And even if there are only two terms, there is an AND between the two, which is neither the one nor the other, nor the one which becomes the other, but which constitutes the multiplicity' (Deleuze & Parnet, 1987: 34).

AND one hears the news from elsewhere, spun like a top — rumours, essays, treatises, dossiers, interviews, poems, songs, films — on radio and tv, in newspapers and journals and books, by phone and email and letter, and in meetings, conferences, classrooms; and the news is fragile, provisional, partial, heart-breaking, funny, unbelievable, and touching.

Today is Saturday, it's a hot summer day. I will



watch a wedding ceremony this afternoon, and see a favourite trio in concert this evening. In the meantime, "here" joins all other places. Its liquid (gluey) concreteness, its strange quivering appearance through the window — like yesterday and last week: hot light, sounds of kids, cars, dogs, birds, planes, trains — presses (upon) the eye and thought, and surfaces/returns as rhythms on the tips of the tongue and the fingers. It beckons you to see what I see ("I wish you were here") and to then say-in-reply what you, U, see (so I can see

what I have never seen). [15] [16]

Notes

[1] Antonin Artaud wrote: 'A thing named is a dead thing, and it is dead because it is separated' (Thévenin, 1998: 43).

[2] Samuel Beckett's set of texts, *Texts For Nothing*, are involuting, volatile, epic, "film-clip," writings which, being moments or life-times, begin where beginning is already well and truly finished, and yet begin anyway, to finish where it can only be that to-begin is all that can, and will, be done — writings for one's life. Text 3 has "here" and "there" as its impossible "life:" It begins:

Leave, I was going to say leave all that. What matter who's speaking, someone said what matter who's speaking. There's going to be a departure, I'll be there, I won't miss it, it won't be me, I'll be here, I'll say I'm far from here, it won't be me. I won't say anything, there's going to be a story, someone's going to try and tell a story. Yes, no more denials, all is false, there is no one, it's understood, there is nothing, no more phrases, let us be dupes, dupes of every time and tense, until it's done, all past and done, and the voices cease, it's only voices, only lies. 'Here, depart from here and go elsewhere, or stay here, but coming and going. Start by stirring, there must be a body, as of old, I don't deny it, no more denials, I'll say I'm a body, stirring back and forth, up and down, as required. With a cluther of limbs and organs, all that is needed to live again, to hold out a little time, I'll call that living. I'll say it's me, I'll get standing, I'll stop thinking, I'll be too busy, getting standing, staying standing, stirring about, holding out, getting to tomorrow, tomorrow week, that will be ample, a week will be ample, a week in spring, that puts the jizz in you. It's enough to will it, I'll will it, will me a body, will me a head, a little strength, a little courage, I'm starting now, a week is soon served, then back here, this inextricable place, far from the days, the far days, it's not going to be easy. And why, come to think, no no, leave it, no more of that, don't listen to it all, don't say it all, it's

all old, all one, once and for all. There you are now on your feet, I give you my word, I swear they're yours, I swear it's mine, get to work with your hands, palp your skull, seat of the understanding, without which nix, then the rest, the lower regions, you'll be needing them, and say what you're like, have a guess, what kind of man, there has to be a man, or a woman, feel between your legs, no need of beauty, nor of vigour, a week's a short stretch, no one's going to love you, don't be alarmed. No, not like that, too sudden, I gave myself a start. And to start with stop palpitating, no one's going to kill you, no one's going to love you and no one's going to kill you, perhaps you'll emerge in the high depression of Gobi, you'll feel at home there. I'll wait for you here, no, I am alone, I alone am, this time it's I must go. (Beckett, 1967: 85-86)

[3] See *Portside Messenger*, Adelaide, Messenger Newspapers, 21.01.04, p. 7; see also <http://www.needapub.com/pubs/adelaide-innerwest/ethel-ton.html#>; <http://www.theadvertiser.news.com.au/printpage/0,5942,8454975,00.html>

[4] See <http://ehlt.flinders.edu.au/archaeology/students/briggs.php>

[5] This is a complex web of stories — political, personal, historical, scientific — which I have unfairly (and tactlessly) touched upon (and as if it is possible to write too). However, what this has in its sight is two (and these have within them countless variations) ways of knowing-seeing — a way which is occupation/visitation, and a way which is occupation/inhabitation; in other words, the world appears different (and it is, and that “it-is” means that “it is” of an entirely other “frequency” or tonality — another world all together [another plan/ce of existence]).

[6] “We” are Sean Pickersgill and myself. For more information on the house and images of the house, see <http://ensemble.va.com.au/lmw/index.html> (The historian is Sandra Morton. She is the woman who will live in The Little House.)

[7] For example, see <http://www.abc.net.au/arts/headspace/tv/express/gascoigne/default.htm>

[8] For example, see <http://www.rothko100.org/>

[9] For example, see http://www.artcyclopedia.com/artists/cornell_joseph.html

[10] For example, see <http://www.studiocleo.com/gallerie/martin/martin.html>

[11] The house is already in the world. It is a wrong-headed state of affairs to deny this by using the expression “into the world again.” It's more that the house in the world will house a human again. It will be an inside for the inside (for the meeting of two heats: the vital surround and the vital flesh). The house itself has been “homeless” — the making of its “hereness” once more is a small gesture toward “saying” — toward making the house, again, an uttered thing. ‘The human finds its place *here*, in the “time for the utterable,” which is the time of transience as such. The historical unfolding of what passes away comes to rest in the earth, its humus. The utterable gives the “lived things” of our human worlds a domestic interior in which to make themselves at home. “Here is the time for the *utterable*, *here*, its home’ (Harrison, 2003: 49).

[12] In Philip Pullman's trilogy *His Dark Materials*, the different worlds exist simultaneously and discretely. Lyra passes into the other world, she leaves behind one world to enter another; the worlds are there, all at once, but their presences are singular and physically/visibly sealed off. Extraordinary (a possible murder) and ordinary (following a cat) circumstances bring the presences, plural, to consciousness.

[13] ‘Beyond a certain state, the ruin no longer refers back to its original state but focuses interest on its own imperfection. The amputated work gains in power of evocation what it loses in formal integrity. The ruin sacrifices to the desire for broken and rough surfaces, the aesthetics of

the picturesque. Infiltrating water causes buckling and cracking, renders flake, walls go to pieces. Amidst this random state and in the micro-fissures of ruined walls, painters saw landscapes. Accidents and ruptures are never clean breaks, they are jagged and fragmented. Walls swell, surfaces become complex. Time's destruction – the deconstruction of the beautiful whole – breaks down classical notions of order and symmetry. The unfinished is at the other end of the chain with regard to the ruined fragment, a chain which links the “not yet” and the “already there.” While the unfinished manifests an insufficiently revealed form potentially present, the struggle of soul against matter, the fragment once belonged to a more complete whole, which was broken and altered. As such it enables a theoretical re-composition. A sign of memory, the paradox is that it takes on the value of the monad, the ultimate unit' (Hladik, 2000: 55).

[14] Misreading Nancy, but trying not to: 'Nancy writes “all art is sacred” — yet art and the divine are not totally distinct things. Which is to say that when the divine manifests itself, art itself is reduced to nothing' (Nancy, 1990: 129).

[15] 'The “topo-ontological” surface...is an abstract surface of encounter, or impingement. Impression. Sensation. The softness of being. Otherwise known as the *imagination*: the vague perception of the world and I emerging together in sensation, differentially unfolding from a contraction in it. The surface of sensation is 'abstract' because if things and I emerge from it, in itself it cannot be any thing, any more than it can be in me. It is all and only in the encounter. What in itself is in nothing. For it *is* the in-which, contraction (the actual immanence of process).

The impingement is given. Cognition follows. It is tweaked into being by the encounter. *This* thing! This beautifully impossibly tasteless thing. This pain in the eye. Where did it come from? How can it be? What do I do now? Laugh? Critique? Buy iridescent paint?' (Massumi, 1997: 782).

[16] The Images:

1. And all the while – while I write – I “picture” another landscape “down south” that I know like the-back-of-my-hand. It's where I come from. I'm not in physical contact with that ground (only the continuation of it as it passes under me here), it's five hours drive away. Still, it's this landscape, this “southness” (there), that accompanies this text (here) – which is a kind of southerly breeze, straight off the Southern Ocean. There are four images of the Southern Ocean “here.”
2. The two images of a small white cup were taken after drinking hot Greek-coffee and turning the empty cup upside down to drain out the remaining liquid so as to “divine” my future (reading the remains).

References

- Akhmatova, Anna. *Twenty Poems*, trans. Jane Kenyon with Vera Sandomirsky (Dunham, Minnesota: Eighties Press & Ally Press, 1985).
- Beckett, Samuel. *Stories And Texts For Nothing* (Grove Press, New York: 1967).
- Delbridge, A. Bernard, JRL., Blair, D., Bulter, S., Peters, P., Yallop, C., (eds.) *The Macquarie Dictionary*, Third Edition, (Sydney: Macquarie University, 1999).
- Deleuze, Gilles and Parnet, Claire. *Dialogues*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson & Barbara Habberjam, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987).
- Derrida, Jacques. 'Le toucher, Touch/to touch him,' in *Paragraph: A Journal of Modern Critical Theory* 16.2, (1993).
- Harrison, Robert Pogue. *The Dominion Of The Dead* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003).
- Hladik, Murielle. 'Figure(s) de la ruine,' in *L'Architecture D'Aujourd'hui*.

Jenkins, John. *A Break in the Weather* (Northcote: Modern Writing Press, 2003).

Massumi, Brian. 'Deleuze, Guattari and the Philosophy of Expression (Involutionary Afterword),' *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature/Revue Canadienne de Littérature Comparée*, Vol. 24, No. 3, (1997).

Nancy, Jean-Luc. *The Inoperative Community*, trans. Peter Connor, Lisa Carbus, Michael Holland, and Simona Sawhney (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990).

_____. *The Birth To Presence*, trans. Brian Holmes & Others (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993).

Pullman, Philip. *The Amber Spyglass, His Dark Materials 111* (London: Scholastic Children's Books, 2000).

Roubaud, Jacques. *The Plurality of Worlds of Lewis*, trans. Rosmarie Waldrop (Dalkey Archive Press: Illinois, 1995).

Thévenin, Paule and Derrida, Jacques. *The Secret Art of Antonin Artaud*, trans. Mary Ann Caws (Cambridge MA. and London: The MIT Press, 1998).

The Two Ulmers in e-Media Studies: Vehicle and Driver

Craig Saper

There's an irreducible gap between replicator and vehicle, between genotype and phenotype, between software instructions and hardware implementation: in short, between the ideality of a repeating informational pattern, and the contingency of any particular material embodiment.

(Shaviro, 2003)

Lesson one

In the penultimate chapter of *Applied Grammatology* (1985), Gregory Ulmer describes the common reading of Sergei Eisenstein's biography in terms of an opposition between the early and later works. In the earlier works, Eisenstein experimented with intellectual montage, picto-ideographic presentation, and the use of formal matching strategies to elicit specific ideological responses among his ideal audience. In the later works, and under the explicit threat from Stalinist censors and thugs, his work has a realist cast and resembles Hollywood movies in both form and content. Counter to the prevailing sentiment in film studies, Ulmer reads the later work in terms of the earlier work to both confound the apparent opposition and to suggest a model for applied grammatology.

Ulmer's reading resembles Roland Barthes' *S/Z* (1974), a re-reading of a Realist story to recover a visual and semantic montage of the fragments with which the story emerges. Ulmer re-reads Eisenstein's last completed film as a picto-ideographic (visual semantic) montage.



Lesson two: modeling

My own work, in *Artificial Mythologies* (1997), used a similar strategy to read Roland Barthes' earliest work on semiology and cultural mythologies as if it were written after his last work, *Camera Lucida* (1981) that focused on the *absolutely particular* that resists culture. Of course, most critics had agreed that the later works, after *S/Z*, moved Barthes's concerns away from the grand meta-narrative explanations of cultural meanings' machinations and toward an apparently phenomenological impressionism. Ulmer's contribution to the myth of the two Barthes was 'Fetishism in Roland Barthes's Nietzschean Phase.' My interpretation of the earlier sober demythologies, as if performed by the later fetishistic hedonist, suggests that theorists perform themselves the first time as tenor (deeply embedded meaning in the lineage of teacher, shaman, analyst), the second as vehicle (style, presentation, picto-ideographic, and performance). It stages the relationship among the various moments of authorship as a series of

signifiers. As Jacques Derrida writes, 'There is not a single signified that escapes, even if recaptured, the play of signifying references that constitute language' (Derrida, 1976, 7).

Lesson three: Performance

Recent computer-assisted scholarship on Shakespeare's plays demonstrated that his later plays borrowed vocabulary, syntax, and style from the early plays. As he was writing the later plays, he was an actor in his earlier plays. One could make a similar claim about Ulmer's work in relation to his own performances. His videos, like *Reading Reading TV on TV* (1987), in which a Professor character claims that a sinkhole in Gainesville, Florida (Devil's Millhopper) is Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, performed himself as a character talking about the function of the unconscious (the ghost). Shakespeare is the model of writing by recovery and performance, Ulmer the model for reading (recognizing the metaphoric character of language in its vehicle and tenor) as abreaction and tele-performance:

This giant sinkhole (500 feet wide, 120 feet deep) was formed when the roof of an underground limestone cavern collapsed. The cool environment allows growth of unique lush vegetation...
(MobilTravelGuide.com)



How does one analyze the essential character and meaning of an important and influential thinker and theorist? How does one analyze Greg Ulmer? In this analysis, how can one use figures, picto-ideographic objects and sounds, and intellectual montage?

Lesson four: Structuring Absence

Using intellectual montage's production strategies, Ulmer can function as a trope — a picto-ideographic figure. In fact, Ulmer offers a guide and demonstration of this strategy in his early work on Jacques Lacan's seminar space. Like the essay in this volume by Jon McKenzie, my story begins with a lunch meeting with Professor Ulmer. We had organized an independent study around lunch — philosophy over lunch — borrowing a Conti-

mental way of knowing (but walking to the local sub shop). It was our version of Lacan's seminars.



Applied grammatology uses psychoanalytic practices, including the notion of a structuring absence or un-

conscious, to challenge the metaphysics of presence and the self-conscious subject (the tenor). Ulmer suggests that one could retain the structure of Lacan's presentational strategies 'while abandoning its reference' or tenor (Ulmer 1985: 189). This strategy depends on what Ulmer calls double inscription that draws on both conscious and unconscious machinations, scientific and poetic approaches, in one operation. Now, though, the tenor does not dominate and force the poetic into effacement. One of the key works on the applica-

tion of psychoanalysis to culture is Freud's study of Michelangelo's Moses. Freud carefully articulates the possible meanings of the figure's posture especially in reference to how the fingers grasp the beard. From the beard, Freud draws conclusions about the structuring absence of the meaning of the figure — that is, what Moses is looking at is not portrayed. We have only the turned head and the grasp of the beard to guide us about what Moses' gaze sees (and how what he sees forms his



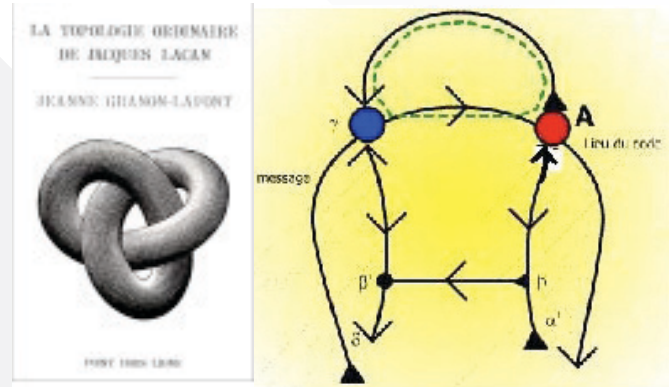
attitude, character, and, ultimately, his identity).

Lesson five: Very Hungry Caterpillar (Metamor- phosis Over Lunch).

Lacan's use of knots to explain psychoanalysis and identity formation resembles how young children learn about culture through word play, allegory, and figurative play. Ulmer references Lacan's

discussion of these literal and figurative knots to discuss the performative aspects of applied grammatology.

Eric Carle's book about *Walter the Baker* uses the knots of the pretzel to create an allegory about culture, creativity born under the sign of the negative (the cat's spilt milk), and the relation between naming and identity. Ulmer, especially in his earlier



works from the 1980s like his essay on Theory as a hobby, draws explicitly on children's workbooks (including visual images) and the knots used to describe the formation of identity. The identity of Ulmer may also depend on applying the knot logic to his more recent works that he employs in his early work on applied grammatology. Here is the description of an important text in early literacy education:

From Publishers Weekly

From the author of *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* comes the story of a baker who invents the pretzel. Carle's whimsical, frenetic collages seem fresh from the oven, even though they were first published 25 years ago. Ages 4-8.

Book Description

Walter the Baker is famous for his breads, rolls, cookies, tarts, and pies. The Duke and Duchess especially love his warm sweet rolls, delivered fresh to their castle every morning. But, one day the cat spills the milk, and Walter is forced to serve the Duke and Duchess rolls made with water. After one bite the Duke throws down his roll in disgust and summons Walter to the castle. He threatens to banish the baker unless he can take the same dough and make a good-tasting roll that the rising sun can shine through three times. Will Walter succeed in his task, or will he have to leave his town forever?

This Pretzel logic is born from the literal name of the father. Ulmer in a number of his works from

the late 1980s, especially in the video *Reading Reading on TV on TV*, discusses the importance of his father's name, Walter, and its connection to Walter Benjamin. He also talks about the need to leave his Montana town even as he takes his driving of his father's International Harvester with him (figuratively as he studies Comparative Literature). Eric Carle's tale about the invention of the pretzel includes a glossary and more information about how the invention depended on a type of object-word play. The parallel story, drawn from folk tales, of its name and shape helps highlight its importance to the Ulmer figure. The shape, according to one tale, was produced by a monk in the sixth century. The monks gave out the pretzels as a reward for children; the shape is based on the arms crossed in the chiasmic shape during a type of prayer in which one crosses the arms and grabs the opposite shoulder (*chiasma* is the term for metaphoric figuration as well as the crossed keys symbol for Heaven). To get a sense of how that type of prayer looks like the figure of a pretzel, one should cross the arms in this fashion. The three holes stand for the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Lacan translates these figures, in his knots, into the Symbolic, Imaginary, and Real, and Ulmer takes Lacan's pretzel reading and applies it to the reader's context (Walter, Ulmer leaving home, and the trace or gram). The name itself started as a little reward (Italian: *prestiola*). That little reward, or morsel or figuratively the gram, takes the name Brezel, derived from Latin *bracchiātus*, "having branches," itself from *bracchium*, "branch, arm." Another tale recounts how a King accused a baker of larceny and demanded that the baker produce a pastry through which the sun could shine through three times. The Baker ingeniously made three holes in the pretzel to avoid the punishment. Of course, the tale of a little reward also connects to the allegory of the Hungry Ghost found in many religions. For example, in Ancient Rome, the hungry ghosts of a family's ancestors figured in the festival of Lemuria (a name that Ulmer makes use of in many of his works since lemur is an acronym for ulmer); it was the duty of the *pater familias* to appease the larvæ of his ancestors with an offer-

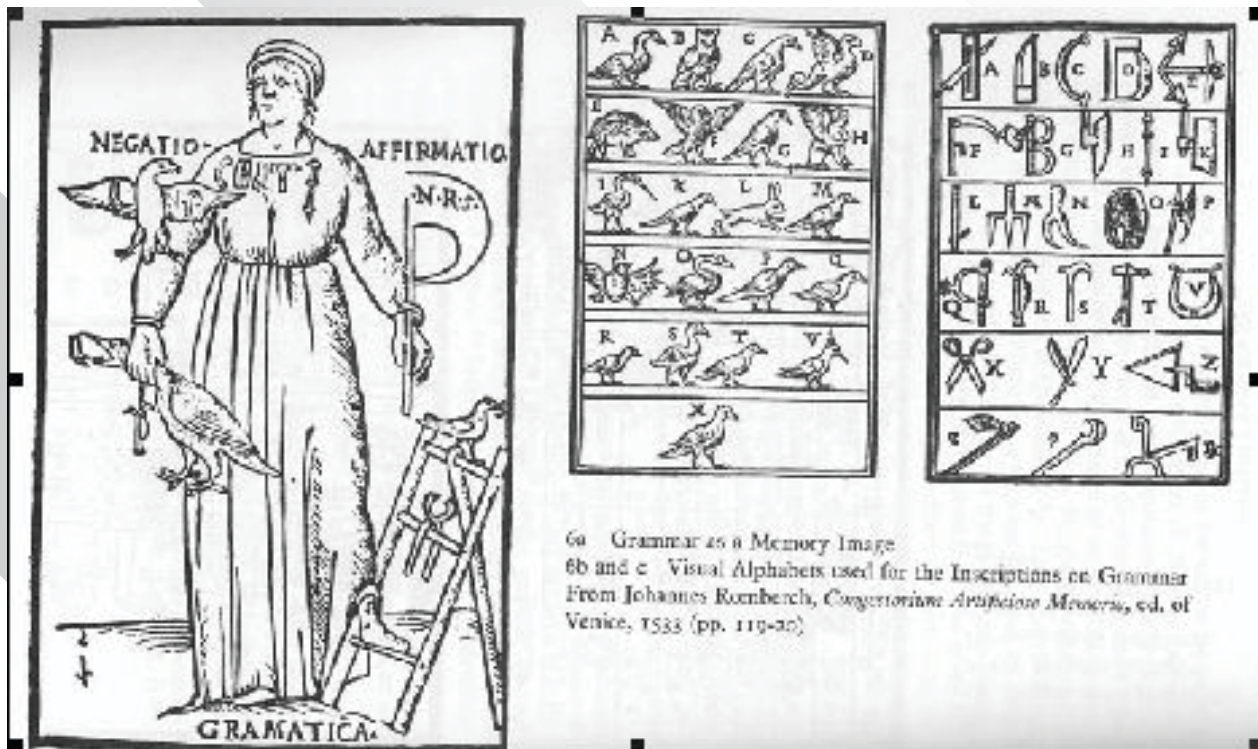


ing of beans. In the Carle book, the name pretzel comes from the phrase, 'Pray tell us,' which the King asks the baker, 'Pray tell us, what do you call this thing?' And the baker, thinking quickly about what to say, makes a homophone from the phrase and answers: pretzel. The motivation for the invention of the pretzel was the cat (who drank the milk), and likewise Ulmer has a similar motivation. Ulmer's later works focus much on the acronym CATt, as a mnemonic device to describe an *inventio*: Comparison, Analogy, Theory, and tale. It becomes in condensed and figurative form the explanation of his entire method. The *inventio* of the pretzel wisdom leads to the production of a staging of the Mago.

mago, -a m,f (hechicero) wizard, magician
el mago de Oz, the Wizard of Oz
los Reyes Magos, the Wise Men

Lesson six: Vehicles (and identity)

In the star-studded movie, *If I Had A Million* (1932), W. C. Fields as Rollo La Rue and Alison Skipworth as Emily, a pair of old-time second-rate actors,



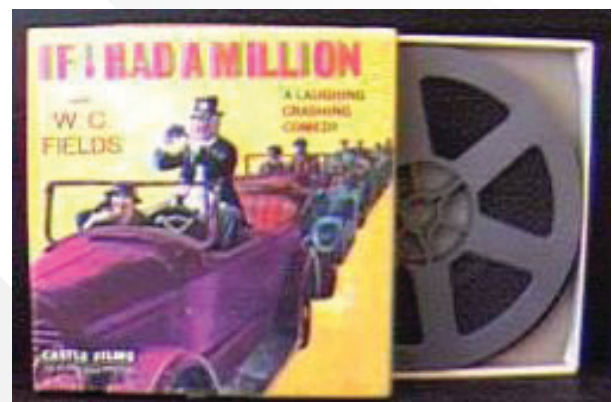
inherit one million dollars from a wealthy man who wants to give away his money to unlikely losers. Rollo buys a fleet of second-hand cars, and has the entire fleet driven behind him as he drives around town smashing into one bad driver after another. Then, with his vehicle a wreck, he gets into the next car and soon finds someone else smashing into the latest car.

The vehicle out of control became one of Fields' most loved bits. In his hit movie, *The Bank Dick* (1940), Fields, as incompetent bank guard Egbert Souse, is taken hostage by bank robbers who force him to drive the getaway vehicle. Eventually his nervous, manic, and out of control driving drives the robbers to insanity.

The sense of hilarious and excessive destruction and loss, in a Potlatch fashion, as a fitting corollary to wealth and accumulation, enacts Ulmer's theory of car accidents using George Bataille's theory of potlatch and the accursed share. The vehicle, in the trope of identity, gets away from the driver only to find another vehicle and another in a long line of signifiers. The film enacts in picto-ideographic form, Lacan's theory of identity.

Lesson seven: Toward a Post(e)-Pedagogical Grammar.

The Ulmers exist side-by-side in a grammatical structure — one he discusses at length in *Applied Grammatology*. Some of his work, especially in the 1980s and early 1990s, sought to reinvent the modern essay, while much of his more recent work, especially in the late 1990s through 2005, has a Swiftian, or ancient, style of imitation. The later works use the form of the grammar or composition textbook, while the earlier works study the allegory of the explicitly knife wielding woman (Gramatica). What if these two FIGURES



– each important in their own right — talked to each other as if in a dialogue: not in a pedagogical Platonic dialogue, but an Ulmerian post(e)-pedagogical demonstration? The question is not quite, what if he had published ‘Handbook for a Theory Hobby’ (1988) or made the video for Paper Tiger TV (1987), after the series including *EmerAgency* (1998) and *Internet Invention* (2003)? Rather, in this formulation, the earlier works performed the later works the way Shakespeare performed the earlier works while writing the later works. *Internet Invention*, in the style of Jonathan Swift’s ‘Battle of the Books,’ functions as an example of imitation used for other ends. Ulmer in his early works discusses a scene, cited by Roland Barthes in his Nietzschean Phase, in The Marx Brothers’ *A Night at the Opera* (1935): Chico and Groucho eventually rip up the contract in their efforts to make the



Groucho: Don't point that beard at me, it might go off!

contract benefit their own ends. It is a contract for a tenor, and, in that sense, they rip up the contract between tenor and vehicle. We left the philosophy over lunch shop and walked back to campus. The vehicles whizzed by us... and we followed the Ulmers.

Bibliography

Barthes, Roland. *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill & Wang, 1974).

_____. *Camera Lucida*. Reflections on Photography, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill & Wang, 1981).

Derrida, Jacques. *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976).

MobilTravelGuide.com. Editorial Review of Devil's Millhopper, <http://MobilTravelGuide.com/>.

Saper, Craig. *Artificial Mythologies*. A Guide to Cultural Invention (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

Shaviro, Steven. *Connected or What It Means to Live in the Network Society*, Electronic Mediations series (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).

Ulmer, Greg. *Internet Invention: From Literacy to Electracy*, Writing and Technology Series (Boston: Longman Publishers, 2003).

_____. *EmerAgency*, <http://www.nwe.ufl.edu/elf/>, 1998.

_____. ‘Handbook for a Theory Hobby,’ *Visible Language* 22 (1988): 399-422.

_____. *Applied Grammatology: Post(e)-Pedagogy from Jacques Derrida to Joseph Beuys*, (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985).

_____. ‘Reading Reading TV on TV’, Paper Tiger TV, 1987.

_____. ‘Fetishism in Roland Barthes’ Nietzschean Phase,’ *Papers on Language and Literature* 14 (1978): 334-355.

Diagrammatology

Rowan Wilken

...the operation of the diagram, its function, as Bacon says, is to “suggest.”
(Deleuze, 1993: 194)

‘Deconstruction,’ Jacques Derrida writes, ‘is inventive or it is nothing at all; it does not settle for methodical procedures, it opens up a passage-way, it marches ahead and marks a trail’ (Derrida, 1989:42). Within architectural theory, at least, this deceptively simple message appears to have been forgotten (if it was ever fully heeded). An act of amnesia hastened, it would seem, at the 1992 Anywhere conference in Yufuin, Japan. It was here that Derrida reputedly refused to ‘outline a project for the new’ for architecture (Speaks, 1998:28). One can only presume that this refusal, to name one reason among many possible reasons, was at least in part because, as noted above, the new is already present within deconstruction in the form of invention. Derrida also apparently refused to ‘offer [the assembled] architects a clear way to convert deconstruction (as the theoretical protocol) into architectural form’ (Speaks, 1998:28). For the architectural fraternity, this double refusal only served to fuel a ‘growing and palpable disappointment with deconstruction’ (Speaks, 1998:28). Not surprising, then, that deconstruction should subsequently fall out of architectural favour, replaced by, among other things, a renewed interest in diagrams. [1]

Drawing together Derrida’s interest in grammar and the inventive, and contemporary architectural interest in diagrams, this paper proposes the notion of “diagrammatology.” [2] Diagrammatology is understood here as a generative process:

a ‘metaphor’ or way of thinking — diagrammatic, diagrammatological thinking — which, in turn, is linked to poetic thinking. This understanding is informed by contemporary architectural theory which conceives of the diagram as a ‘temporary formulation of intentions still to be realized, a machine for learning and change,’ a “heuristic method” (Confurius, 2000:5). This paper develops diagrammatology through example, by exploring three iterations of the (architectural) diagram. The first iteration is Derrida’s choral grid diagram, which emerged from his reading of the chora section of Plato’s *Timaeus* — a reading that framed his collaboration with the architect Peter Eisenman on Bernard Tschumi’s Parc de la Villette project. The second iteration is the use Gregory Ulmer subsequently made of Derrida’s choral diagram and reading of the *Timaeus* in the development of the genre of “mystory” and “heuretics” (the “logic of invention”). The third iteration uses the choral grid as a guiding figure for speculating on the intermingled nature of contemporary tele-technologies.

Choral Work

In 1983 the Swiss-French architect Bernard Tschumi won the international competition to design a new 125-acre park, Parc de la Villette, for the former slaughterhouse site in the northeast corner of Paris. Tschumi’s successful scheme for Villette is organised according to a strict point-grid system, with each point appearing at 120-metre intervals and each marked by a bright red 10 x 10 x 10 metre ‘neutral space’ cube or *Folie* (Tschumi, 1987:ii). The program for Villette is dense in allu-

sion, and includes an elaborate play on the various meanings of “folly/folie” as façade, madness, insanity, and was conceived in part as homage to Borges, Burroughs, Cocteau, Queneau, and Bataille, among others. Also included in the site are galleries and segments of a ‘cinematic promenade’ of gardens, many of which were designed by individual designers or in collaboration. The best known of these collaborations is Tschumi’s invitation to Peter Eisenman and Jacques Derrida to work together to design a garden within Villette Park. Six brainstorming sessions took place, during which Peter Eisenman’s design team met with Derrida to develop a plan for a garden at Villette. Despite these sessions, no ultimate scheme was realised from this collaborative pairing; we will come to one of the many reasons for this in a moment.

In the first session, Derrida responded to Eisenman’s invitation by providing the architect with a fragment of what was later to become a much longer reading of Plato’s *Timaeus*, entitled “Chora.” [3] Derrida’s partial text examines ‘a very enigmatic passage in the *Timaeus*’ in which ‘Plato discusses a certain [singularly unique] place’ known as *chora* (also *khora*, *khōra*):

In Greek, *chora* means ‘place’ in very different senses: place in general, the residence, the habitation, the place where we live, the country. It has to do with interval; it is what you open to ‘give’ place to things, or when you open something for things to take place. [...] Chora is the spacing which is the condition for everything to take place, for everything to be inscribed. The metaphor of impression or printing is very strong and recognizable in this text. It is the place where everything is received as an imprint. There have been many interpretations of *chora*, typically reducing *chora* or projecting into *chora* various systems, Kant’s for example. Chora resists all these interpretations. (Derrida, 1987: 9-10)

Having thus introduced the notion of *chora* to his co-collaborator, Derrida explains his own interest

in it:

What interests me is that since *chora* is irreducible to the two positions, the sensible and the intelligible, which have dominated the entire tradition of Western thought, it is irreducible to all the values to which we are accustomed. [...] Chora receives everything or gives place to everything, yet Plato insists that in fact it has to be a virgin place, and that it has to be totally foreign, totally exterior to anything that it receives; so, in a sense, it does not receive anything — it does not receive what it receives nor does it give what it gives. (Derrida, 1987: 10)

In other words, Derrida explains, ‘everything inscribed in it erases itself immediately, while remaining in it. It is thus an impossible surface – it is not even a surface, because it has no depth’ (Derrida, 1987: 10). [4]

Within the context of the Villette garden project, ‘because *chora* is a sort of radical void (though not a void)’ it is suggested that ‘the project be simple, even empty’ (Kipnis, 1987:139). As Jeffrey Kipnis points out:

Because of the role of the four elements – earth, air, fire and water – in Plato’s text on *chora*, Derrida suggests they be symbolized in the project, sand for earth, light for fire, etc.’ (Kipnis, 1987:139)

“Choral Work” is the title invented by Eisenman to describe this collaborative enterprise. [5] For Derrida at least, this is a particularly apt and evocative title, with its layered evocations of *chora*, coral growth, and of choreography, choir and concert (‘how could I not be reminded of the *Music for the Royal Fireworks*, of the chorale, of Corelli’s influence, of that “architectural sense” we always admire in Handel’) (Derrida, 1987: 95-101). Encouraged to contribute to this Choral Work some form of non-written text in order to distil his ideas — that is, to “write,” if one can say, *without* a word’ — Derrida, ‘improvising in the airport and then in the plane,’ produces the following sketch

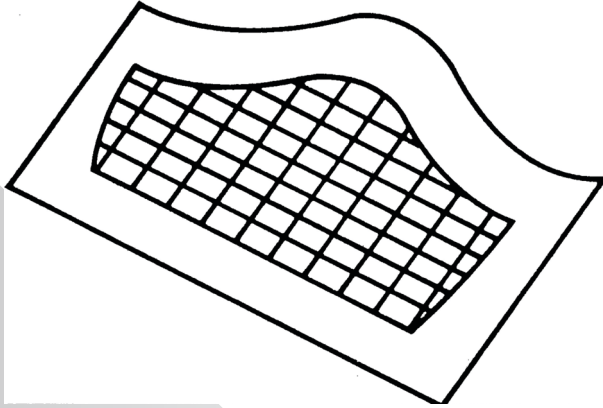


diagram (Derrida, 1987: 185).

Source: Bennington and Derrida, 1993: 406.

Accompanying this diagram is the following explanatory text:

I propose then [...] a metallic object, gilded (there is some gold in the passage of *Timaeus* on *chora* [...]), planted oblique to the sun, neither vertical nor horizontal, a solid frame resembling, at the same time, a framework (loom), a sieve, or a grille (grid), and also a stringed musical instrument (piano, harp, lyre): strings, stringed instrument, vocal chords, etc. And more than grille, grid, etc., it will have a certain rapport with a selective and interpretive filter, telescope, or photographic revealer, a machine, fallen from the sky, after having photographed; photographic filter and aerial view, which allows the reading and the screening (sifting?) of the three sites, the three layers (PDE, BT, LV). And more than a stringed instrument, it will make a sign (signify?) to the concert and the multiple chorale, the *chora* of *Choral Works*. (Derrida, 1987: 185)

As for explanatory interpretation, Derrida adds: I think that nothing need be inscribed on this sculpture [...] except for possibly the title and a signature, unfigured somewhere. (Choral Work, by ... 1986) as well as one or two Greek words (Plokanon, seidmena, etc.) for discussion, among other things. (Derrida, 1987: 185)

The significance for the Villette project of Derrida's tutor-text and diagram can be revealed by turning to the second iteration of his reading of the *chora* in Plato's *Timaeus*. The second iteration — remembering that 'iteration always involves alteration' — is the use that has been made of Derrida's choral grid diagram and reading by Gregory Ulmer in his own researches into pedagogy, method, and invention (Tofts, 2004:59).

Chorography

The choral grid diagram — with the *khōra* as crible, sieve or sift — appears on the cover of *Teletheory* (1989), the second book in Ulmer's trilogy of invention. It also features prominently in the final section of *Teletheory* in Ulmer's example of a mystorical compilation: 'Derrida at the Little Bighorn.' Here, it would seem, Ulmer draws on Eisenman's insight that 'the quarry is a form of *chora*' to think through the "mystorical" significance of his father Walt's Sand and Gravel plant and the sieving screens used there to size gravel. Yet, in 'Derrida at the Little Bighorn' the notion of *khōra* and the choral grid are relatively minor elements in a kind of larger collage-montage text which draws together the three registers of the personal, the popular, and the academic.

It is not until *Heuretics* (1994), the third book in his trilogy of learning through discovery and invention, that Ulmer most fully incorporates Derrida's reading of *khōra* (and not just the sketch diagram Derrida hastily furnishes by way of illustration/distillation). In *Heuretics*, *khōra* holds a key place in Ulmer's development of 'the logic of invention' (heuretics) as a method for 'thinking and writing electronically' (Ulmer, 1994). [6]

To begin with, Ulmer discovers that 'in order for rhetoric to become electronic, the term and concept of *topic* or *topos* must be replaced by *chora*' in its richer yet more enigmatic sense. (Ulmer, 1994:48) 'This,' Ulmer writes, 'is what I learned from Derrida' (48). "Place" (or more accurately

khōra) subsequently holds twofold significance for Ulmer. First, it establishes a ‘valuable resonance for a rhetoric of invention concerned with the history of ‘place’ in relation to memory’ (39). Secondly, and working from an understanding of *khōra* as ‘an area in which genesis takes place,’ Ulmer sees an aspect of the task of his study to ‘rethink the association of invention with place before “place” was split into *topos* and *chora*’ (48 & 70).

Furthermore, in developing this heurctic method, the documentary record of the Eisenman/Derrida brainstorming sessions is read as a vital example of learning (and problem-solving) through invention. Ulmer suggests that in these sessions Derrida performs a kind of double manoeuvre. Derrida’s contribution to the design ‘is to propose to Eisenman the Platonic notion of space [...] not so much for their own sake but as a model for an invention strategy. Chora evokes an image of cosmological creation for a park of creativity’ (63). At the same time,

Derrida mimed the unusual strategy of Socrates in this dialogue [in the *Timaeus*]. Rather than leading the discussion as he normally did, here Socrates placed himself in the position of listener, of active receiver or receptacle, of the discourse. [...] In the six planning sessions leading to the design of the folly, Derrida performs *Timaeus* and places himself in the same relationship to Peter Eisenman and his collaborators that Socrates held in relation to Timaeus and his companions. Derrida mimes Socrates, then, but it is not the interrogating Socrates of Platonism. In the first session, Derrida explains that he comes to the project with one idea that he wants to introduce into the process. (Ulmer, 1994: 64-65)

This “idea,” as noted earlier, is the “impossible surface” of the chora.

An impossible surface: the perfect figure or “metaphor,” it would seem, for an impossible project. As Ulmer puts it, ‘the goal [with Villette] is not just to

design a folly but to explore the invention process itself by means of this problem’ (Ulmer, 1994: 66). Herein lays Ulmer’s interest in the project: ‘the impossibility of chorography is analogous to Eisenman’s difficulty when he accepted *chora* as the program for his folly. He had to give architectural form to that which is unrepresentable’ (66). It is, for Ulmer, a question of developing ‘the method of no method (the possible impossible)’ (67). The name he gives to this ‘no-method’ of invention, this ‘illogic of sense,’ is “heuristics.” And if ‘the general name for generating a method out of theory is *heuristics*, the particular name of the method is *chorography*’ (39) — a method that is designed for ‘writing and thinking electronically’ in an age of electronic hypermedia (45). Ulmer characterises this method (after J. Hillis Miller) as thinking that is ‘goal-directed without knowing exactly where it is going (it is tele-illogical)’ (Ulmer, 1989: 19; Ulmer, 1994: 47); it is learning that is ‘more like discovery than proof’ (Ulmer, 1994: 57).

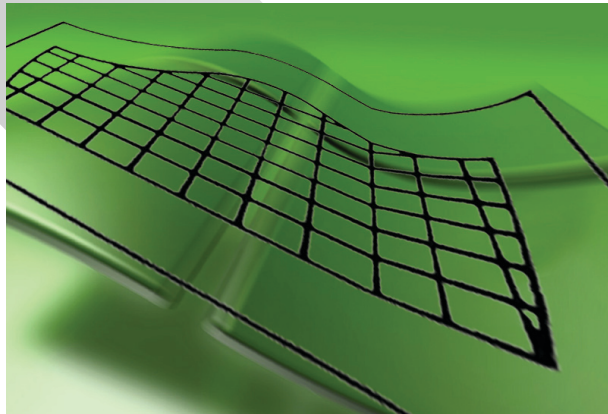
Ulmer’s study has not been without criticism. [7] Even so, it has had lasting influence and remains a particularly important contribution in ‘bringing into relationship the three levels of sense — common, explanatory, and expert’ (Ulmer, 1989: vii); in developing a method (heuristics, chorography) for ‘thinking electronically’ (Ulmer, 1994: 45); and in its emphasis on the (il)logic of invention (and on rethinking the “place” of invention). [8]

Chorographical coincidence: the double winnow/window

To these first two iterations of the Derridean (architectural) diagram (and that is to say of diagrammatology in general), a third can be added. In the course of writing the preceding text, and throughout my own ongoing research into tele-technologies and issues of place and community, a certain chorographical coincidence has presented and continues to present itself to me. The coincidence is this: there is an uncanny similarity between the Derridean choral grid or sieve diagram and Microsoft’s Windows XP icon. Indeed, the two can be overlaid, one on top of the other, to create a col-

lage-montage, a kind of double winnow/window or filter/screen.

What is of interest in this coincidence is the capacity of the diagram – and of this particular diagram – ‘to organize and suspend diverse kinds of information within a single graphic or set of graphic configurations’ (Lobsinger, 2000: 22). To offer, that is, ‘a logical and abstract means for representing, thinking about and explaining the complex dynamic and information dense conditions we confront;’ to serve, in other words, as a conceptual



tool ‘that approximates our experience of the real’ (Lobsinger, 2000: 22).

The coincidence of the double winnow/window diagram is explored here as a kind of guiding figure (or “interpretive filter”) for engaging with the intermingled nature of contemporary teletechnologies – one which draws from both the Derridean and Ulmerian iterations of the choral diagram. This engagement with teletechnologies via the overlaid double winnow/window diagram follows Ulmer’s notion of electronic writing insofar as it is more concerned with discovery than proof. That is to say, it is prospective, in the sense of mining or prospecting, an opening up to speculation of various “veins” (within the lode that constitutes the whole apparatus of teletechnology in general) in order to see what they might yield and where they might lead.

Yet I hesitate to describe the discovery of this coincidence, as Ulmer might, as a “Eureka moment.”

Rather, it is a coincidence that is resisted due to a fear that in aligning the Windows icon (which stands as a kind of metonym not just for Bill Gates and Microsoft and all that both might represent, but for globalised telecommunications and media production in general) with the choral grid (which in a similar way might stand, metonymically, for the philosophy of Jacques Derrida) there is a risk, through this surface alignment, of merely perpetrating yet another form of violence against Derrida and the intricacies of his thought (not to mention against Ulmer and his thought).

However, despite such an unlikely convergence, such apprehension, it would seem, need not be restrictive. It is Derrida who in fact writes that ‘interesting coincidences are necessary coincidences’ (Derrida, 1987: 171). [9]

Coincidence must be loved, received, treated in a certain way. The question is, in which way? Coincidence must be respected, though it is not easy. Such respect demands an orientation, a disposition and exercise to respect the important aspects of the coincidence. (Derrida, 1987:172)

In the present context, then, what might this disposition be? The following preliminary observations provide a useful initial point of orientation and departure from which to exercise and respect the important aspects of the chorographical coincidence suggested in the above diagram (and in/by diagrammatology). The etymology of diagram (*di/a* + *gram*) reveals something of the potential that diagrammatology and the above double winnow/window diagram hold for negotiating binary thinking and for critically engaging with the contemporary apparatus of teletechnologies. According to one possible derivation of the word diagram, *di-* is from the Greek *dis-*, meaning ‘twice, two, double’. And according to a second, more common etymological formation, *dia-* means ‘through,’ and *-gram*, from *grapho*, means ‘to write,’ and ‘denotes a thing written or recorded, often in a certain way’ (diagrammatically, for example). Thus, dia-

grammatology permits the possibility of thinking *through* the double (di). That is to say, it is *through writing* (dia+gram) that one is able to *think through* binaries, in both senses of the word through: as a way of simultaneously working *with* and *against* binary oppositions, of ‘undoing-preserving’ opposites as Spivak puts it (Spivak, 1997: xliii). [10] It is this very act of ‘thinking through opposites,’ of ‘undoing-preserving,’ that I see as captured in the aforementioned chorographical coincidence of the double winnow/window.

Let us (re)turn – albeit far too briefly and only by way of outline – to the issue of the diagram, and of this particular winnow/window (filter/screen) diagram, as an abstract means for representing, thinking about and explaining the complex conditions we face, and the question of what these conditions might be.

If a name could be put to this winnow/window diagram, it might well be a double name – that which Derrida terms the ‘two traits’ of actuality: “artifactuality” and “actuvirtuality” (Derrida & Stiegler, 2002: 3). The coining of these two ‘portmanteau nicknames’ (3) is a continuation of Derrida’s deep-seated interest in ‘thinking through binaries’ and revealing what Niall Lucy describes as ‘the “aporetic” moment’ or “blind spots” that structure all oppositional logic (Lucy, 2004: 1). In this particular instance, these issues are explored by Derrida around a consideration of the notion of actuality and “our experience of the present [...] as something that is produced (made, made up)” (Lucy, 2004:3). Actuality, Derrida writes, ‘is not given but actively produced, sifted, invested, performatively interpreted by numerous apparatuses which are *factitious* or *artificial*, hierarchizing and selective [...]’ (Derrida & Stiegler, 2002: 3). Derrida coins the term “artifactuality” to describe these processes. The second trait of “actuality” is captured in Derrida’s insistence ‘on a concept of *virtuality* (virtual image, virtual space, and so virtual event) that can doubtless no longer be opposed, in perfect philosophical serenity, to actual reality in the way that philosophers used to distinguish between

power and act, *dynamis* and *energeia*,’ and so forth (Derrida & Stiegler, 2002: 6). Derrida coins the term “actuvirtuality” to describe this second trait. The import of this insistence on the artifactuality/actuvirtuality of teletechnological experience is ‘to let the future open’ (Derrida & Stiegler, 2002: 21): It is to show that what counts as actuality in the present can no longer be confined to the ontological opposition of the actual and the virtual, despite the ongoing necessity of this opposition to every form of politics. (Lucy, 2004: 6)

Derrida’s ‘thinking through’ of the traditional ontological opposition of the actual and the virtual (and of the actual as the ‘undeconstructible opposite of artifice and the artefact’) thus holds manifold implications for media and cultural theory that extend far beyond a simple commentary on the way in which media produce rather than simply record events (Lucy, 2004: 4). This reading necessitates a responsibility to analyse the media, ‘to learn how the dailies, the weeklies, the television news programs are *made*, and *by whom*’ (Derrida & Stiegler, 2002: 4). A responsibility that is made all the more urgent by the fact that, in our time, ‘the least acceptable thing on television, on the radio, or in the newspapers today is for intellectuals to take their time or to waste other people’s time there’ (Derrida & Stiegler, 2002: 6-7).

Moreover, not only does artifactuality and actuvirtuality necessitate a responsibility to analyse media, it is a responsibility that is open to the future and open to the other.

Such an understanding of the actual as what is always ‘actively produced’ and ‘performatively interpreted’ is not an excuse for disengaging from public life or for affecting a disinterest in real-historical events. If the condition of actuality is that it must be made, then it must be able to be made differently [...]. That is why it’s possible to make another artefact of the other — as the *arrivant*, the absolute stranger. (Lucy, 2004:6)

In practical terms, Lucy suggests, ‘remaining as open as possible to the radical alterity of others [...] means only that, as a place from which to

start, an artefact of the other *arrivant* leaves open the greatest space for the possibility of a non-violent future to come' (Lucy, 2004: 6).

To return, momentarily, to the winnow/window diagram: where Derrida's choral grid serves as a diagrammatic distillation of his reading of the chora section of the *Timaeus*, the winnow/window (filter/screen) diagram serves as a distillation of Derrida's twin notions artifactuality and actuvirtuality. That is to say, this, the third, iteration of the choral diagram functions as a kind of prompt or reminder of the responsibility to analyse the media, and for media and cultural theorists (etc.), to remain open to the future and to the other.

Yet, the insights gained from this reading of the twin facets of actuality can be extended according to a slightly different yet complementary set of considerations. This change in direction might be summarised according to the following crude delineation. If Derrida's reading of the actual can be taken to activate (or be abstracted in) the diagram's winnowing function as a critical *interpretive filter* for engaging with teletechnologies, the second set of considerations are distilled in and framed by the window/screen aspect of this same diagram, and can be usefully introduced via the relay of humour.

Joke:

Q. What architectural element do Jacques Derrida and Bill Gates have a shared interest in?

A. glas/s windows.

This joke isn't very funny. The central pun in this joke certainly wasn't funny for Peter Eisenman as he reflected back on his Villette collaboration with Derrida:

Jacques, you ask me about the *supplement* and the *essential* in my work. You crystallize these questions in the term/word/material *glas/s*. You glaze over the fact that your conceptual play with the multifaceted term *glas* is not simply translatable into architectural glass.

One understands that the assumption of the identity of the material glass and your ideas of *glas*, in their superficial resemblance of letters, is precisely the concern of literary deconstruction; but this becomes a problem when one turns to the event of building. This difference is important. For though one can conceptualize in the building material glass, it is not only as you suggest — as an absence of secrecy, as a clarity. While glass is a literal presence in architecture, it also indexes an absence, a void in a solid wall. Thus glass in architecture is traditionally said to be both presence and absence. (Eisenman, 1987:187)

While this joke was apparently no laughing matter for Eisenman, the glass window serves as a useful frame for engaging with contemporary teletechnologies and attendant issues such as presence and absence, public and private, transparency and secrecy, and so forth.

The Australian media theorist Scott McQuire places the architectural window in a broader context of a 'cultural history of transparency' (McQuire, 2003: 103-123). This context enables McQuire to 'sketch a cultural logic linking the modernist project of architectural transparency to the contemporary repositioning of the home as an interactive media centre' — charting, in other words, a 'shift from glass windows to screen walls' in both an architectural sense (as in the much-publicised Gates house), and in the rise of media phenomena such as the *Big Brother* television franchise (McQuire, 2003: 103,110, *passim*). In the case of *Big Brother*, what McQuire identifies in this program is a reconceptualisation of private and public space where the private is given up in the name of public entertainment (McQuire, 2003: 119). And while this transformation of the private 'may well offer a glimpse of a more open society with greater transparency in interpersonal relations,' it is suggested that 'this promise should also be seen as part of the historical process by which surveillance has been normalised in the name of minimising social risk' (McQuire, 2003: 119). McQuire posits that the

popularity of programs such as *Big Brother* 'might be seen as the entertainment complement to other policies of "border protection" which preoccupy the contemporary nation-state swimming the tides of globalisation' (McQuire, 2003: 120). It is a particularly apposite remark given that Derrida's thinking on teletechnologies and the actual is part-and-parcel of his thinking on a broader European (and global) geopolitical context that is marked by renewed desire for the "home," in both its domestic sense and in a more threatening nationalistic sense (Derrida & Stiegler, 2002: 79-80).

This same geopolitical and global context — characterised by an overabundance of information and a growing tangle of interdependencies, according to one account (Augé, 1995: 28) — is also seen to have dramatically reconfigured the very nature of interpersonal communication through an increasingly complex interplay of presence and absence. Concomitant with and overlapping this interplay is an equally complex intermingling of public and private space and of "actual" and "virtual" space (actuvirtuality) to create a peculiar kind of paradox which the anthropologist Marc Augé characterises as the creation of an 'excess of space correlative with the shrinking of the planet' (Augé, 1995). Augé coins the term "non-places" to describe this expanding excess. "Non-spaces" are those interstitial zones where we spend an ever-increasing proportion of our lives: in supermarkets, airports, hotels, cars, on motorways, and in front of ATMs, TVs and computers. Augé argues that a new form of anthropology — an "anthropology of supermodernity" — is required if we are to begin to account for and make sense of these teletechnological "non-places" (Augé, 1995: passim).

A key point to add to Augé's account of the non-places of supermodernity (to employ his phrase) is that computer-mediated communication and the endless flow of global informational and media vectors is *a priori* anchored in the flows of the everyday. The global is filtered through the local, in other words. Just as importantly, teletechnological machines, and computers in particular, are no

longer stationary items; they are increasingly miniaturised and made mobile. [11] Thus, in the face of globalised communications, we cannot afford to lose sight of the reality that cyberspace temporality is experienced from the local and, increasingly, from local mobility, from our own movement in time through space, whether this be in transit (city streets, train, plane, automobile) or at any of a number of possible destinations (home, car, office, library, hotel, transit lounge). In short, and to state the deceptively simple: 'we have to relearn how to think about space' (Augé, 1995: 36). In part this requires relearning how to think about space as teletechnological space. And in light of increased technological mobility, such spatial relearning, as Augé suggests, also involves thinking about 'space as frequentation of *places* [and 'non-places'] rather than a place' (Augé, 1995: 85). It could be suggested, then, that any project that attempts to rethink place and teletechnology in these terms, to following Augé's lead, needs to pay attention to 'factors of singularity:' singularity of objects, of groups or memberships, the reconstruction of places; the singularities of all sorts that constitute a paradoxical counterpoint to the procedures of interrelation, acceleration and delocalization [and I would add *relocalisation*] sometimes carelessly reduced and summarized in expressions like 'homogenization of culture' or 'world culture'. (Augé, 1995: 39-40) In the context of the above discussion of the actual and the virtual, inside/outside, and the question of the other, it is noteworthy that, for Augé, within 'the contemporary world [...] with its accelerated transformations' there is 'a renewed methodical reflection on the category of otherness' (Augé, 1995: 24).

A great deal more could be said here about the window and interface culture. However, I will limit myself to the following concluding remarks, which concern a past thread in the Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR) email list where many of the above issues resurface. At the time, this thread generated considerable debate and a flurry of postings. It developed from an initial questioning

of the suitability of drawing on notions of space and place and other like metaphors when writing about the Internet and related technologies. An early posting in this exchange declared a determined resistance to the continued use of the term space in such research:

I believe that the employment of such terms as 'space' and 'cyberspace' in popular and academic writings about the computer and Internet technologies makes it seem like representations are a kind of material environment. This writing repeats and even enhances design strategies that describe synchronous settings as 'rooms,' Internet maps that produce unnecessary and fictive geographies, and programming that makes users' progression through sites seem like bodily movement. Such visceral renderings discourage critical interventions into Internet representations because sites seem tangible. The conflation of space-producing discourses with user investment in particular sites and identities threatens to make stereotypes 'real.' The represented bodies of Internet settings are 'fleshed out' because there seems to be an environment that can support varied bodily processes. Computer representations can also justify the perpetuation of physical but certainly not necessary or natural conditions by mirroring material circumstances.

(White, 2004)

The post concludes with the qualifier: 'I also continue to ponder other ways that we can write about and experience technologies' (White, 2004). In response to this parting remark, another contributor wonders whether the above poster, or others on the list, has 'an alternative suggestion [that might be offered] constructively in addition to pointing out flaws of the space and place metaphors?' (Bunz, 2004) Alternatives were not forthcoming; one suggestion eventually put forward is the somewhat prosaic and alternative term "setting."

What seems to be played out in the AoIR debate bears certain, albeit qualified, resemblances to the difficulties facing Derrida and Eisenman, and Ulmer after them: the difficulty of representing the unrepresentable. Which is to say, this same problematic also characterises much contemporary (and past) discourse on teletechnologies and "cyberspace:" a kind of ceaseless straining to come to terms with, to define and delimit that which, through its intermingled character and diffusion, increasingly evades simple conception and strict definition. Further complicating this already complicated scene is the fact that what arguably lies at the heart of the AoIR place/space debate are equally fraught considerations of (and attempts to represent) vexed issues such as subjectivity, (dis)embodiment, and otherness, to name a few. It is in this context, for this reason, that it would be interesting to posit *khōra* as a further alternative (or supplement) to space/place/setting. Of course, there is merit in proposing this alternative (or supplementary) term, but, as Derrida might suggest, writing "*sous rature*" ("under erasure"), rendering the word in strikethrough font — ~~*khōra*~~ — in order to highlight its status as provisional, inadequate. Redeployed in this way, *khōra* is useful insofar as it stands as one name that can be given to that which is unnameable. It also sheds light on the ongoing struggle to come to terms with the issue of subjectivity and the category of the other, both of which underpin so much of computer-mediated communications research. Some of this illuminating potential is discernible in the following summary of Derrida's thinking on *khōra*:

as Derrida sees it [...] *khōra* is that third thing (between the intelligible and the sensible) that makes it possible to think anything like the difference between pure being and pure nothingness (or between my autonomous selfhood and your autonomous otherness); it is what makes it possible to think the difference between 'I' and 'you.' (Lucy, 2004: 68)

And while Ulmer clearly develops the notion of *khōra* in different directions to what is suggested in the above passage, his understanding of chorography nonetheless makes for an important additional layer here. ‘*Chora* evokes electronic media,’ he writes, it ‘concerns not this or that machine, not a winnowing basket or a convex mirror, *not a computer monitor, but machinery or technology as such*’ (Ulmer, 1994: 69, emphasis added). That is to say, as another term for heuristics, or the logic of invention, Ulmer’s understanding of *khōra* brings to mind both the notion of *poesis* as revealing or making in general (such as Heidegger develops it in ‘The Question Concerning Technology’ and elsewhere), as well as Donald Theall’s conception of ‘the poetic’ as an organising term for all forms of ‘inventive cultural productions’ (Theall, 1995: xiii).

Thus, if the operation of the diagram, its function, is to suggest, as Deleuze claims, hopefully what might be suggested by the above winnow/window diagram is a prompt in a double sense. It operates as a mnemonic (or mnemotechnical) device: a reminder of the intermingled and ambivalent nature of the actual and the virtual, and of the responsibility to analyse what Derrida calls the whole apparatus of teletechnology in general. (Derrida & Stiegler, 2002) And, at the same time, it serves as a reminder or prompt ‘to let the future open,’ to engage with the ‘possible impossible’ of invention: an encouragement to invent, to act, and to invent new actualities which remain as open as possible to the radical alterity of others.

Notes

[1] For example, see *ANY*, 23 (1998), *Daidalos*, 74 (October, 2000) and Peter Eisenman’s *Diagram Diaries* (1999). Eisenman, it should be noted, does not entirely abandon Derrida in his embrace of the architectural diagram. For example, Derrida’s reading of Freud’s ‘mystic writing pad’ figures prominently in Eisenman’s discourse on diagrams. This makes for an interesting point of comparison with cybercultural criticism, where this same essay by

Derrida also figures prominently. See, in particular, Tofts and McKeich (1998).

[2] I am not the first to use this term. For example, in a 1981 essay on spatial form in literature, W. J. T. Mitchell makes the following argument for diagrammatology, which has some relevance for how I wish to employ the term here: ‘Since we seem unable to articulate our intuitions or interpretations of formal characteristics in literature and the other arts except by recourse to “sensible” or “spatial” constructs (not just diagrams and not just visual forms), then why not do it explicitly, consciously, and, most important, systematically? If we cannot get at form except through the mediation of things like diagrams, do we not then need something like diagrammatology, a systematic study of the way that relationships among elements are represented and interpreted by graphic constructions?’ (Mitchell, 1981: 622-623).

[3] This partial text is reproduced in Kipnis and Leiser, 1987. A longer version of this text appears as ‘*Khora*,’ in Derrida, 1995: 89-127.

[4] Or as Niall Lucy puts it, ‘*khora* is the pre-philosophical, pre-originary non-locatable non-space that existed without existing before the cosmos. Something like that. Its singularity — and this is the point — is its very resistance to being identified; it is what philosophy cannot name.’ (Lucy, 2004: 68)

[5] Although ‘collaboration’ is a particularly problematic term for describing the Derrida/Eisenman ‘Choral Work,’ For Derrida, it is ‘certainly not a collaboration. It is even less an exchange.’ Rather, ‘it is a double parasitic laziness,’ or what Eisenman terms ‘separate tricks.’ See Derrida in Kipnis and Leiser, 1987: 111 and Eisenman in Kipnis and Leiser, 1987: 132-136. This issue is also discussed by Jeffrey Kipnis at length in the same volume, 137-160.

[6] In a later essay, Derrida’s understanding of *chora* also holds a key place for Ulmer as the ‘theory’

for his 'Traffic of the Spheres' project which proposes a 'MEMorial' to those killed in car crashes. See Ulmer, 2001: 327-343. This same essay also provides a humorous account of Ulmer's perplexing dalliance with architectural education. 'I went to an academic advisor, a man wearing a hearing aid that seemed to give him considerable trouble. It functioned less as a prosthesis and more as a sign – "I am deaf." "I'm interested in the notion of *Dasein*," I told him. "Could you recommend a class I might take that would deal with *Dasein* in more detail?" He sent me to a course in architecture, an introduction to *design*. I have never been able to decide whether the advice was a mistake or not,' (331-332).

[7] For example: 'What a mystory ends up looking like [...] judging by "Derrida at the Little Bighorn," is a *canonic literary memoir*, beautifully written and fashionably discontinuous, and suitably apocalyptic in tone.' (Lucy, 2001:130)

[8] Ulmer's project of developing a 'logic of invention' (heuretics) shares marked similarities with the work of the Canadian media theorist Donald Theall and his dual notions of an 'ecology of sense' (an adaptation of Gregory Bateson's theory of the ecology of mind) and 'the poetic' (an umbrella term for all forms of 'inventive cultural productions'). Curiously, these similarities have largely passed without remark, although they are playfully acknowledged in the title of the present volume with the two key concepts ('logic of invention' and 'ecology of sense') conjoined to form a kind of portmanteau title. On Theall's work, see in particular: Theall, 1995 and Tofts, 1997: 32-36.

[9] As Ulmer puts it, 'Chora is about the crossing of chance and necessity, whose nature may be discerned only indirectly in the names [and I would add, the ideas and associations] generated by a puncept rather than as a concept (or paradigm) [...]' (2001: 332).

[10] Part-and-parcel of this process of 'undo-preserving' opposites is remembering, as Meaghan

Morris remarks, that 'binarization, too, has differing aspects:' 'not all binarized terms are *opposed* terms (the drawing of a distinction is not necessarily oppositional), and oppositions can be alternating, or 'only relative' [...], as well as rigidly divisive; no positioning of a term is final, and 'nonsymmetrical' reversals are always possible between terms [...]' (Morris, 1996: 393).

[11] One might say that teletechnological equipment in general, and computers in particular, are undergoing an increasing transmogrification in form and use from stationary items to stationery items: devices that are small, transportable, and often designed with aesthetics as much as function in mind.

References

ANY ('Diagram Work' special issue, eds Ben van Berkel and Caroline Bos), 23 (1998).

Augé, Marc. *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, trans. John Howe (London & New York: Verso, 1995).

Bennington, Geoffrey, and Jacques Derrida. *Jacques Derrida*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

Bunz, Ulla. 'Re: first post (An Internet without Space)', posting to air-l@aoir.org mailing list, 3 February (2004).

Confurius, Gerrit. 'Editorial,' *Daidalos*, 74 (October, 2000): 4-5.

Daidalos ('Diagrammania' special issue, ed. Gerrit Confurius), 74 (October, 2000).

Deleuze, Gilles. 'The Diagram,' in Constantin V. Boundas (ed.) *The Deleuze Reader*, trans. Constantin V. Boundas (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 193-200.

Derrida, Jacques. 'Letter to Peter Eisenman,' in

Jeffrey Kipnis and Thomas Leiser (eds) *Chora L Works: Jacques Derrida and Peter Eisenman* (New York: The Monacelli Press, 1987), 182-185.

—. 'Why Peter Eisenman Writes Such Good Books,' in Jeffrey Kipnis and Thomas Leiser (eds) *Chora L Works: Jacques Derrida and Peter Eisenman* (New York: The Monacelli Press, 1987), 95-101.

—. 'Psyche: Inventions of the Other,' trans. Catherine Porter in Lindsay Waters and Wlad Godzich (eds) *Reading de Man Reading* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 25-65.

—. 'Khōra,' trans. Ian McLeod in Jacques Derrida, *On the Name* edited by Thomas Dutoit (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1995), 89-127.

Derrida, Jacques, Eisenman, Peter and Kipnis, Jeffrey. 'Transcript Seven,' in Jeffrey Kipnis and Thomas Leiser (eds) *Chora L Works: Jacques Derrida and Peter Eisenman* (New York: The Monacelli Press, 1987), 104-112.

Derrida, Jacques, Eisenman, Peter and Kipnis, Jeffrey. 'Transcript One,' in Jeffrey Kipnis and Thomas Leiser (eds) *Chora L Works: Jacques Derrida and Peter Eisenman* (New York: The Monacelli Press, 1987), 7-13.

Derrida, Jacques, and Kipnis, Jeffrey. 'Afterword,' in Jeffrey Kipnis and Thomas Leiser (eds) *Chora L Works: Jacques Derrida and Peter Eisenman* (New York: The Monacelli Press, 1987), 166-172.

Derrida, Jacques, and Stiegler, Bernard. *Echographies of Television: Filmed Interviews*, trans. Jennifer Bajorek (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002).

Eisenman, Peter. 'Post/el Cards: A Reply to Jacques Derrida,' in Jeffrey Kipnis and Thomas Leiser (eds) *Chora L Works: Jacques Derrida and Peter Eisenman* (New York: The Monacelli Press, 1987), 187-189.

—. 'Separate Tricks', in Jeffrey Kipnis and Thomas Leiser (eds) *Chora L Works: Jacques Derrida and Peter Eisenman* (New York: The Monacelli Press, 1987), 132-136.

—. *Diagram Diaries* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1999).

Kipnis, Jeffrey, 'Twisting the Separatrix,' in Jeffrey Kipnis and Thomas Leiser (eds) *Chora L Works: Jacques Derrida and Peter Eisenman* (New York: The Monacelli Press, 1987), 137-160.

Kipnis, Jeffrey, and Leiser, Thomas (eds). *Chora L Works: Jacques Derrida and Peter Eisenman* (New York: The Monacelli Press, 1987).

Lobsinger, Mary Lou. 'Cedric Price: An Architecture of the Performance,' *Daidalos*, 74 (October 2000): 22-29.

Lucy, Niall. *Beyond Semiotics: Text, Culture and Technology* (London and New York: Continuum, 2001).

—. *A Derrida Dictionary* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004).

McQuire, Scott. 'From Glass Architecture to *Big Brother*: Scenes from a Cultural History of Transparency,' *Cultural Studies Review* 9(1) (May, 2003): 103-123.

Mitchell, W. J. T. 'Diagrammatology,' *Critical Inquiry*, Spring (1981): 622-633.

Morris, Meaghan. 'Crazy Talk Is Not Enough,' *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 14 (1996): 384-394.

Speaks, Michael. 'It's Out There... The Formal Limits of The American Avant-Garde,' in Stephen Perrella (ed.) 'Architectural Design Profile, No. 133: "Hypersurface Architecture,"' in *Architectural Design*, 68 (5-6) (London: Academy Editions, 1998):

White, Michele. 'Re: first post (An Internet without Space),' posting to air-l@aoir.org mailing list, 3 February (2004).

From Mystorian to Curmudgeon: Skulking Toward Finitude

Marcel O’Gorman

You will feel, if you transcribe the passage in this orderly fashion, that the rugged impetuosity of passion, once you make it smooth and equable by adding the copulatives, falls pointless and immediately loses all its fire. Just as the binding of the limbs of runners deprives them of their power of rapid motion, so also passion, when shackled by connecting links and other appendages, chafes at the restriction, for it loses the freedom of its advance and its rapid emission as though from an engine of war.

(Longinus, “On The Sublime”, Chapter 21)

HAMLET:

To what base uses we may return, Horatio! Why may not imagination trace the noble dust of Alexander, till he find it stopping a bung-hole?

HORATIO:

‘Twere to consider too curiously, to consider so.

(William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Act V, Scene 1)

Curmudgeonly Self-Indulgence

CURMUDGEON: [n] An avaricious, grasping fellow; a miser; a niggard; a churl. [OE. cornmudgin, where -mudgin is prob. from OF.; cf. OE. muchares skulking thieves.]

How did I get here? Only five years ago I was mystorizing with Greg Ulmer in sunny Gainesville. Today, in gray, sludgy Detroit, I am asking students to write academic essays that explain

away their experimental work in HTML and Flash. What’s worse, the course topic I have chosen this term is *finitude*, human mortality. I am on the cusp of becoming radically un-hip, a curmudgeon. The curmudgeon side makes me say things like: ‘mystories are for navel-gazers.’ Indeed, that is the problem with assigning mystories to students during the winter months in Detroit. They use the genre — a discursive network (*popcycle*) of pop culture, critical theory, history, and autobiography — to engage in auto-psychoanalysis. They get mired in their own subjectivity, and produce work that is no more innovative than the nostalgic, self-exploratory essays encouraged in freshman composition classes. The curmudgeon also says things like: ‘hypertext is dead.’ There’s that finitude again. Where does this comment come from? Maybe, in part, from the boredom I sense when clicking through the directionless infinity of hypertext fiction. And, in part, from the way writers use digital nonlinearity as a way of masking poor writing skills. And, in part, from being overwhelmed by too much information, most of it worthless. Whatever the case may be, I am nauseated by the sense of nostalgia I feel when I look at the cover of George P. Landow’s *Hypertext Theory*. Hypertext theory, too, is dead. Even critical theory itself has been liquidated into a series of menu items in Photoshop and Dreamweaver. What comes next?

In an attempt to exorcise the curmudgeon — or at least examine him — I’m going to take this opportunity to engage in a little self-indulgent navel-gazing myself. Maybe I can rescue or at least revisit the sense of pleasure that I felt while composing the various Ulmer-inspired mystories and other

heuristic exercises that I completed over the past decade. Perhaps, as well, I might be able to discover how I went from mystorian to curmudgeon in such a short time. My goal, then, is admittedly hermeneutic, which, I'll admit, is heresy for a heuristician. Recalling a passage in Ulmer's *Teletheory* (1989) (I will only recall Ulmer here, not quote him) I will begin by appropriating the mood of Hamlet as he pondered forensics at Yorrick's grave. In sooth, I suppose there really is no appropriation here; as a scholar, I am always-already melancholic, always-already staring into the skull.

A Skull Session with Gregory "Golgotha" Skulmer

[Check this out]

SKULLFISH: [n] a whaler's name for a whale more than two years old.

The very first mystory I completed was an assignment in a critical theory class at Ottawa University, my first real course in theory, and the most difficult I have ever taken. The course was taught by a stern German, a specialist in Melville and Heidegger, who once told me that 'no great philosophy ever came out of the south.' And yet, he deigned to include *Teletheory* (written by a Floridian) on the syllabus. Each student was required to select a text from the syllabus and give a seminar-style presentation. Admittedly, I was somewhat intimidated by older PhD students in the class, and reluctant to make a selection at all. I was the last to choose, and the only text remaining was Ulmer's. All that I can recall of this class is a series of befuddling seminars, which I felt were more akin to mathematics than literature. I can also recall the cigarette breaks, for which I stupidly braved the bone-chilling pain of a Canadian winter.

SKULDUGGERY: [n] verbal misrepresentation intended to take advantage of you in some way.

I'm not sure that I completely grasped what Ulmer was up to in *Teletheory*, but I knew one thing for certain: I wanted to make a mystory. What's more,

I wanted to make a mystory on my computer, which at the time was a 640K portable unit with no hard drive. While this proved impossible, I did manage to gain access to a 386 in the office of a friend who worked for Corel. He not only loaned me the machine, but, after listening to my design goals, he also introduced me to Freelance Graphics, a presentation software package whose market value was destroyed by PowerPoint. Using Freelance, I created a mystory with a specific timeline that scrolled across the screen in about three minutes. I learned simultaneously how to "do theory" and how to work in Freelance Graphics, both of which I approached as an amateur.

SKULKING: [adj] marked by quiet and caution and secrecy; taking pains to avoid being observed. See also: dodging, escape, evasion.

By the time it came for my seminar on *Teletheory*, the snow was melting. I remember the Proustian flash of smelling spring as I walked to class, which I had arranged to hold in a computer lab. I loaded my Freelance "slide show" into a 486 equipped with an LCD projector panel, and sat nervously as text blocks and images scrolled by, leaving my classmates as befuddled as they had left me during their own presentations. After the last words scrolled by, the professor asked me to explain what I had created, but I couldn't. I suggested that my mystory, which integrated *Teletheory* itself into the popcycle, was intended to be a stand-alone, a performance piece designed to create 'an effect', provoke discussion. 'An effect?' asked the professor. 'I'm not sure what you mean.' Neither was I. I didn't really understand what I had created, and I had no particular goal in mind when creating it. I was working blindly, gluing together various snippets of discourse without any particular direction except that offered by the film-like sequencing effects in Freelance. During the summer term, I was often berated for this performance, and labeled mockingly as 'a mystorian.'

SKOL: [n] Fortran pre-processor for COS (Cray Operating System).

Just recently, I discovered a fragmented copy of this mystery on a diskette and loaded it into my abandoned Pentium II. The “show” flew by so quickly that it was nearly impossible to read the text. Advances in processing speed have rendered the mystery unreadable, even on a Pentium II.

Gibberish: A Digital Hiding Place for Pomo Sapiens

[Check this out]

SCULLER: [n] someone who skulls (moves a long oar pivoted on the back of the boat to propel the boat forward). See also: oarsman, rower.

I abandoned Freelance Graphics when I enrolled for a second M.A., this time in Creative Writing, at the University of Windsor. A computer scientist, with whom I was discussing Eastgate’s first beta version of StorySpace, introduced me to HTML and the World Wide Web. What he showed me seemed much more flexible and robust than StorySpace, which at the time could only embed images as black and white bitmap files. I spent my year as a Creative Writing student assembling infinite hypertext networks of critical theory quotes in which nearly every word was “hotlinked,” as we said back then.

SCULD: [n] Goddess of fate: Future. See also: Norn.

My education in theory, then, was classical, acquired by a word-for-word transcribing of “the masters” from print to screen. Longinus himself would have approved of this method, which also describes how I learned HTML, “stealing” code from the web pages of others.

This writer shows us, if only we were willing to pay him heed, that another way (beyond anything we have mentioned) leads to the sublime. And what, and what manner of way, may that be? It is the imitation and emulation of previous great poets and writers. And let this, my dear friend, be an aim

to which we steadfastly apply ourselves. For many men are carried away by the spirit of others as if inspired, just as it is related of the Pythian priestess when she approaches the tripod, where there is a rift in the ground which (they say) exhales divine vapour. By heavenly power thus communicated she is impregnated and straightway delivers oracles in virtue of the afflatus. Similarly from the great natures of the men of old there are borne in upon the souls of those who emulate them (as from sacred caves) what we may describe as *effluences*, so that even those who seem little likely to be possessed are thereby inspired and succumb to the spell of the others’ greatness. (Longinus, “On The Sublime”, Chapter XIII)

In the end, I learned more about writing — primarily, how to maintain a complex sequential argument — by transcribing Barthes and assembling HTML code than I did in all the workshops I attended in grad school. While I did write my share of short stories — all conventional fiction — my M.A. project was a hypertext entitled “Gibberish,” in which I ironically applied postmodern theory to a number of paintings by the Windsor artist Stephen Gibb. I sent a link to an early version of the project to Greg Ulmer, along with a diskette containing the mystery I had created in Ottawa. Ulmer suggested that I apply to the University of Florida’s PhD program.

1/0

[Check this out]

SKULL AND CROSSBONES: [n] emblem warning of danger or death. See also: black flag, emblem, Jolly Roger, pirate flag.

What frustrated me about Ulmer’s seminars was not the lack of direction, a lack of those predictable assignments that are the whipping boys of heuristics, but the fact that, in Ulmer’s terms, we were in class ‘to do theory, not art.’ In other words, our goal was not to make things that look pretty, but to work with ideas, to invent methods, even if our goal was to invent a ‘picture theory.’ Isn’t

it possible, I thought, to achieve a more holistic combination of theory and aesthetics? William Blake, for example, invented relief-etch printing, a method — inspired by his own distaste for mechanical engraving techniques — which he outlines in visionary detail in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. The problem was that not one of us in the seminars was trained as an artist. We were all English majors working with the tools at our disposal. We couldn't draw or paint, but we could certainly steal images off the Web and manipulate them.

SCULLION: [n] a kitchen servant employed to do menial tasks.

My opus mystorius as a student of Ulmer's was a hypertext I ended up calling "1/0" based on the recurrent pattern of 1 and 0 or I and O shapes that serendipitously appeared in the images I had chosen for the project. "1/0" uses a popcycle to explore/explode the issue of racism that I encountered as a Canadian living in the Southern United States. Included in the popcycle is the work of William Blake, particularly the "Little Black Boy" engraving from the *Songs of Innocence*.

My mother bore me in the southern wild,
And I am black, but O! my soul is white;
White as an angel is the English child,
But I am black, as if bereav'd of light.

"1/0" played a central role in my dissertation, which amounts to a lengthy explanation that I wish I could have offered four years earlier to my theory professor at the University of Ottawa.

The 4Fold Vision

[Check this out]

SCULP: [v.t.] to sculpture; to carve; to engrave
[Obs. or Humorous].

Something about the materiality of Blake's work, his holistic interweaving of philosophy, art, and technics, suggests a fruitful model for thinking

about discourse in the electronic apparatus. After graduating from the University of Florida, my primary obsession was to invent a new mode of academic discourse by drawing on William Blake as a "media exemplar." I devised an assignment for my students entitled 'The 4Fold Vision,' which is an image-rich modification of the mystory form. Rather than drawing on verbal puncepts as a method of interlinking modes of discourse, The 4Fold is glued together with visual puns motivated by the schematic shapes in Blake's art: the arch, the inverted U, the circle, and the spiral.

SKULLCAP: [n] rounded brimless cap fitting the crown of the head. See also: beanie.

When I introduced the assignment to my E-Crit students, the response was one of befuddlement, and the results were varied. Among graduating seniors this term, this assignment stands out as the one that had the greatest impact on their formation as media critics and designers. A 4Fold Vision completed by Amy Ruud, one of the first E-Crit graduates, traces the 'O' shape through the film *Dogma*, the Berlin Wall, Baudrillard, Blake and her friend's brain tumor (http://liberalarts.udmercy.edu/~ruudar/portfolio/electronica/ani_gif.htm). Her animated gif captures the schematic essence of her 4Fold, but what impressed me most was the "justification" that she wrote to accompany her project. I had never before required students to write a justification of their work in experimental critical theory. At this point, I realized that *écriture* had to remain central to E-Crit. I began assigning lengthy essays in my classes.

Necromedia

SKULL, THE PLACE OF A: See GOLGOTHA: [n] a hill near Jerusalem where Jesus was crucified.

In the winter of 2001, I began investigating a pattern of coincidental relationships that I had noticed between death and media technology. These included Watson's gallows telephone, Marey's chronophotographic rifle, and the first human

ultrasound, which took place in the disused turret of a B-29 bomber. Technology's greatest end is for military uses, for the destruction of human beings. Technology renders bodies immobile and redundant. Technology promotes ghost industries and fantasies of immortality. I invented the term "necromedia" to describe this seeming collusion between death and media technologies. Soon, necromedia scenes appeared everywhere: in *American Beauty's* elision of gun and video camera; in *Vanilla Sky's* Coltrane hologram and cryogenic dreaming; in *Ringu's* lethal and ghostly VHS tape.

SKULL: [n] the bony skeleton of the head of vertebrates. See also: axial skeleton, bone, braincase, head, jaw, jugal bone, mala, malar bone, orbit, orbital cavity, os, os sphenoidale, os zygomaticum, sphenoid bone, zygomatic bone.

I began taking very seriously Katherine Hayles' suggestion that we learn to accept and celebrate our finitude. She was echoing Heidegger's concerns about technology and being, but without the luddite and fascist associations that have made Heidegger inconvenient for media critics.

We now name that challenging claim which gathers man thither to order the self-revealing as standing-reserve: "ge-stell" (enframing). We dare to use this word in a sense that has been thoroughly unfamiliar up to now. According to ordinary usage, the word Gestell (frame) means some kind of apparatus, e.g., a bookrack. Gestell is also the name for a **skeleton**. And the employment of the word Gestell (enframing) that is now required of us seems equally eerie, not to speak of the arbitrariness with which words of a mature language are so misused. (Heidegger, 1977: npn)

How do we celebrate our finitude when, all around us, others are celebrating their capacity to be placed on call as cybernetic standing reserve? After teaching a few courses on necromedia, it occurred to me that the sprawling hypertext projects I was assigning encouraged only a drive toward

infinity, a resistance to finitude. I was hoping to provoke the opposite of that resistance, an acceptance and celebration of finitude.

Running (Posthu)Man

[Check this out]

SKULL SESSION: [n] a practice match; teaching strategy to an athletic team. See also: grooming, preparation, training.

A few years ago I ran my first marathon. I took up running to relieve work-related stress, provoke creative thought, and to alleviate the chronic back pain that resulted from sitting for several hours a day in front of a screen. Since then I have been running trail races only, primarily 50K ultra marathons. Over time, my necromedia course morphed into a design studio on running, based, of course, on a concept I developed while running. The studio is not only about running in the strictly biomechanical sense, but also in the various metaphorical outcroppings of the word, which provide a vehicle for discussing the impact of media technologies on time, space, and the body. I have asked students in the class to develop Flash movies that will play on a laptop cable-hacked into a treadmill. The heartbeat and speed of a runner or walker will power these movies. My own movie, entitled *DREAMMILL*, revolves around the increasing immobility of our culture (Detroit was named "America's fattest city" this year). It draws heavily on the necromedia concept, and combines graphics, text, clips from Hollywood film, and talking heads. I now realize that I have moved away from the infinitude of hypertext, and am turning back toward the genre of my first mystory.

SKULL: [n] [see {school} a multitude.] a school, company, or shoal. [Obs.]

Jeff Rice, a colleague of mine (also a former student of Ulmer's and "cool" theorist), noted that the *DREAMMILL* project is very Ulmerian in nature because it draws on an outrageous, perhaps surrealist premise: 'you need a treadmill to teach a media studies class.' I hadn't considered this per-

spective, which Jeff was quick to offer in rebuttal to my recent threats about abandoning the Florida School and hypertext for Blake and artists' books. What I do know is that the concept of putting a treadmill in an English Department classroom and wiring it to a laptop is emblematic of what I see as the future of Humanities research in a culture driven by technological efficiency. This interdisciplinary project, which involves the cooperation of faculty and students in E-Crit, Engineering, Architecture, and English, places the Humanities back at the core of higher education. In opposition to the techno-scientific focus of the contemporary university, I would propose a program not in humanities computing, or even in human/computer interaction, but in *humane computing*, a program that puts both the body and mind, with all their finite limitations, in a holistic relationship with the development of new technologies.

Post-Run Cooldown

Just recently I discovered that I suffered a stress fracture in my left hip, a result of obsessive training, combined with long races that are beyond the limitations of my biomechanical abilities. I will require a hip replacement in the near future, which will qualify me as a literal cyborg. I wonder if, at that point, I will begin to reconsider the emancipatory potential of cyberspace. In any case, it will make for a great mystery on becoming un-hip.

Bibliography

Blake, William. "Little Black Boy" *Songs of Innocence* (1789) in *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*. Edited by David V. Erdman (New York: Doubleday, 1988).

The William Blake Archive, <http://www.blakearchive.org> (March 22, 2004).

Hayles, Katherine. *How We Became Posthuman* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

Heidegger, Martin. *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays* Translated by William Lovitt (New York: Harper, 1977).

Hyperdictionary, <http://www.hyperdictionary.com> (March 22, 2004).

Landow, George. *Hypertext: The Convergence of Contemporary Critical Theory and Technology* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992).

Longinus, *On the Sublime* Translated by W. Rhys Roberts. (Cambridge, 1899), *Peitho's web*, <http://classicpersuasion.org/pw/longinus/index.htm> (March 22, 2004).

Shakespeare, William. *Hamlet* (1600), <http://the-tech.mit.edu/Shakespeare/hamlet/>.

Ulmer, Gregory L. *Teletheory: Grammatology in the Age of Video* (New York and London: Routledge, 1989).

Soliciting Taste: How sweet the lips of salted bream

Teri Hoskin

[launch website]

On Hip-Hop, a Rhapsody

Michael Jarrett

Press [Play] to listen to the accompanying podcast for this essay

Or else perhaps he may invent
A better than the poet meant,
As learned commentators view
In Homer more than Homer knew.
Jonathan Swift, *On Poetry: A Rhapsody*

One must be an inventor to read well.
Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The American Scholar*

In a word, Gregory Ulmer has recommended *heuretics*. As the paradigm that we have come to know as “literacy” shifts to something else, which Ulmer calls “electracy,” *heuretics* is a readiness strategy. It is more than that, certainly. But from the start, I want to emphasize that *heuretics* is a way to prepare for writing in — both in the sense of “ushering in” and “working within” — an emerging digital culture. It is a practice — an orientation or attitude toward texts — worth trying out now.

Before I practice *heuretics* to write about rap, let me briefly explain the word. It originated in the Middle Ages as a theological term, the flip-side of “hermeneutics,” in structuralist terms its Other. One could interpret scripture, filter it through a hermeneutic, an institutionally established and sanctioned grid that enabled literal, allegorical, moral, and anagogical readings. Doctrine would result — verifications of truth — or the application of doctrine in the form of lessons or homilies. One could also employ scripture as a means of invention. Which is to say, one could read it *heuretically* (Ulmer, 1989:15). Such “readings” might seem revelatory (‘Eureka!’). Conversely, they might seem heretical, depending on how interpretive communities responded to what was

invented (see the case of Joan of Arc). The point is, hermeneutics yielded “readings” that seemed discoverable in scripture. They seemed to have been placed there. The interpreter showed his audience what the text (and, by implication, its author and its ultimate Author) said. Meaning was not imposed upon the text; meaning arose from the text. Or at least that was the general idea — contested and critiqued now for a few hundred years. *Heuretics*, then, was hermeneutics that failed or sounded dubious. Such a reading practice seemed a lot like writing. It generated the sneaking suspicion that “readings” were not recovered; they were made — made from the text. The interpreter (consciously or not) had used the text to say something — used it as a pretext for his own purposes. In effect, hermeneutics turned into *heuretics* — turned reading into writing — any time an interpretation was received or regarded as an invention.

Hundreds of years ago, the term “*heuretics*” dropped out of usage. Who needed it? It appears that we do. In *Teletheory* (1989), Ulmer reintroduced “*heuretics*” as a concept and practice useful for reading and writing in electronic culture. He suggested that interpretation pushed to a place where it became invention was ideally suited for the development of *electracy*. In *Heuretics* (1994), Ulmer explored and detailed the ‘logic of invention,’ going so far as to demonstrate a heuristic for *heuretics* (when he labeled the CATTt). Implicit in his writing and in the writings of those influenced by Ulmer is the assumption that tomorrow’s writing would necessarily seem *avant-garde* today. Accurate or not, this assumption is useful. It generates

willfully experimental writing. Its problem is scope. The myth that today's *avant-garde* is tomorrow's mainstream unnecessarily restricts the reach of Ulmer's audacious ideas. They are equally applicable to writing that we might consider ordinary. As a mild corrective or, better, as an attempt to balance a larger equation, I want to model writing familiar to a print-oriented audience. It does, however, proceed according to an illogic of sense, and it is designed to function in (and as) electronic media. What follows is an extended – and false – etymology (a particularly electrified “genre” worth developing). It expands a couple of shorter items I wrote for popular music publications: one, originally, introduced a guide to rap recordings; the other examined hate-filled song lyrics (Jarrett, n.d. and 2001). It is mutated journalism, my response to specific assignments and, as such, a blend of dictions. The essay points toward a hybrid form of writing that we might label the “theoretically informed feature” or the “popular experiment.” It is heuristics, then – interpretation pushed around. Gangsta writing, then. The connection between rhapsody and rap is an invention. It is grammatically motivated; predicated on what Ulmer calls a “punctcept.” The goal of such alignments or, at least my goal, is to create knowledge (or even truth and eureka) effects. Treat any type of writing – in this instance, the etymological essay – heuristically, and it will function as theory.

A few thousand years ago, there was no such thing as writing – no blazes on trails, no diagrams scratched in sand, no paintings on cave walls, and no totem poles or bas-relief murals that told stories of days gone by. I am not sure about songlines. But people definitely did not write books. Libraries didn't exist. There weren't any music guides. People were “illiterate.” Aimed at your last boyfriend, illiterate might mean “stupid.” More historically, the word was a print-based way to say that oral cultures were “unfamiliar with literature.” Go back far enough, and none of our kinfolk wrote. But they read all the time: worry in the eyes of a child, reassurance in the kiss of a lover, husbandry in the sweetness of a fig, warning in the blast of a

horn or the clang of a bell, a promise of rain in the smell of a spring breeze. A pile of feces could tell you everything there was to know about a person – past, present, and future. In oral cultures people lack not the ability to read, but technologies for recording. They lack all means of fixing memory. They can't “graph” the past – not as chirograph, photograph, phonograph, or cinematograph.

In Greece, where alphabetic writing developed, what label was assigned to epic poems such as the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*? Answer: ‘Rhapsodies.’ And who threw down dactylic hexameters and was a sex machine to all the chicks? Homer. He “rapped odes,” which literally meant he wove or stitched together songs (Ong, 1982: 2). He did not invent poems whole cloth. The poems Homer recited had been passed down for centuries (and ‘set down in the new Greek alphabet around 700 – 650 BC’). Rather, Homer reworked and preserved set expressions – what we would call prefabricated parts, mnemonic formulas, set phrases, or clichés – according to metrical purposes associated with particular performances. Tale-stitching bards were the MCs of the ancient world. Their job was to praise or to blame. They were prophets, venerated not for compositional ability or originality – both print-based concepts – but for verbal agility. They could string together metrical units like beads on a copper wire. And they kept it real with crowd-pleasing stories bolstered by spiraling body counts, gratuitous obscenities, and treacherous women. ‘[S]tandardized formulas were grouped around equally standardized themes, such as the council, the gathering of the army, the challenge, the despoiling of the vanquished, the hero's shield, and so on and on’ (Ong, 1982:23). Even so, street-level credibility did not guarantee memorable, dramatic performances. Words had to flow. Bards, across the globe, were duty-bound to rock a house party at the drop of a hat. Their skills and exploits were later documented in printed accounts such as *The Mwindo Epic* (West Africa), *The Tale of the Heike* (Japan), the Bible (for example, in both the story of Balaam and the Song of Deborah), and Iceberg Slim's *Pimp*.

Archilochus and Aithirne the Importunate are still notorious for free-styling lethal rhymes. Robert C. Elliott tells their stories in *The Power of Satire*. Archilochus was a Greek rhymers of the seventh century B.C. He is credited with inventing iambic verse, ‘the measure in which “ruthless warfare ought to be waged”’ – and with using words to draw blood. His father was a priest of Demeter and a politician; his mother was a slave. As the story goes, Archilochus was betrothed to marry Neobule, but right before the wedding, the bride’s father, Lycambes said, ‘Let’s call the whole thing off.’ Archilochus went berserk. At the festival of Demeter, he chanted iambics against Lycambes and Neobule. They promptly hanged themselves. Archilochus, for his part, went on to establish ‘a towering reputation as a poet’ (Ong, 1982:7).

And then, there is Aithirne – Aithirne the Importunate. Equally despised and admired, he is the most celebrated rhyme slinger in Irish saga: a bad ass of truly global proportions. People cowered in terror whenever Aithirne made an unannounced stop during one of his “bardic tours” of the Emerald Isle. (It is helpful to picture him riding on a rock ‘n’ roll tour bus.) Aithirne and his two sons used to travel ‘lefthandwise from kingdom to kingdom,’ exacting outrageous favors. Their weapon of choice was the *glám dícind*, a metrical malediction with magical powers. When they rocked the mic, everybody ran for cover. For example, when Aithirne rolled into the town of Connaught, he was met by the one-eyed King Eochaid. The king figured he would appease the poet. Legend says, he offered ‘whatever his people had of jewels and treasures.’ “There is, forsooth,” saith Aithirne, “the single eye there in thy head, to be given to me into my fist.” “There shall be no refusal,” saith Eochaid.... So then the king put his finger under his eye, and tore it out of his head, and gave it into Aithirne’s fist.’ Later, in Leinster Aithirne took a notion to get very down and intimate with the queen. He shared this reasonable fantasy with the king. For ‘honor’s sake’ and to avoid a verbal beatdown of epic proportions, the king agreed to grant Aithirne his

wish. (What the queen had to say is not recorded.) Finally, Aithirne got wind that another king, a fellow named Conchobar, was engaged to marry Luaine. Aithirne and his sons planned to crash the wedding party, drink a few pints of stout, and cop some cash. Complications arose when they spied Luaine. They were smitten and ‘besought her to play the king false.’ She refused. In retaliation Aithirne ‘made three satires upon her,” and ‘the maiden died of shame.’ The story does not end there. After the funeral, King Conchobar and his posse followed Aithirne the Importunate. They tracked him to his compound, walled up his crib, and set fire to the place; toasted the poet and his entire family – shock and awe. And get this: local poets were pissed senseless. Imagine the king’s disrespect! Had he forgotten the magic power of words? (Ong, 1982:27).

‘Art,’ to cite an explanation coined by Wyndham Lewis following Freud, ‘is a civilized substitute for magic’ (quoted in Elliott, 1960: 92). Rhapsody signifies that space where and when magic passes into art. It sublimates the hostility inherent in spells and curses, redirecting aggression into socially acceptable forms such as wit and humor. ‘Wit,’ wrote Freud in *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, ‘permits us to make our enemy ridiculous through that which we could not utter loudly or consciously on account of existing hindrances’ (quoted in Elliott, 1960: 264). To which Eminem replies, ‘I’m like a head-trip to listen to, ‘cause I’m only giving you things you joke about with your friends inside your living room. The only difference is, I’ve got the balls to say it in front of y’all, and I don’t got to be false and sugar — coat it at all’ (“The Real Slim Shady,” *The Marshall Mathers LP*).

By the beginning of the 18th century in Europe, rhapsody was recognized as a literary term. It had pretty much completed the passage from spoken to printed language, from magic to art. Or rather, rhapsody always represents a case of literacy looking back to an oral “form” and simulating this form on the page, often with a tone of regret sig-

nifying mourning. Rhapsody referred to a medley, a hodgepodge, or a farrago of various writings cobbled together without logical connections (Rogers, 1972: 246-47). Its free-wheeling, irregular form suggested improvisation, and its association with “rapture” connoted emotional intensity or an effusive outpouring of sentiment (Holman, 1980: 379-80). All of these meanings and more play out in a poem Jonathan Swift published in 1733. It was titled “On Poetry: A Rapsody,” and that was the original spelling of ‘rhapsody,’ too. Dropping the ‘h’ from ‘rhapsody,’ Swift played off a double pun on ‘rap,’ a slap upside the head, and ‘rapp,’ a widely circulated, counterfeit coin (Rogers, 1983: 869-78; OED). Swift was a classicist (a satirist in the Juvenalian mode), a politically-connected Tory, and the Dean of St. Patrick’s Cathedral in Dublin. His point in “On Poetry: A Rapsody” was predictably conservative, even reactionary. It referred back to Plato’s *Republic*, which banished song-stitchers and ode-rappers, and forward to C. DeLores Tucker’s mid-1990s war against the hip-hop nation. Contemporary poetry, as Swift saw it, was in a terrible state of decline. It had degenerated into sophistry. The empty panegyrics of Grubb Street poets inflated language the same way that worthless money — in a scheme that Swift helped to foil — had almost wrecked Ireland’s economy. Unprincipled poets — the Grubb Street blokes — wrote raps characterized by ‘trivial turns’ and ‘borrowed wit’ — by ‘similes that nothing fit’ (Swift in Rogers, 1983: 151-52). Their productions — stamped out like cheap copper coins (Wood’s halfpence or rapps) — contributed to a degenerate, materialistic society. Instead of accepting time — honored truth — for instance, that ‘heavenly influence’ was required in order ‘to strike the muses’ lyre’ — modern versifiers seemed to regard poetry as a DIY or do-it-yourself industry (Swift in Rogers, 1983: 31-32). They were counterfeiters (‘faking the funk,’ ‘raping rhapsody,’ and ‘pimping the pleasure principle’). They substituted junk rapps for the genuine, time-honored article. They employed the technology of writing and, especially, the increasingly available technology of print for financial gain. Everybody seemed to be taking up the pen

— rhapsodizing and getting paid in full. Or as Swift put it, ‘In every street a city bard / Rules, like an alderman his ward’ (Swift in Rogers, 1983: 301-302).

By the end of the 18th century, Swift’s world had essentially vanished. He had seen it coming. Sense yielded to sensibility; the ancients to the moderns. With the rise of Romanticism, rhapsody as a ‘freer verse style’ won the day. But not without a final irony. The Romantic Movement “effectively obliterated” rhapsody as it had been practiced by poets — and institutionalized in Europe — for centuries. As an analogy, simply recall that Rousseau’s theories of education eventually displaced a pedagogical regime founded on classical rhetoric: rhetoric that was thoroughly informed by oral habits of thought and expression, relying on formulaic elements (Ong, 1982: 26). And so with Romanticism comes a modernist fascination — to the point of obsession — with endangered or disappearing primitive worlds (hence, the birth of ecological consciousness). Modernists are astonished by — that is, they simultaneously admire and fear — the mind that rhapsodizes. (See Book IV of *Gulliver’s Travels*: In it the savage minds of Swift’s shit-slinging Yahoos is an object of obsession for the hyper-rational Houyhnhnms. Further, the Houyhnhnms have never seen anything quite so amusing and entertaining — and deeply perplexing — as Gulliver, a ‘wonderful’ and ‘perfect’ Yahoo (Swift, 2003: 218-19). And by the way, neither Yahoos nor Houyhnhnms are literate. Yahoos are not capable of reading. They are preliterate. And Houyhnhnms do not need to read. They are postliterate.) The modernist infatuation with staged savagery — with the unrestrained zeal and free — associative logic projected onto the primitive — sustained black-face minstrelsy for 100 years — in the USA. It prompted the mass (white) acceptance of R&B — derived forms of music (which is to say, rock ‘n’ roll), and it lies at the heart of gangsta rap’s continued and global popularity. Modernist infatuation with staged savagery charges hip-hop with sexual and violent energy. Or look at it this way. Modernism makes people of

all races feel like they are losing stuff — stuff basic and vital to our humanity, to our sense of self, to our planet. Marx called this effect (or affect) “alienation.” Hence, any art that feels like recovery or like an evasion of ensuing loss will very probably seem like a return of the native. The primitive arrives in the nick of time to save the world.

Cultural guardians, such as Swift, may rightly fear rhapsody as linguistic inflation: the tendency of words to mean less and less; the need for more and more words to purchase meaning; the wide-spread penchant to talk shit. Perhaps our culture is turning primitive, going native, our thinking becoming less rational and more magical. Certainly, in their allegiance to invective and verbal abuse, modern rhapsodists — from Furry Lewis to Rudy Ray Moore and Iceberg Slim, all the way up to Ice Cube, Howard Stern, and Eminem — recall ancient satirists. There is, however, a more coherent and compelling way to understand contemporary rhapsody. It follows from a basic observation about electronic culture. The dominant mass-media technologies of the last century — the telephone, radio, phonograph, cinema, and television — which are now converging in the digital circuitry of the computer, reemphasized modes of communication formerly identified with oral cultures. We now live in an age that Walter Ong calls “secondary orality” (a repetition of orality but with differences). Rhapsody may have ancient roots in magic, but rhapsodists are not pagans or primitives. They denote neither the fall of civilization nor some presumed loss of moral fiber. On the contrary, rhapsodists emerge whenever and wherever oral skills — primary or secondary — are valued. In *Orality and Literacy*, Ong writes:

When all verbal communication must be by direct word of mouth, involved in the give — and — take dynamics of sound, interpersonal relations are kept high — both attractions and, even more, antagonisms. (Ong, 1982: 45)

Electronic communication extends and develops this tendency to use words combatively.

Consider the case of Sunnyland Slim. In 1947, this black musician from the Mississippi Delta recorded his song *Johnson Machine Gun* for Aristocrat Records, a Chicago-based label owned by two Polish — born Jews, Leonard and Phil Chess. The lyric, writes Robert Palmer, was ‘a violent urban fantasy with a touch of sinister humor.’ It opened with a boast: ‘I’m gonna buy me a Johnson machine gun and a carload of explosion balls / I’m gonna be a walkin’ cyclone, from Saginaw to the Niagara Falls.’ It closed with a threat: ‘Now, little girl, the undertaker’s been here, girl, and I gave him your height and size. / Now if you don’t be makin’ whoopee with the Devil tomorrow this time, baby, God knows you’ll be surprised’ (Palmer, 1981: 147).

A reasonable examination of this tune might focus on Sunnyland Slim’s rage (and downplay his tongue-in-cheek humor). Some bitch did the bluesman wrong — or rather he feels he’s been done wrong, and he can’t hold back. The song becomes a delivery system for verbal and sonic venom directed toward a perceived or projected agent of offense. Pretty obviously, this is true of all rhapsody in a satiric vein. But any examination that stops here is not being reasonable. It has forgotten (or conveniently ignored) that the song was manufactured for sale to a mass audience. The song was made to be heard as something overheard. Like a rapp — one of those Irish coins — it is supposed to circulate. We need to take into account both the distribution and the consumption of the song.

Johnson Machine Gun was the result of a contractual arrangement between a black artist and two Jewish entrepreneurs (plus an unseen network of listeners). Think about it. In 1947, the year of the song’s release, Sunnyland Slim and the Chess brothers represented two groups of people more often the target of hate than its perpetrators. It is a dubious honor, but songs such as *Johnson Machine Gun* — and there are a good many of them — signal what we might call the “democratiza-

tion of rhapsody.” Distributing venom and bile is no longer the exclusive privilege of vested power. Electronic culture, which brought us both phonograph records and internet downloads, gives everybody the chance to vent their spleen. And in the bargain intention gets awfully slippery. As Plato noted in the *Phaedrus*, the author of a written — printed or digitally recorded — rhapsody no longer controls meaning. Who is to say that the ‘I’ of *Johnson Machine Gun* — the song’s narrator — coincides with the song’s author? With very little effort we can interpret the song, not as a misogynistic attack on the ‘little girl’ that did Sunnyland Slim wrong, but as an example of the satirist satirized. As an artist, Sunnyland Slim fashioned a narrator whose quick resort to violence makes him appear ridiculous. The narrator becomes the target of the song’s satire. If this reading seems preposterous, it is no fault of the text. Rather, it is because we as listeners, even in the 21st century, cannot imagine a bluesman that cagey and crafty (most probably an assumption grounded in racism) or because we do not understand how music circulates in electronic culture.

Bile is a commodity easily and regularly monetized. But that does not mean everybody’s bile is equally valuable, exchangeable in the marketplace. On this point *Johnson Machine Gun* is illustrative. Market forces governing electronic culture typically reward rhapsodists who choose traditional, innocuous, or personal targets. Sunnyland Slim and the Chess brothers settled on the generic ‘little girl’ (a target that may or may not make the singer/narrator appear psychopathic). This was a wise move. Even today, the lyric still passes — like a rapp — for transgressive. Sunnyland Slim wasn’t fool enough to take on the white-racist establishment (though he might venture the occasional metaphor for white hegemony). Getting lynched is three times worse than going broke. By the same token, it is hardly likely that a cabal of gangsta rhapsodists is hatching out an attack on the white corporate executives who finance the production of rap to sell to masses of pink ‘n’ pimply high-schoolers. Marshall Mathers in the guise of Eminem or Slim Shady would rather attack Moby, boy bands, or

Britney Spears. But I digress — which might be the point with a rhapsody.

Almost 30 years have passed since Kool Herc wove danceable tunes out of “breaks,” stitching together melodic and rhythmic snippets isolated from various r&b, soul, funk, and disco records. With disco, records replaced live musical events. With rap, records formed a node that organized — or around which coalesced — new types of live events. Mass-reproduced music became music for reproducing. Copyright became the right to copy (Ulmer, 1983: 96). More than 20 years have passed since Grandmaster Flash popularized scratching and Afrika Bambaataa formulated hip-hop as an aesthetic, if not a worldview. But people continue to debate the merits of rap, the music of hip-hop culture. Is it positive? ‘Schoolly D is still the shit, man.’ ‘Listen to anything by KRS — One. It is the vernacular poetry of urban streets. The man’s a teacher.’ Or is rap negative? ‘Eazy-E first peddled drugs; then he peddled the musical equivalent of crack cocaine.’ ‘Soul is the sound of African Americans leaving church; rap is the sound of them not coming back.’ Or is hip-hop neutral? ‘MCs are reporters, pure and simple. Public Enemy’s Chuck D should’ve won a Pulitzer prize for “war correspondence.”’

Whatever. Because whatever valence we assign to rap, it is conventionally understood as a late manifestation of rhapsody, even by people unfamiliar with that term or its history. It is easy to see why. Hip-hop recommends making new recordings by rhyming over stitched-together fragments appropriated from already made records. It is a compositional methodology tailor-made for — arising from — electronic culture or secondary orality. Rhapsody stands as an alternative to models and methods of textual production that emerged out of literacy. For at least two millennia, much of the labor involved in composition — whether written, visual, or musical — has been devoted to effacing traces of labor. This is a fairly basic observation, easily illustrated. Hollywood movies are most often enjoyed when they appear less constructed by

film crews than magically conjured out of thin air (delivered to theaters in a manner similar to God handing Moses the Ten Commandments). Much of the work in freshman writing courses is devoted to crafting clear sentences, cohesive transitions between sentences and paragraphs, and coherent arguments. Popular music is hardly different. Studio wizardry – from tape splicing to multi-tracking to compositing vocals – aids and abets the creation of seamless products. Rap deviates from this venerated tradition by validating rupture, the performance that seems stitched together (whose seams show). Its break with music is as decisive as the break Picasso made with painting when he exhibited his first collage in 1912. The sonic productions of DJs – Steinski, Marley Marl, Jam Master Jay, Eric B., Premier, Terminator X, Shadow, Prince Paul, Mixmaster Mike, Danger Mouse, and Kid Koala – are not about masking or suturing seams. They are about collage or montage. They embrace a cut 'n' paste, rhapsodic aesthetic: a rapsthetic. (Oh, and did you know that Jonathan Swift used more than forty pseudonyms during his life?)

Parallels between the mnemonic formulas of epic poetry and the methods of contemporary MCs and DJs are uncanny. They are impossible to ignore. But it is a mistake to understand hip-hop as a revival (or as the atavistic survival) of ancient poetic traditions. Snoop Dogg, Tupac Shakur, Queen Latifah, L.L. Cool J, Ice T., the Rza and the Wu Tang Clan, P. Diddy, Jay-Z, and Kanye West are not griots from West Africa. They are cybnauts. Hip-hop did not arise within an oral or ancient culture. It was made possible by – it was an unintended effect and an early expression of – electronic culture. Put historically, in the 20th century music-related technologies converted the practicing amateurs of the 19th century into purchasing consumers. Instead of gathering around pianos and singing popular songs, people huddled around radios, plugged headphones into record players and gazed at movie and television screens. Hip-hop imagines a reversal of this picture. Which is not necessarily unique. The electric guitar

wrought similar changes by spawning countless garage bands. Hip-hop distinguishes itself by showing that machines designed to enable the consumption of music can be redirected as a means of producing original music. Hip-hop is one way to apply heuristics to music making: push playing records so far that it becomes a means of invention or composition. For anyone who accepts collage as a viable strategy for making art, turntables and samplers are, without qualification, musical instruments. They erode – they deconstruct – the distinction between making and listening to music. Rhapsody, as a form and methodology, seems especially suited to textual production within an emerging electronic paradigm.

Like punk, hip-hop is a DIY art form. Or as the Beastie Boys' Michael Diamond once told me, 'The highest praise that you can give any kind of music – coming from both the punk-rock and the hip-hop sides — is that you're actually creating music that inspires other people to make music, as opposed to sitting back and saying "Okay, I'm in the audience."' Chances are Jackie Wilson, Aretha Franklin, Otis Redding, Marvin Gaye and Donna Summer prompted jaw-dropping awe a lot more often than they inspired emulation. Who could match their artistry? But Rakim, Big Daddy Kane, MC Hammer, Biggie Smalls, Master P, Nas, Ol' Dirty Bastard, and Eminem? Or how about *The Adventures of Grandmaster Flash on the Wheels of Steel*, Herbie Hancock's *Rockit*, DJ Premier's *Deep Concentration*, and DJ Shadow's *In/Flux*? Fostering the illusion – and it is an illusion – that anyone can make hip-hop, they have motivated countless 15 year olds to grab mic in one hand (crotch with the other) and freestyle, or to imagine themselves commandeering a matched pair of direct-drive Technics turntables. Right now, all over the world, kids feature themselves becoming André 3000 or Big Boi, Pharrell, Jay-Z, Dr. Dre, Nelly, Ludacris, Mos Def, 50 Cent, Kanye West, or Dizzee Rascal. Their dreams and resultant behavior may not qualify as revolutionary, but they do refresh and renew music.

Unlike punk, hip-hop does not inherit or follow an Oedipal script. That is not the myth that moves it along. It does not acquire credibility by denigrating or forsaking the music – r&b, soul, funk, and disco – that forms its foundation. It is not evolutionary. It is not about slaying fathers, burning bridges, and shattering icons. Sure, hip-hop is highly competitive (on and off the mic). Rivalries between crews and geographical regions structure its history. But hip-hop suffers from no anxiety of influence. It is more complicated than that. To its manifest black audience, hip-hop accrues authenticity by seeming not to accommodate its latent audience – whatever that audience may be (it is most often pictured as a soft, undifferentiated mass of paleness). That is how hip-hop keeps it real. It is a basic time-honored *avant-garde* strategy.

Take the example of N.W.A's *Straight Outta Compton* and, by extension, gangsta rap. It was not deemed authentic because of its origin: it oozed up from the mean streets of Los Angeles. Authenticity does not inhere in art. It is conferred. Perhaps the album's black urban audience heard an accurate description – a representation – of its world and bore witness to the album's validity. But that theory is naïve. More likely, *Straight Outta Compton* helped focus – and even re-create – African American identity by denying other audiences positions with which they could identify. That's right. Who you are is determined by who you cannot become (by what theorists call the Other). White, suburban boys loved the album and gangsta rap because it so thoroughly excluded them. "Blackness" was thus opened up as a realm of fantasy. Rap supplied white kids with scripts that they found every bit as complex and enjoyable as a game of Dungeons and Dragons. Conversely, in the world of hip-hop, inauthenticity always results from a failed attempt to negotiate racial issues. Selling out – the counterfeit rap – means alienating one audience by accommodating another audience that wants to feel its Otherness. Hip-hop is one of the stages on which America plays out its drama of race. And rap is the most recent stage

of rhapsody as a compositional strategy, a way to write in electronic culture.

Bibliography

Elliott, Robert C. *The Power of Satire: Magic, Ritual, Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960).

Emerson, Ralph Waldo. 'The American Scholar', in Daniel J. Boorstin (ed.) *An American Primer* (New York: Meridian, 1966), 301-320.

Holman, C. Hugh. 'Rhapsody', in *A Handbook to Literature* 4th ed. (Indianapolis: Bobbs – Merrill, 1980).

Jarrett, Michael. 'Hip-Hop – What It Is, What It Is', in *The Tower Guide to Hip-Hop* (New York: Tower Records, 2001), 4-8.

_____. 'In a Time of Hate' *music.com*, (Spring, 2001):71-75.

Ong, Walter J. *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (New York: Methuen, 1982).

Palmer, Robert. *Deep Blues* (New York: Penguin, 1981).

Rogers, Pat. 'Shaftesbury and the Aesthetics of Rhapsody' *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 12, (1972): 244-57.

_____. (ed) 'Notes on *On Poetry: A Rhapsody*' in *Jonathan Swift: The Complete Poems* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983).

Rose, Tricia. *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1994).

Swift, Jonathan. 'On Poetry: A Rhapsody' in Pat Rogers (ed) *Jonathan Swift: The Complete Poems* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983).

_____. *Gulliver's Travels* (New York: Penguin, 2003).

Ulmer, Gregory L. 'The Object of Post-Criticism'
in Hal Foster (ed) *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on
Postmodern Culture* (Port Townsend, Washington:
Bay Press, 1983)

_____. *Teletheory: Grammatology in the Age of
Video* (New York: Routledge, 1989)

Appendix

The following URLs appear as links only throughout *Illogic of Sense*:

Preface: Gluetube

http://institute.emerson.edu/vma/faculty/john_craig_freeman/imaging_place/about/projects/choragraphy/ulmer_tapes/index.html

Niall Lucy: *The King and I: Elvis and the Post-Mortem or A Discontinuous Narrative in Several Media (On the Way to Hypertext)*

Sample from the Black Eyed Susans' *Viva Las Vegas*

http://www.altx.com/ulmer/lucy/vivalasvegas_sample.mp3

Elvis: *Edge of Reality*

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ga-gTPeir-E>

Elvis: *If I Could Dream*

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OtUTPhCSkLg>

Suspiciously Elvis: *An American Trilogy*

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KAWSYdbBeuc>

Marcel O'Gorman: *From Mysterian to Curmudgeon: Skulking Toward Finitude*

A Skull Session with Gregory "Golgotha" Skulmer

<http://artsweb.uwaterloo.ca/~marcel/e-crit/skulmer.html>

Gibberish: A Digital Hiding Place for Pomo Sapiens

<http://artsweb.uwaterloo.ca/~marcel/gibb/gibbcover.html>

1/0

<http://artsweb.uwaterloo.ca/~marcel/blake/10/10intro.html>

The 4fold Vision

<http://artsweb.uwaterloo.ca/~marcel/courses/392b/4fold/4fold.html>

Dreadmill

<http://www.dreadmill.net>

Michael Jarrett: *On Hip-Hop, a Rhapsody*

<http://www.altx.com/ulmer/jarrett/onhiphoppod.mp3>

Bio Notes

Editors

Darren Tofts is Associate Professor of Media & Communications, Swinburne University of Technology.
dtofts@groupwise.swin.edu.au

Lisa Gye is Lecturer in Media & Communications, Swinburne University of Technology
lgye@groupwise.swin.edu.au

Contributors

Niall Lucy is a Fellow of the Australian Research Institute at Curtin University.
n.lucy@curtin.edu.au

Jon McKenzie is Assistant Professor of English and Co-coordinator of Modern Studies at University of Wisconsin Milwaukee
jonm@uwm.edu

Linda Marie Walker is Senior Lecturer in the Louis Laybourne-Smith School of Architecture and Design, University of South Australia
Linda.Walker@unisa.edu.au

Craig Saper is Professor and Co-coordinator of the Texts and Technology PhD program in the English Department at the University of Central Florida.
csaper@pegasus.cc.ucf.edu

Rowan Wilken is a researcher and writer completing a PhD at the University of Melbourne.
rwilken@unimelb.edu.au

Marcel O’Gorman is a Professor of English and Director of the Digital Media Studies Program at the University of Detroit Mercy.
orgormamm@udmercy.edu

Teri Hoskin is an independent researcher, writer and artist and is currently working as program manager at the Experimental Art Foundation
teri.hoskin@internode.on.net

Michael Jarrett is Professor of English at Penn State University (York Campus).
jmj3@psu.edu



2007 / some rights reserved

design/layout: Joel Swanson / js@hippocrit.com

ALT^X

Alt X Press
3188 Redstone Rd
Boulder CO 80305
www.altx.com

ISBN: 1-931-560-15-3
ISBN 13: 978-1-931560-15-3