Reading ,Writing, and Teaching Creative Hypertext:

A Genre-based Pedagogy

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Asking students to write for an electronic medium like the World Wide Web, and in a non-linear or multi-linear form like hypertext, is still asking many of them to go where they have not gone before. This seems particularly true for the English and Education majors I teach, and even more true when I ask students to produce creative fiction or non-fiction work in hypertext along the lines of work published through the Eastgate and Alt-X web sites, rather than produce the somewhat more familiar genre of "homepage." Recent collections of essays about hypertext and networked classrooms (DeWitt and Strasma 1999; Gatlin and Latchaw 1998; Gruber 2000; Howard and Benson 1999) have become increasingly practice-oriented, and publications on the importance of thinking about hypertext patterns (Bernstein 1998), arrangement (Brooke 1999), collage (Janangelo 1998, Landow 1997), and coherence (Joyce 1998) in student hypertexts suggests that other teachers are also trying to figure out how to help their students build successfully in electronic environments. Joyce says he has been trying to develop a pedagogy of "the middle-voice," a pedagogy of coherence, somewhere between pedagogies of stir-fry and theorizing without writing (1998: 176). Many teachers of hypertext seem to be in a similar place, trying to work out similar accounts or formulations for their students. What has surprised me, however, in reading the literature of hypertext pedagogy, is the near-absence of genre-based approaches to teaching the reading and writing of hypertext. Genre-based pedagogies, I argue in this paper, provide useful theoretical and pedagogical tools for helping students make sense of not only the

structure of creative hypertexts, but also a wide range of compositional concerns: tone, diction, prose style, character development, plot, setting, visual design, and hypertext navigation strategies. Genres are useful guideposts for students working in unfamiliar territory like hypertext (Bazerman 1997), and the conventional aspects of many genres—always open to revision, and in the case of hypertext, "remediation" (Bolter 2001)—has been empowering, rather than constraining, for most of the students I have asked to write hypertextually.

Genre theory in the past fifteen years has made great strides in accounting for both the production and reception of texts, and this seemingly most-formal of critical approaches has also been successful in describing the ways that genres are located within wider social (rather than exclusively textual) contexts. The usefulness of genre theory has largely been overlooked by the post-structuralist influenced hypertext theorists because of generic criticism's structuralist past. But the rethinking of genre in rhetorical and social terms opens the door for the synthesis of genre and hypertext theories. To the extent that this synthesis has already begun, it has mainly been through what Laura L. Sullivan jokingly refers to as "The Florida School" of electric writing (1999: 29)—the work of Gregory Ulmer and his students in using texts as models for invention, rather than objects of explication. Their work is a component of what I call a genre-based pedagogy, but even it could be enriched by embedding genre-based hypertext pedagogies within activity theory. Activity theory has become prominent in human-computer interaction studies as a way of describing the complex interaction of people and artifacts—specifically, but not exclusively computers—in the pursuit of goals (Nardi 1996). But it has been incorporated by only a handful of scholars in rhetoric and

composition into their descriptions of how writers and students use writing technologies (Haas 1996, Spinuzzi 1999). The importance of activity theory for a genre-based pedagogy of hypertext is only briefly elaborated on below, and will need more extensive development elsewhere, but taking hypertext theory and research in that direction seems especially useful for scholars who want to combine empirical, classroom research and social, historical, and/or theoretical analysis of writing hypertext.

The story of the slow convergence of hypertext theories and pedagogies and genre-based theories and pedagogies is, *apropos* of an essay about hypertext, a story of paths not taken, research and ideas not linked. You will see in the first section of this essay a story of hypertext theorists focusing on structure without connecting particular structures to particular genres, not acknowledging the ways in which generic choices often commit writers to a limited range of structures. You will see in the second part of this essay that scholars who have focused on genre-studies have been unaware of, or have yet to explore, the ways in which their work could inform and advance theoretical and pedagogical ideas about hypertext. The mingling of these lines of thinking and teaching has been productive in upper-level creative-non-fiction and creative writing classes that I have taught over the past four years, particularly in hypertext autobiography assignments and hypertext popular culture genre assignments. While the first two parts of this essay primarily synthesize recent, relevant scholarship in hypertextual and genre studies, the final section describes student work generated in my class. In retrospect, a more detailed case-study approach would have yielded more insights into the composing process of my students, and more precise accounts of the usefulness of a genre-based approach to teaching hypertext. But the significant increases in the quality of the products every year

for the past four years, and the obvious reduction in barriers to writing hypertext that I have seen over the past four years, has convinced me that a genre-based pedagogy is appropriate and useful for teaching creative hypertext reading and writing.

Hypertext Pedagogy and Genre: Missed Connections

A story of paths not chosen must start at a crossroads. David Dobrin (1994) and Doug Brent (1995) made very similar points about the nature of hypertext in the mid-1990s—still an early moment in the history of hypertext theory and pedagogy. They both believed that hypertext could be read along generic and conventional lines—just as we often read print texts—but hypertext presented considerable challenges for reading and writing in 1994 and 1995 because its conventions were in their infancy. Both argued that as those conventions developed, they would be the key to hypertext pedagogies. Brent specifically saw in the work of Carolyn Miller, Charles Bazerman, Richard Coe, and others the pedagogical tools by which to engage with and teach hypertext reading and writing:

> Many proponents of teaching rhetorical forms argue that form is heuristic: that the preset forms of a culture are important storehouses of certain ways of knowing (Coe).
>
> Bartholomae argues that we should teach these forms as a way of welcoming students into the knowledge-world of the academy. These forms can be absorbed unconsciously (Freedman), but Bazerman argues that it is important to learn consciously the discourse forms in which one's discourse swims. Learning to be conscious of those forms and how they

> shape thought is not just learning to function with those forms. (Section 2.2)

Brent's solution in 1995, however, was to enact a "much looser pedagogy" with "flexible tools that can involve students in the incompletely understood environment that is (or maybe isn't) growing up around them."

In attempts to bring some form to the looseness of hypertext and approaches to teaching it, scholars in the field chose to focus on hypertext structure alone, as if it could be easily separated from generic choices. George Landow (1997) and Joseph Janangelo (1998) asserted that collage, and specifically the work of artist Joseph Cornell, might provide an appropriate model for hypertext writers. But knowing that "all hypertext webs, no matter how simple, how limited, inevitably take the form of textual collage" (Landow 1997: 171) will not take students very far in being able to make distinctions about the structure of existing hypertexts, or give them much guidance in writing their own hypertext. Mark Bernstein (1998) identified ten common patterns (in addition to common tree and sequenced hypertexts) found in hypertext documents: cycles, counterpoints, mirror worlds, tangles, sieves, montages, neighborhoods, split/joins, missing links, and feints. Bernstein does not significantly generalize about when or where these patterns occur, however, and he leaves unanswered questions like: in which genres are counterpoints more prevalent or more useful than mirrorworlds? Which genres are more likely to employ tangles than neighborhoods, and why? For what purpose or end? His analysis covers fiction and non-fiction hypertexts, but he uses no sharper generic definitions than those.

Collin Brooke builds off Bernstein's work to argue for reconnecting pedagogies of hypertext writing to the classical rhetorical canon of arrangement. He concludes his "Making Room, Writing Hypertext" by arguing for the need to emphasize and employ the "patterned yet provisional qualities of arrangement" when teaching the reading and writing of hypertext (1999: 265). He sees a place for genre within his concept of rearrangement, but does not significantly elaborate on it. He says "we need to invent forms that lie somewhere in between the containers that print has encouraged and the paralyzing freedom of an infinitely open space. These hypertextual forms, figures, and genres, like their print counterparts, will be open to adaptation, revision, and transformation" (262). Michael Joyce's pedagogy of coherence relies on similarly fluid notions of structure— "coherence can be seen as partially meaningful patterns emerging across a surface criss-crossed with potential meanings" (1998: 176)—suggesting that recent work in hypertext pedagogy is indeed moving towards balancing looseness and structure. "Genre" as a concept, however, provides a way of talking about the interplay of looseness and structure, the combination of the familiar and new, and for that reason alone, genre-based pedagogies seem like a logical fit for teaching hypertext.

Laura Sullivan's "Wired Women Writing" is the closest thing to an articulation of a genre-based pedagogy for teaching hypertext that I am aware of. In this essay, and her earlier online essay "Hypertextualizing Autobiography" (1995), she acknowledges a debt to Gregory Ulmer and his notion of heuretics. Heuretics is a strategy of invention that looks a little bit like teaching genre-conventions through the use of texts as models or sets of instructions for writing other texts (Ulmer 1994: xiii). Sullivan says:

Overall, my electronic pedagogy relies on this [Ulmer's] heuretic

approach, as students read texts not only to investigate what the texts

mean but also explore what instructions they offer for designing another

text, a hypertext related to the course topic. . . . My students and I use

these texts [feminist print autobiographies] as models when we create our

hypertexts" (1999: 30; 32).

Surprisingly, however, she does not use hypertext autobiographies like Shelley Jackson's

"My Body," or the collection of fictional and autobiographical writings at Carolyn

Guyer's "MotherMillenia" web site as models. A second surprise in her article is that she

is very concerned about the function of hypertext as a means of social intervention and a

way of demonstrating "the contradiction of living under the regime of capitalism," yet

she doesn't significantly engage the material setting in which she teaches, the materiality

of the computers on which she and her students work, nor the negotiation of social,

economic, and technological networks her students might have undergone to produce

their hypertexts (1999: 51). Her groundbreaking work would be usefully supplemented

by examples of hypertext genres at work and by activity theory: an account of the human-

computer interaction as well as the interaction of this hybrid genre in its social context.

Jay David Bolter's concept of "remediation" should also open the door to further

genre-based hypertext pedagogies. Bolter explains precisely through the concept of

remediation the role of the old genre in the new medium:

Hypertext in all its electronic forms—the World Wide Web as well as the

many stand-alone systems—is the remediation of print. Writers and

designers promote hypertext as a means of improving on the older

medium, or more precisely on the genres associated with the medium of

print, such as the novel, the technical report, and the humanistic essay.

Where printed genres are linear or hierarchical, hypertext is multiple and

associative. Where a printed text is static, a hypertext responds to the

reader's touch. The reader can move through a hypertext document in a

variety of reading orders. Whether multilinearity and interactivity really

do render hypertext better than print, is a cultural determination. (2001:

42)

These are the *claims* of hypertext promoters, but Bolter also acknowledges that

"Electronic hypertext certainly pays homage to the medium that it is seeking to

refashion" (43). Even more precisely for my concerns about reading and writing

hypertext, he says "we depend in a variety of ways on our knowledge of print in order to

read and write hypertexts" (45). He summarizes pedagogical innovations, and notes that

teachers have been more willing to remediate genres than have researchers, but Bolter

does not elaborate on a specific pedagogy for teaching hypertext.

I've provided this long review of hypertext pedagogy's short history because it is

important to see that the paths *chosen* by hypertext scholars have primarily led around,

rather than through, genre studies. The structure of a hypertext has been deemed more

important to its function or success than its generic affiliations, but it seems to me that

separating a hypertext's structure from its generic affiliations is a formalist and a-

rhetorical pedagogical move. Teaching structures within the context of genres that have

histories and that respond to immediate and recurring social situations reconnects

structure and hypertext to other texts and rhetorical purposes. All of these

concepts—collage, provisional patterns, and coherence—are still relevant to a genre-based pedagogy. They are elements within a genre that make it recognizable, or elements from old genres, remediated, but recognizable. They are part and parcel of what I have been calling a genre-based pedagogy—a pedagogical approach that has been significantly developed in the last fifteen years, but not significantly applied to the reading and writing of hypertext.

Genre Pedagogy and Its Uses for Hypertext: Building Bridges

The breadth and depth of contemporary genre theory is nicely summarized by Anis Bawarshi in "The Genre Function". He argues that genre studies which focus on the production of texts have flourished in functional and applied linguistics, communication studies, education, rhetoric and composition—even sociology and psychology. Meanwhile, literary critics have only recently begun to understand that genre theory can be used to clarify the nature of literary production rather than simply classify finished products (2000: 335-45). This emphasis upon the usefulness of understanding genres as a means of both reading texts and producing texts is developed by Amy Devitt, who argues that "genre," should be redefined as "a dynamic concept created through the interaction of writers, readers, past texts, and contexts" (2000: 699). She is looking to integrate literary and rhetorical theories of genre through the common study of "the complexity of reading and writing" (696). Neither Bawarshi nor Devitt, however, apply their analysis to hypertext, nor do they acknowledge any work done in that area. Doug Brent's essay remains by far the most explicit attempt to connect genre-based pedagogies and hypertext writing. In returning to that crossroad one more time, I will wander up and down the path of genre-theory rather than march through it chronologically because relevant general

concepts, heuristics, and supplemental frameworks which have not been applied to hypertext have been developed at various times over the past fifteen years.

Charles Bazerman's claim that "Genres are the familiar places we go to create intelligible communicative action with each other and the guideposts we use to explore the unfamiliar" (1997: 19) should be at the heart of a genre-based hypertext pedagogy. Students in my classes often initially equate creative hypertexts with choose-your-own-adventure books, and then refine their generic understands from there. From the perspective of students who are writing hypertext for the first time, or writing it creatively rather than pragmatically for the first time, working with familiar genres can ease the anxiety that still frequently accompanies computer-intensive assignments for many students. If the technology, the computer programs, and the terminology are unfamiliar, at least the genre and the writing tasks will be somewhat familiar. Producing hypertexts in genres that are familiar to readers—often friends and family members outside of class because of the ease of Web access—can also increase students' sense of accomplishment because those students can bring something that is often unfamiliar (creative hypertexts) to new audiences in a recognizable form.

A general claim like Bazerman's can be supported by more concrete heuristics developed by genre theorists and teachers. Richard Coe suggests that genres should be taught "as social process, archeologically, and ecologically," but what that means depends on teachers and students unique situations (1994: 163). My own heuristic emphasizes the ecological nature of genres—genres interact and overlap—in the first point that follows, and the social process of writing genres in points two and three:

1. have students come to understand that all texts, including hypertexts, are rooted in one or more genres. Genres can be understood inductively by reading "in" a genre, an act complicated, but also enriched, by the fact that texts are never easily or clearly in one genre, but often have traces of many genres;

2. have students choose a genre that will meet their communicative needs, unless clear pedagogical reasons are articulated for asking students to write in a particular genre; and

3. encourage students to re-invent genres, to play with conventions, and to play with one or two specific texts as a way of engaging a genre.

All three of these concepts are widely practiced in writing classes already, although romanticists may chafe at using such structured elements in the generation of creative hypertexts. My experience, however, is that this structure enables the play of creativity, and avoids the paralysis of open spaces that Brooke acknowledges as a problem in teaching hypertext writing (1999: 262). Each of these points needs further elaboration to show their use in a genre-based hypertext pedagogy.

Genre theorists work from the assumption that generic knowledge is derived, at least in part, from reading. Ulmer and Sullivan clearly employ reading as the first step in invention—they read texts not only for what they mean, but what "instructions they offer for designing another text" (Sullivan 1999: 30). Hypertext theorists have been slow to employ genre-based pedagogies for the teaching of writing hypertexts, but they have frequently drawn on generic knowledge to make sense of the hypertexts they read. Landow sees in Shelley Jackson's *Patchwork Girl* and Carolyn Guyer's *Quibbling* an assemblage of genres (1997: 199, 207). Espen Aarseth sees in Michael Joyce's *afternoon*

the familiar conventions of modernist novels (1994: 71), and Ulmer sees in Joyce's

"Twelve Blue" strong elements of soap opera, although treated from a distance (1997:

para. 5). The goal of having students read hypertexts for their *use* of genres is not to

develop a catalogue of strictly categorized hypertexts, but to see the ways in which print

genres are remediated (for better or for worse), and to see the ways in which genre

conventions can serve as both instructions for textual production and guides for textual

comprehension.

Bazerman is particularly helpful again for the second step in my heuristic

strategies. He identifies the importance of offering students choices about the genres they

employ:

> Learning to write is hard work, requiring addressing ever more difficult
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> writing problems, so that if we want students to learn to write we must
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> locate the kinds of writing they will want to work hard at, the kinds of
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> writing problems they will want to solve. (1997: 26)

This issue of motivation and choices is complicated when hypertext assignments are

assigned, particularly when assigned in classes that are not explicitly about writing in

electronic environments. Sometimes, the "problem" of writing for the web is so

interesting and challenging for students, that the issue of generic choices is not significant

as a motivator, except that students who choose a familiar genre will probably be able to

produce text more easily than those who choose to work in a new genre, or without a

clear sense of their genre. Sometimes, however, the "problem" of writing on the web is

so uninteresting and unappealing to students, that the choice of an appropriate genre is

the most important motivating factor. If specific genres are assigned, and neither the

genre nor the medium provide an interesting challenge, students might find themselves boxed into particularly frustrating writing assignments.

The third component of teaching hypertext genres as process, the notion of re-inventing genres or playing with their conventions, has been at the heart of much of the genre-theory renaissance. Genre-based pedagogies need a language to account for changes in generic conventions and a language to engage writers in an act of agency, rather than simply transcription. The notion of re-inventing, remediating, or simply playing with genres is particularly important in hypertext pedagogies, and the concept has been addressed directly and concretely in Anne Freadman's "Tennis Anyone?". Texts are not in a genre, nor are genres in texts, Freadman argues in the essay. "[G]enre as a game is best understood as minimally two texts in some sort of dialogical relation" (1994: 48). This minimalist definition puts the focus on understanding a text's tactics, strategies, and traditions. Putting the emphasis of defining genres upon their response to other texts lets teachers out of the structuralist project of trying to strictly and firmly label and categorize texts. Instead, readers of hypertext can understand the ways in which a work responds to other texts or other traditions, and writers of hypertext can respond to one or more text in the construction of their own hypertext. Genres, as many in rhetoric, composition, and education have argued, are alive, are forms of life, and not simply dead categories to be applied to finished texts.

Bazerman's notion of genres as guideposts provides an entry into teaching hypertext genres, and Coe's heuristics (modified to individual situations) provide concrete steps to follow in teaching hypertext genres. One final important supplement to a genre-based pedagogy for hypertext comes from recent work that synthesizes activity

theory and genre theory. David R. Russell argues that a dialogic understanding of communication generally or writing specifically is too narrowly focused on "dyads" (i.e. a writer's *dialogue* with another text, as in Freadman's tennis metaphor). An activity theory perspective would take into account things like "long-term objects of activity and the motives of individuals and groups" and the wider "activity systems" individuals or groups participate in (1997: 509-10). "An activity system is any ongoing, object-directed, historically conditioned, dialogically structured, tool-mediated human interaction" (1997: 510). In undertaking any writing activity, writers not only respond to other texts, but they must choose among physical tools (pen and paper, computer and word processor) and linguistic tools, genres among the most important of those tools. When we ask students to use particular genres, Russell explains, we cannot forget that those genres are part of various activity systems, and those systems embody values that students might resist (1997: 534).

> As individuals are pulled in different directions, they experience double binds manifest in their writing, which may be resolved by their coming to appropriate the object/motive of some activity system(s) as they appropriate its genres—and as they resist or refuse appropriating others. (1997: 534)

Teaching the creative use of hypertext in advanced writing classes (as opposed to the building of web sites in technical writing classes) is in itself an activity that has the potential to pull students in at least two directions. This seems especially true for those students who have consciously chosen a major with limited technical and computer content. Explicitly asking students to engage in hypertext writing is asking them to

engage in an activity system some students have consciously avoided, often for strongly held and well-considered reasons. The activity theory framework certainly clarifies many of the dynamics teachers are likely to see in a computer classroom or during a specific hypertext assignment: the different kinds of motivations, the resistance to or excitement about using the technology or the genres, etc. I have introduced more choices into my hypertext assignments over the past few years—including "hypertext" in non-computer form—because of thinking through the values I was asking students to accept without much of a venue for critique. The activity systems involved in teaching hypertext and teaching in a computer classroom need to be studied further, and most likely through classroom case studies or ethnographies where students have a chance to talk about the values they associate with computers and the Web. But teachers of hypertext can certainly bring to bear on teaching hypertext an awareness of the complex set of values inscribed in technologies, genres, collaboration, and other tools used to produce hypertext.

Two Applications: **Hypertext Autobiography and Popular Culture Genres**

I bring hypertext theory and genre theory together in two assignments I use in upper-level writing classes: a hypertext autobiography assignment, and a hypertext popular culture genre assignment. The former assignment is geared towards individual hypertext production, the latter towards collaborative hypertext production, although building a collaborative classroom environment even for the autobiography assignment is very important for working in a new medium. These classes are not computer-intensive, and I do not use email discussion or other computer mediated activities much before turning to these assignments. I do lead into the hypertext autobiography assignment with

print autobiographies, and I lead into the popular culture genre assignment with essays about electronic culture and writing electronically. I asks students to be particularly aware of the print genres that inform the hypertexts they read; doing so provides a way of orienting students in the unfamiliar environment of writing for the web. I draw on hypertext patterns and the importance of structure, as it is relevant to the genres students are working in. When I first started using a hypertext assignment and began only with structural suggestions, students were often slow to begin and sometimes did not get far at all. Groups that intuitively plugged into a genre had a much easier time generating text and feeling like they had a direction to move in. Now that I explicitly have students read for the generic characteristics of existing hypertext, and try to have them use genres as guideposts, almost all students or groups start quickly and sustain, if not build, on their initial momentum.[1]

I follow the heuristic outlined above: students read print and hypertext genres relevant to their assignments, and in the case of popular genres, I assume a high level of familiarity. When I ask students to write hypertext autobiographies, I have ready access to a wide variety of print autobiographies and have used essays relating to the region and to popular culture. But unlike the scholars of the mid 1990s, I would also say that I have reasonable access to a wide variety of hypertext autobiographies. When I last taught this assignment in the spring of 2000, I had my students read the creative work of other students like Jeff Peck at Brown University ("Growing Up Digerate" 1996), and a more scholarly student essay on autobiographies in cyberspace by John Palmer at the

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University of Missouri, Kansas City ("Brave New Selves: Autobiography in Cyberspace" 1995). I also had my students read hybrid autobiographical/scholarly work by Louise Krasniewicz and Michael Blitz, which has a specific section entitled "Arnold Schwarzenegger: Write Us (An Autobiography)" 1999). And I had them read the highly visual, somewhat surreal autobiography "My Body" by Shelley Jackson (1997). This by no means exhausts the list of possible hypertext autobiographies; Sullivan and her students have produced a significant body of work in hypertext autobiography that could easily be drawn into an assignment like this one (see Sullivan's personal web page).

In setting up a specific genre for an assignment, I seem to ignore my own guideline: that students should choose a genre that meets their communicative needs. Autobiography, however, is obviously a highly flexible and experimental genre, and because my goal is to have students attempt hypertext writing (particularly multi-linear, visual writing), I am not concerned with policing generic boundaries, but only using the genre as a guidepost and a set of possible models or instructions. Some students produce very traditional, apparently non-fictive, autobiographical hypertexts while others create an "autobiography" about fictional alter-egos. Structurally, students can see the differences between Peck's more-or-less linear hypertext autobiography—what Bernstein would call a tree pattern (main trunk with branches)—and Shelley Jackson's "My Body," what Bernstein would call a "neighborhood," a set of related nodes readers can wander around in without feeling lost. This comparison alone is illuminating as a set of instructions for writing a hypertext autobiography (a linear story of a self dispersed versus a story of a self as spatial, non linear), but the comparison also raises interesting questions about "selves." How do we narrate our lives in relation to particular topics like

technology? To what extent is our sense of self derived from narratives that span our

lives, and to what extent is our sense of self derived from the *petit recits* we collect or

tattoo on ourselves? A genre-based pedagogy, like Ulmer's and Sullivan's heuretic

pedagogy, engages in analysis and interpretation of texts, but it need not stop with

analysis.

Having students read hypertexts like Jackson's or like Louise Krasniewicz and

Michael Blitz's "Dreaming Arnold Schwarzenegger" limits the extent to which the

students themselves feel as if they are "re-inventing" a genre. But most, and particularly

those who respond to Jackson's "My Body," certainly feel like they are engaging

autobiography in a way that is new to them. Many of my students have been drawn to

Jackson's "My Body" as a model or set of instructions because it successfully combines

visual and textual elements, and it remediates print autobiography via its spatial, visual,

and dream-like or fantasy qualities. An older-than average student who often reminded

me of this fact, in part I think as a pre-emptive explanation as to why she might struggle

with the web assignment, produced a hypertext autobiography she called the "The Quilt

of Hobbies." Her first screen was a 9-panel quilt with clip-art images representing her

hobbies, clearly modeled after Jackson's body-map, but appropriate to her subject matter.

Although a computer-user in her work, she hadn't considered the possible creative uses

of a computer or the web. They were technologies outside her leisure interests, as the

hypertext itself goes on to illustrate. And while she expresses an interest in learning more

about hypertext writing within the essay, I think her choice of topic is in many ways a

response to the technology—she still prefers her familiar hobbies, her home life, and her

family life to a life on the screen.

A second student composed a hypertext autobiography she called "Dreamviewer." This student was in her early twenties, majoring in experimental psychology and minoring in English. She told me that she responded very directly to "My Body" in design and content, but she localized her story in a way consistent with her academic interests. Her response to the spheres of activity—the genre and the computer technology—was to embrace them. Her autobiography began with a brain in a vat, hooked up to a machine—humorous, but not distopian or critical of that kind of work she did in psychology. While not as visually sophisticated as Jackson's hypertext autobiography, she used an image map for her opening screen, she searched the web rather than used clip art, she sought out animated GIFs, and she attempted to capture a dream-like state in prose. In incorporating this kind of prose, in presenting a surreal autobiography, she confidently received Jackson's volley and returned the shot. She was also much more clearly at home in the activity system that included hypertext writing, and produced a fully-developed draft the first week the class as a whole began working on the assignment. Many other students were still reading, and had not significantly begun composing, when she posted her sophisticated and fleshed out draft.

I have not pushed my students as far along the path of theorizing or politicizing autobiographical hypertexts as has Sullivan; I have considered my assignment more of an introduction to, rather than immersion in hypertext writing. I have also responded to some of their resistance to technology by opening the assignment up to non-electronic hypertexts. If the goals of teaching hypertext are not simply to increase computer literacy, but to encourage associative and visual thinking, I though I had to allow for more choice in mediums. Although most students still choose to work with hypertext

either because of some familiarity with or a desire to engage in that sphere of activity, one student produced a media-focused autobiography-in-a-box, not unlike a Joseph Cornell collage. Her box—the kind that reams of paper are sold in—has to be opened and interacted with, not just viewed. She included favorite books with analyses of the books' significance to her pasted on the inside cover; she included a tape, a tape recorder, and headphones for listening to her favorite music; and she included other artifacts from her life, all with explanations about their role and significance to her. As a future middle school teacher, very likely in rural North Dakota, she told me that she would not likely have access to enough computers or computer support to produce hypertexts, but she would be able to do collage, or non-electronic, hypertext projects.

My two reservations about the hypertext autobiography assignment are the lack of generic choice, and the use of an individual assignment for hypertext. Assigning one genre, particularly in a class that has no explicit goals about teaching certain genres, can lead to the kind of writing bind Russell alludes to, and a genre-based pedagogy can possibly send the message of rigid, formal requirements, even if as a teacher you try to emphasize the looseness of generic conventions. My second concern, about the individual nature of the autobiography assignment, is connected not so much to the problem of the values that students assign to computer technology, but connected to the wide range of ability with technology. The speed with which the author of "Dreamviewer" completed her first draft seemed to intimidate some students, and re-enforce a sense that some people are computer whizzes, others are not. More generally, students unfamiliar with hypertext writing might be able to produce text, but the mechanics of web publication can lead to frustration, and a shifting of the focus of the

assignment away from autobiography and on to coding and file transferring. Some of these problems are lessened, although not eliminated, when students work collaboratively. An activity theory perspective on hypertext assignments supports the notion that a "community" can provide essential support for individuals and groups to meet their goals, and all of the students in my courses have been more successful in producing elaborate, fully-realized hypertexts when I have used collaborative assignments, rather than individual hypertext assignments.

The collaborative hypertext popular culture genre assignment I use follows the same principles and heuristics as the autobiography assignment. Students read a variety of popular culture genres in hypertext format, then decide as a group on an appropriate hypertext project. As with autobiography, the online examples for reading are plentiful and growing. Some popular models have been "The Company Therapist," a collaborative web soap opera (1996-1999); "The Unknown" (Gillespie, Marquardt, Rettberg, Stratton 1998-2001) an on-the-road hypertext novel that one of the authors has connected to the picaresque tradition (Rettberg 1998); "The Heist" (1995) a hardboiled detective story by Walter Sorrells, and "Charmin' Cleary," a hypertext short story by Edward Falco (2000) that has generic affiliations with mysteries and David Mamet's *Oleanna* (1993). I've also asked students to read Michael Joyce's "Twelve Blue" (1997) as an example of "high culture" writing that still employs a popular genre structure: the soap opera. I also ask students to pay particular attention to the pattern(s) used in these hypertexts. Although students often find all of the hypertexts to be a "tangle" of sorts, they can see that "The Company Therapist" and "Charmin' Cleary" use a mirrorworld structure: the same events are seen and told from different perspectives. Students who

reported on the "The Heist" saw the seive pattern at work: readers are funneled into a series of events told from one character's perspective. The seive may seem like a mirrorworld in that it can provide a different perspective and a different voice articulating the same events, but it typically forces readers back to a decision point to see the other perspectives, rather than presenting them all along. My goal in having students analyze hypertexts from generic and structural perspectives is not, as I have said before, to pin down a hypertext as conclusively in one genre and using one pattern. Instead, I am interested in helping my students understand some of the ways in which hypertexts are cobbled together, how they work, and what familiar elements are likely to be found in hypertexts that upon first-glance may look entirely new and foreign.

The element of generic choice for this assignment is much broader than with the autobiography assignment. Students may use the hypertext(s) they read as their model, their set of instructions; they may use one of the other hypertexts presented in class by another group; or they may draw on their own knowledge of genres in order to guide their production. This element of choice may seem somewhat constrained within the general assignment—produce a popular culture genre hypertext—but I have specifically included Joyce's "Twelve Blue" in order to open up the door to a style of language and hypertext design that has elements of popular culture, but is more thoroughly high culture in its orientation. For some instructors and students, the popular culture genres might too readily open the door to sophomoric writing that relies on shock-value and infantile humor, but my students knowledge of popular culture genres seems to provide a particular powerful engine for textual production. Popular culture genres provide stock characters, plots, and settings, all of which can be played with rather than simply recited.

This might seem like an odd quality to emphasize, but student paralysis upon being given a loosely defined hypertext assignment does seem to be one of the most important hurdles hypertext teachers have been trying to overcome.

As with the hypertext autobiography assignment, some of the popular culture hypertext models already remediate print genres significantly. Students who chose to work in the genres of soap opera or road-trip narrative, for example, found themselves playing a new, but recognizable game for the first time, rather than re-inventing a genre or inventing a new one. In the fall of 2001, a group of students used "The Unknown" as an explicit and exclusive model for their own work. The main characters of the "The Unknown," Dirk, Scott, and William, are engaged in a chaotic cross-county book-promotion tour of their unpublished book; the main characters in my students' hypertext, "Original Flavor," undertake a similarly chaotic trek from Fargo to Vermont in search of more Ben and Jerry flavors than are available in Fargo. As with "The Unknown," it is unclear whether or not the characters in "Original Flavor" ever actually make it to their destination. My students self-consciously used both the tangle and mirrorworld patterns to structure their hypertext, and they learned from "The Unknown" that even if the dominant genre is "road-trip" or "travel narrative," that many other genres can be folded into the story. "Original Flavor," like "The Unknown," incorporated the prose narrative of the trip, poems, songs, diary entries, e-mails, and literary analysis. "Original Flavor" does not necessarily add up to anything substantial, but it seems like the intent of it and "The Unknown" is to break things down or crack things up. The characters in "Original Flavor" all hold on to public representations of themselves that break down after days in a van with strangers. The academic prose and literary analysis these four students had

been engaged in performing for three to five years is subject to ridicule and parody. Their new writing, their hypertext writing, is by no means perfect and undoubtedly will not stand the test of time, but it might be part of what Geoffrey Sirc hopes will be the "general" (as opposed to "restricted") economy of the Internet. He asks: "Can we allow writing that might be cracked, unfinished, but that circulates some interesting ideas? It doesn't have to be powerfully or rigorously conceptual. . . . Just a touch will do . . . —just an easily accessible hit" (1999: 196).

There is with this popular culture genre assignment an opportunity to break some new ground. One group of students in the fall of 2001 wrote a web "mockumentary" of a country-rock band, "The Crotchless Horsemen," playing with the generic form most closely associated with the movie *This is Spinal Tap*. In this case, they knew of no web model to follow, but their knowledge of the genre and hypertext patterns enabled them to produce in seven weeks a fully realized hypertext document (approximately 75 screens) tracing the rise and fall of this fictional band. Readers got an overview of the band at four different stages in their career from a third-person, documentary voice, and then readers could choose to follow one band-member's story, from beginning to end, or move among the stories throughout the stages of the band's career. What seemed particularly striking here is that the material relied on many of the cliches of sex-drugs-and rock 'n' roll stories, and led to the kind of content that the writers admitted they wouldn't let their own students produce. But the writers also worked very hard at using distinct voices with regional and class markers appropriate to the genre, and they worked for hours to develop a clear navigation system with no broken links or images. Having a clear understanding of the genre they chose to work in and a good knowledge of the hypertext patterns that

typically informed work of this size enabled these students to produce a well developed, technically sophisticated piece of hypertext fiction.

I suspect that for many teachers, the central concern about using a genre-based pedagogy is an apparent tendency towards formulaicness or the problem of containerism, and popular culture genres might seem particularly prone to the first problem. But remediating print genres through hypertext almost immediately negates this concern. Students recognize the presentation of a print-based document in electronic format, and while those documents may be of great informational value, students also know immediately that the document is not interesting in and of itself to look at. My students seem to know, intuitively, that if a document is going to be created for the web, it has to be something more than print—an intuition Bolter also acknowledges as central to remediation. Genres can certainly be restrictive and confining when they are assigned prescriptively, when students are told to work in a particular genre, follow particularly conventions, without clear motivation being provided or students unable to find a motivation for using such a genre. But helping students see dominant and secondary generic features that inform creative hypertexts, and helping students make sense of the apparent looseness of many hypertexts, enables and empowers students as readers and writers in this still unfamiliar medium.

Conclusion

I've tried to weave hypertext pedagogy and genre-pedagogy in the section above, describing a few of the products of that intermingling through the hypertexts my students have constructed. But that weave is a loose one. I'd like to conclude by re-iterating and elaborating on what I take to be the compatibility and strengths of combining hypertext

pedagogies and genre pedagogies into a coherent genre-based approach to teaching hypertext. In other words, I'd like to tie those strands at four tight points:

1. Social and rhetorical theories of genre and the remediation of print genres in hypertext makes a genre-based pedagogy viable for teaching creative fiction and non-fiction in a hypertext format. Much of the recent work in genre-theory has been done by researchers in business and professional writing or academic writing, but it is equally relevant for scholars who teach and do research in creative writing, creative non-fiction, or simply non-fiction essay writing. The notion of playing with genres and conventions should be particularly amenable to creative writing pedagogies and principles.

2. The rich research on form in hypertext pedagogy and theory—collage, pattern, arrangement, coherence—remains a valuable part of a genre-based pedagogy, but I would recommend that writers make their decisions about pattern in the context of the genres they are working in and the communicative goals they have. Although I encourage putting the genre before the pattern, teaching hypertext genre as a process obviously requires that students have the freedom to work recursively, to start with a pattern and find a genre, or start with a genre and try out a variety of patterns until they find one that works.

3. The use of familiar genres like autobiography and popular culture genres is particularly valuable for novice hypertext writers, and starting students in the domain of the familiar is clearly supported by activity theory and a variety of other educational principles. Laura Sullivan has already gone much further than I have in taking her students' hypertext projects out of the realm of the familiar and personal, and into the realm of the social and political. That direction is worth extending, and seems like the

direction that many writing teachers will likely want to take hypertext genres. This more socially engaged, critical and creative hypertext, however, should now also be able to build on the growth of hypertexts being published by creative writers, scholars, and students. Teachers of socially engaged critical and creative hypertext would also benefit from a close examination of the many activity systems they are asking their students to engage with as they write hypertextually about personal and political issues.

4. The door is open for extended research into and application of activity theory in the realm of hypertext pedagogy. Activity theory is already central to studies in Human-Computer Interaction studies, and one of the most important points activity theory makes is that writing is not simply an interaction between texts and authors; instead, writing is part of larger social activity systems. In the case of hypertext writing, human-computer interaction is a large part of that activity system. Genre theorists have been drawn to activity theory because of the way it re-casts genres as flexible "tools" rather forms, and because of the way it places those tools in historical and social contexts. The hypertext theorists seem not to have incorporated activity theory into their work in any significant way. Bringing these lines of thought together should enrich, not prescribe, hypertext pedagogy. Activity theory is not prescriptive—it will not tell us how to teach in computer classrooms or computer-mediated environments—but it in itself can be a powerful tool for those who want to navigate and negotiate the looseness and structures of teaching hypertext creatively.

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