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From the Editors

Julie Bates

With each new issue of the *Grassroots Writing Research Journal*, it's exciting to see how contributors to the journal find unique ways of shaping their own writing research identities and sharing what they have learned from their studies in genre, cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT), and literate activity in its myriad forms. The thirteen new articles in the 6.2 issue—which range from studies on music notation and basketball to bumper stickers and flash fiction—showcase just how in-depth and complex writing research can be.

To jump-start this issue, our first four articles uncover the ways that CHAT can be used in undertaking analyses of a variety of genres. **Shannon Harman** uses CHAT to compare different types of music notation and discovers that their modes of production, distribution, and socialization lead people to view them differently. In her study, **Sarah Greenberg** delves into the history of bumper stickers and the ways people use them to communicate a variety of messages on the road. Then, drawing on his own experiences and observations as well as his studies of critical essays, **Benjamin Sutton** attempts to uncover why people allow greeting card writers to mediate some of their most important messages. Rounding out our opening series of articles on CHAT, **Millie Dunbar** digs into the complex activity system of the volleyball court using a variety of primary and secondary research methods.

Next we undertake exploration of some of the ways writing researchers examine literate activity in its varied forms. **J. Michael Rifenburg** shares how spatial orientation impacts the literate practices of a Division II men's basketball team. Then, continuing our streak of sports-related articles, **Annie Hackett** sits down with football coach Wes Gaddis to learn how his daily activities involving writing and researching have evolved over the years. And in a study of a very different type of literate practice, **Matt Del Fiacco** utilizes CHAT analysis to examine how participation in National Novel Writing Month (NaNoWriMo) affects participants' writing practices.

The next two articles hone in on the trajectory of specific texts to reflect on what those texts do and how they move around in the world. **Kristen R. Strom** leads off with an article in which she investigates the trajectory of a research tool called the CATUM and how students who used the CATUM in high school

transferred the skills and knowledge they gained from it into new writing contexts. Then **Tharini Viswanath** writes about the Humans of New York Facebook page and the way its many trajectories are influenced by its production, distribution, reception, and socialization.

Authors of the next three articles examine how antecedent genres influence what writers do and some of the ways writers transfer their genre knowledge (both successfully and unsuccessfully) into unfamiliar writing situations. **Eric Pitman** draws connections between his need to take better notes as a college freshman and his more recent experiences with remediating flash fiction into a variety of genres. Next **Kayla Scott** shares how she transferred knowledge of genre studies from an English 101 class and applied it to her inquiry into genres in an art class. And **Laura Skokan** details the messy experience of writing a complex graphic novel and how she came up with a new term—*anti-cedent genre*—to describe a genre we don't know as well as we think we do.

Then, in the final new article of the issue, **Joyce R. Walker** presents a match-up for the ages—the rhetorical triangle versus CHAT—and makes the case for why CHAT is the better tool for examining the complexity of literate activity.

The 6.2 issue concludes with a reprinting of "Publishing with the *Grassroots Writing Research Journal*," which seeks to encourage prospective writers to submit their rigorous investigations of how people, tools, and situations affect writing in complex ways. As we close our sixth year of publication, we continue to receive a record numbers of submissions from writing researchers interested in publishing their studies in the journal. In the coming year, we hope to receive even more submissions that reflect a diversity of perspectives, explore a variety of distinctive genres, and provide a richer understanding of the culturally and historically bound spaces in which these genres are embedded.

Scales, Saussure, and Socialization: Applying CHAT and Linguistic Theory to Music Notation

Shannon Harman

Drawing on her own experience as both a musician and writer, Shannon Harman uses cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT) to compare different types of music notation to genres of writing. She illustrates how various types of music notation are functionally similar, yet she finds that the differences in their modes of production, distribution, and socialization lead people to view these types of notation and their users very differently.

When I was eight years old, I started taking piano lessons. Every week for years my mom would drop me off for my lessons, and I would happily trot off with a pile of lesson books about standard notation and music theory tucked under my arm. I would later bang away on my electronic keyboard every day after school, attempting to sight-read more and more challenging pieces. One day my dad came downstairs while I was practicing. I had a particularly dense and tricky progression I was working on, and my dad picked up the music book and said, "I don't know how you can read all of this; it's like a different language!" My dad was joking with me, of course, but his comment was actually very insightful; music notation is similar to language in that it, too, is textual (and by that I mean you have to be able to read and write it) and, thus, a genre of writing. In this article, I will be using cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT) to look at how different forms of music notation, specifically standard notation and tablature, work as genres of writing.

So What Exactly is Notation? And What's a Genre of Writing? And What's CHAT?

You might be a little confused by some of the terminology I just used (totally OK; that was me not too long ago). Let's start with the idea of a **genre**. You might have heard the word genre, but never applied to writing. Well, when we English-y types say "genre" what we are really referring to is a category or type of writing. You probably know of a number of different types or genres of writing. Fantasy novels are a genre of writing, for example. They have very specific characteristics that you can recognize: they are fictional, they are generally fairly long, they can be simple stories or complex stories, they are generally told from first or third person, and so on. This makes them significantly different from other types or genres of writing. They are very different from the persuasive essays that you may have had some experience with in school. These essays are formal, certainly not fictional (I hope!), much shorter, and so on. Both novels and essays are types of writing, but they are so different that we consider them different genres of writing with their own unique "genre characteristics" or "genre features" like the ones I just listed.

So now that you know what genre is and what genre features are, you might be wondering about **cultural-historical activity theory** (CHAT). CHAT is, at its most basic, a helpful means of understanding how different genres of writing (or "texts") are made, how they work, and who they impact. There are a number of other terms wrapped up in CHAT that I will be using throughout this article that are important to understand. First, in looking at how a text is made and where it goes, the terms "production" and "distribution" are really helpful. **Production** refers to anything that goes into actually making the text, whether that means the physical objects that created it—like a computer or printing press—the person or people who made the text, or even the assumptions that those people had about what that text ought to be. (For example, you generally assume, without even realizing it, that a Facebook status should not be as long as a novel, which might seem silly, but it is something that you consciously or unconsciously take into consideration when writing a Facebook status.) **Distribution**, then, refers to where that text, once it is produced, actually goes (Walker 75). Who is the text for and how does it get to them? Is it a hardcover novel that was shipped to a bookstore for specific people to buy? Was it a blog post that is available electronically for anyone to read?

After looking at production and distribution, I will talk about "reception" and "socialization," both of which focus on how different audience members, readers, users, etc., use a text once it is distributed. **Reception** refers to what people do with a text (Walker 75). Do they use it the way its author(s) intended? Do they repurpose it and use it for something completely new? **Socialization**, on the other hand, refers to how people not only use the text, but also how they talk about it, as well as its importance and use in our society. So, for example, the way we talk about e-mail and the assumptions we make about what it

should look like (a greeting, a body, etc.) is significantly different from the way we talk about a sonnet (which is a type of poem). You probably write far more e-mails and know a lot more about e-mails than you do about sonnets; thus, we could argue that e-mails are a more actively socialized kind of writing.

Finally, you may be wondering what music notation is. There are actually many different forms of music notation, including (but not limited to) standard notation, tablature ("tabs" for short), chord charts, and the Nashville Number System. In my own composing, I primarily use standard notation and tablature, which are arguably the most complex forms of music notation. Standard notation is the kind of music notation you probably think of when you hear Mozart or Bach, but its roots actually far predate them. To give you a brief (and highly simplified) history of standard notation, we have to start with the hymns and chants (a type of a cappella singing, meaning it was not accompanied by any instruments) that were used in worship in the Jewish liturgy before Christ and then later after Christ in the early centuries of Christianity (Wellesz 1). These hymns and chants had to be sung in a very specific manner (obviously, or they would have ended up with completely different songs!), so, as a result, the early Christian church developed a sort of "punctuation" in writing to indicate things like pitch (Wellesz 2). This punctuation slowly evolved in complexity over the centuries, indicating not only the pitch of the note, but the duration of the note, how loud or soft it should be, and more. It didn't evolve into what we think of as modern standard notation, though, until around the fifteenth century A.D., when the liturgical practices of the Christian church underwent a shift as they were heavily influenced by secular music practices, which brought new, more complex, and more varied musical forms to the church, and, thus, required more complex notation that made the circulation of different musical forms possible at different times in the liturgical year (Harrison 82). This, in combination with the later invention of the printing press, which made printing and circulating music notation on a large scale possible, led to the development of what we know today as standard notation. Because of the political power and importance of the church at that time, standard notation became the norm for upper-class musicians.

This type of notation uses a system of notes placed on a staffs to indicate information such as pitch, time, and loudness. Figure 1 below shows a G major scale written in standard notation.

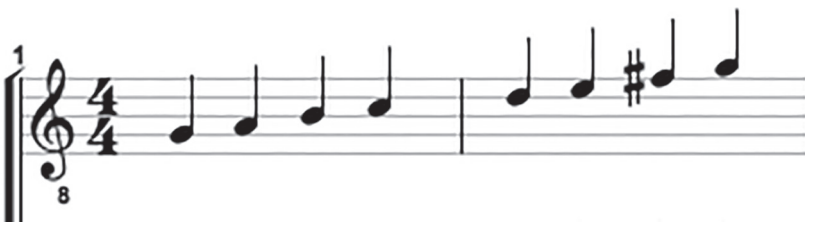

Figure 1: G major scale written in standard notation. Image created by the author.

When I first began learning to play the piano and studying music theory, I learned to read standard notation (and I learned its associated history as well). I was not introduced to any other forms of notation until much later, when I began playing other instruments, particularly guitar and bass guitar. I noticed that my friends who also began their music careers playing piano or any orchestral instruments (such as woodwinds or brass instruments) also learned standard notation. Not everyone I know who plays an instrument learned standard notation, though. My brother is a great guitarist. He started learning to play the guitar at the same time I started learning to play the piano. I did not start playing the guitar until a few years later, and I focused on acoustic techniques while he focused on electric. As a result, he can play using certain electric guitar techniques with a finesse that I just can't seem to manage (yet!). But he can't read standard notation. In fact, a lot of my guitarist friends who started their music education playing guitar rather than piano or orchestral instruments can't read standard notation. Instead, they learned to read and write music in the form of a type of notation called tablature.

Tablature actually developed around the same time as standard notation. What we know today as modern tablature evolved from German and, later, Italian and French lute tablature that appeared during the fifteenth century (Minamino 3). The lute, invented in the late thirteenth century, became popular across Europe during the Renaissance and, as techniques for playing the lute became more complex, the need for some form of notation arose (Minamino 3). This early tablature was quite complex. It differed from standard notation in that the symbols did not represent sounds, but, rather, represented positions on the fretboard of the lute. (The fretboard is the long neck on a stringed instrument where the player presses down on the strings to produce different pitches.) Different numbers, or sometimes letters, placed on a visual representation of a fretboard would indicate to musicians where to place their fingers on the fretboard and what strings to pluck.

Today, tablature is commonly used by guitar players. Once I began playing guitar, my teacher required me to learn and use tablature rather than the standard notation I was accustomed to at that point. In modern guitar tablature, there are six lines, each representing one of the six strings on a guitar, with the top line representing the highest string, also called the first string, and the bottom line representing the lowest string, also called the sixth string. The lines in between represent the respective strings in between the first and sixth strings. Numbers are then placed on the lines to indicate which fret should be played on which string. For example, the number three written on the top line indicates that the guitar player should place a finger on the third fret of the first string. Figure 2 on the next page shows a G Major scale, the same scale shown in Figure 1, but this time written in tablature.

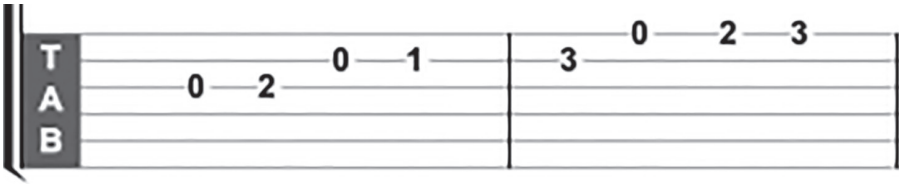

Figure 2: G Major scale written in tablature. Image created by the author.

Since the musicians I knew who read standard notation and tablature were both equally technically skilled at their instruments, the difference between the two types of notation initially did not strike me as particularly significant. I did not realize that people have radically different assumptions about these forms of notation as texts until someone asked me if I could read "music." I realized that what that person was really asking was whether or not I could read standard notation. In spite of the similarities between the histories of standard notation and tablature and the aspects of music that they both communicate to musicians, there is still an assumption among many musicians (and non-musicians) that standard notation is THE form of music, and, as a result, all other forms of notation are implicitly framed as substandard and, consequently, their users as less technically or theoretically proficient. But is this really the case?

Spoiler: Tabs Are Just as Complex as Standard Notation! (Comparing Genres)

After comparing the history and development of standard notation and tablature, I then dug up some of my old sheet music (which is standard notation) and tabs in order to compare the genre features of each. I noticed that both do share certain important genre features; foremost among them being that they actually communicate much of the same information. It becomes evident from the above history of these types of notation that they have both evolved into texts and, in some ways, languages of their own in that they communicate certain things to the reader just like language does. In theorizing about language, the famous linguist Ferdinand de Saussure describes the manner in which individual words (or the sounds comprising them) indicate specific objects, ideas, persons, etc., to the person reading or hearing the words/sounds (Saussure 7). For example, when I write (or speak) the word "dog," my reader (or listener) immediately conjures up an image of furry, four-legged canine—in other words, the reader immediately thinks about an actual dog. In this case, according to Saussure, the word "dog" is said to *signify* (or represent) an actual dog because that is what we think of when we hear the word "dog." Thus, the word "dog" is what Saussure calls a *signifier* for an actual dog, which is the *signified*.

In precisely the same manner as language, different symbols and their complex relationships with one another in music notation serve to signify certain pitches, tempos, pitch duration, and more. In language, if a person does not know English, the English word "dog" would not serve to signify an actual dog to him/her; instead, to that person, the word "dog" would just be a random sound that does not mean anything. Similarly, in music, if a person does not know the particular notation, he/she would not know that the first note on the top staff in Figure 3 below represents and signifies the note G. It is the same with tablature. If a person does not know how to read a tab, then he/she would not know that the first number zero in the tab in Figure 3 below signifies both the note G *and* plucking an open string (which means that you do not press any frets on that string when you play it).

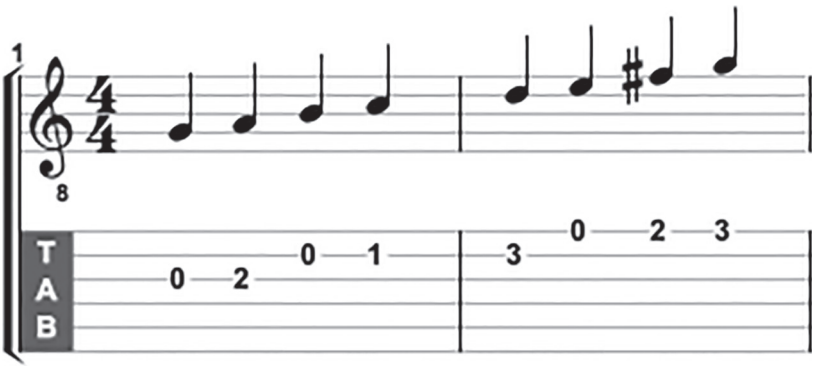

Figure 3: G Major scale shown on the top staff (the lines with the notes) as standard notation and on the bottom staff (the lines with the numbers) as tablature. Image created by the author.

So, just as words strung together make up sentences that make up larger texts, notes and other music symbols strung together make up progressions that make up songs, which are texts of their own. A person has to know the language of the notation in order to be able to read it.

But why is this important? Well, if both standard notation and tabs can be theorized as language in this way, if they both serve to signify the same aspects of music (in the way that the first note on the top staff of Figure 3 and the first number zero on the bottom staff of Figure 3 both signify the note G even though the two staffs look radically different), then neither is more or less complex than the other. They simply use different symbols and structures as signifiers. It is similar to the way English uses the word "dog" to signify an actual dog whereas Spanish uses the word "perro" to signify precisely the same dog. They are different words/sounds, but they mean the same thing, and we would not claim that Spanish is more complex than English or vice versa; we simply recognize that they are different.

OK . . . So Tabs and Standard Notation Have Similar Histories and They're Both Complex. What's the Big Deal?

In proceeding with my research, after comparing the history of standard notation and tabs as well as the ways in which they work to signify aspects of music, I was left wondering why, given the similarities between them and the fact that neither is more complex than the other, musicians still assume that standard notation is music and that "tabs don't count," (to quote one of my friends who could read both standard notation and tabs). In looking back on my own experience with these different forms of notation, I found that the primary difference between standard notation and tablature centers not so much on their complexity or the different symbols they use to signify pitch, loudness, duration, and more, but rather on their production, distribution, reception, and socialization, if we think of them in the CHAT terms that I described in the beginning of this article.

When I started researching the ways in which standard notation and tablature are produced, I once again went back to my own experience and pulled out all of my own old sheet music and tabs and went through them to see how and where I acquired them. When I was learning how to play the piano, if I wanted the sheet music for a song, I had to go to a music store and actually purchase official sheet music. All of the sheet music I have is official sheet music (by official, I mean that it is standard notation professionally produced by the copyright owners of the song). It is almost impossible to find sheet music anywhere else, even the Internet, because musicians and producers are very thorough in ensuring that illegal copies are not produced and distributed via the Internet, and because (accurate) sheet music is so complex that it often takes a professional, or at least a musician with expertise in transcribing music via standard notation, to produce sheet music. Even more importantly, going back to the history of standard notation that I talked about before, sheet music is considered "professional," and it is the "standard" (hence the name) in the music industry given its history as the primary form of music notation circulated within the church and among "high-class" musicians and composers throughout European and American history from the fifteenth century forward. So the production of sheet music today is controlled and shaped by the copyright laws (only the copyright holder can legally produce it), by the need for a professional to write it given its complexity, and by the need for the correct software for writing in standard notation, which can be very expensive, therefore limiting access and necessitating professionals who can afford that software. It is a highly controlled and policed process, both because of the difficulty of acquiring the software and the professionals to write the notation, and also because of copyright laws here in America that limit who can reproduce such a text.

Tablature, on the other hand, is everywhere. Copyright law still applies to tablature, of course, but I know from my own experience that it is not policed with the severity that standard notation is given that it is not applicable across all instruments in the manner that standard notation is (tabs are only used for stringed instruments) and, thus, it is not used in the same professional contexts. It is possible to buy official tablature, but it is not as common. It is far more common for guitarists (and musicians who play other stringed instruments) to learn a song by ear and then write up a rough tab of it either for personal use or for sharing online. It is a completely different production process. Many of my friends produce their own rough tabs by ear, rather than paying money for official tablature. Since they play by ear, they do not feel the need to write tabs that are as complex as official tabs, and it is these less complex tabs that then get circulated. For example, my brother never has time signatures on his tabs because he already knows the time signature from his own familiarity with the song. (A time signature tells the musician how fast to play and how many notes are in a measure; songs are broken down into what are essentially smaller pieces called measures that help determine the flow of the song and help musicians keep track of where they are.) I also know some musicians who write and then share their tabs online; they do not include time signatures either because their assumption is that anyone looking for the tab for a given song is already familiar with that song and/or can simply play along, learning the song by ear. It is a much less rigid production process than that of standard notation.

The production of sheet music in standard notation and tablature leads me to distribution and reception, because these two wildly different production processes affect who has access to these different types of notation. The production of sheet music as it has been shaped by the history of standard notation and its evolution as THE form of music notation has led to far more limited access. Because it is written by professionals and owned by the musicians and recording companies who hold the copyright of the song, it is distributed via highly controlled channels; it is sold as complex and precise official sheet music specifically through music stores (in-store or online). This then affects the reception of the text because it means that only those musicians who can afford the official sheet music have access to it. It raises the stakes for acquiring the sheet music. For example, I will not purchase sheet music if I just want to learn a song for fun or my own personal reasons. I do not see the point in paying money for it. I will only purchase it if I need it for professional reasons (like when I was playing in my high school band). Even though I may have the money, I do not necessarily want to spend it. I need both the money and a pretty good reason to buy the sheet music. I have a number of friends who feel the same way about sheet music. They just do not have the resources and/or any reason to purchase sheet music. I think this explains why sheet music remains circulated largely in highly professional contexts. Such contexts are the target for both its distribution and reception.

The far more informal production process of tablature, on the other hand, leads to an equally informal and far more widespread process of distribution and reception. It also leads to the repurposing of tabs both as individual texts and as a whole genre in a way that I have never seen happen with standard notation. As I mentioned before, I know a lot of musicians who write their own tabs and then share them online, which results in a far broader distribution of tabs than sheet music. In fact, a quick Google search for guitar tabs reveals numerous sites, such as Ultimate Guitar, Guitar Tab Universe, 911 Tabs, and Ultimate Tabs, all devoted to collecting user-submitted tabs, which users transcribe themselves by ear. These sites have collected hundreds of thousands and sometimes millions of user-generated and submitted tabs, which are then available to download for free, as well as available to other users for modification. I have downloaded tabs from many of these sites in order to learn certain songs, and I know people who have corrected, altered, and added to many of these tabs and re-uploaded them. So this particular form of distribution has created a community of musicians, mostly guitarists, who are continually freely sharing, exchanging, and building off of one another's knowledge. One of the key features of the reception of tablature that is far different from standard notation is the ability for audience members to repurpose it. Thus, what I ultimately discovered is that these two genres have completely different trajectories from the moment of their production all the way through their reception by their respective audiences. By **trajectory** (which is another CHAT term), I simply mean the overall path that a text follows from its production to its distribution to its reception and socialization. In other words, who is it made by and where does it eventually end up? As you can see, the answer to this question is radically different in the case of standard notation versus tablature.

What I Took Away from My Research: There Is So Much More to Texts Than Their Genre Features

So what did this all mean? What did I take away from research into these particular genres? I think my research serves to illustrate how different genres can be compositionally similar, with similar genre features and similar linguistic functions and purposes, yet can interact with the world, society, culture, and audiences in incredibly different ways. In CHAT terms, this has to do with the socialization of the genre and the individual texts within that genre. While looking at the history of standard notation and tablature, I noticed that standard notation carried a lot more weight and prestige simply because, like I said, it was the Christian Church producing it and printing it, and the Church was very politically powerful at the time that standard notation was initially being developed and circulated. Tablature, on the other

hand, was used by common lute players; it did not have the same influence. This clearly remains the case to some extent. While the two may have the same purpose and may be structured around some of the same genre features, the ways in which musicians produce, distribute, and receive them completely alters how we view them as texts. It has been my own experience that people do not think as highly of tablature as of standard notation. There is this assumption that tablature is not *music*, that its users cannot possibly be as technically proficient as musicians who read standard notation. Thus, I think this comparison shows just how powerfully different genres of writing can work as vehicles for certain assumptions about people, and it also shows that certain genres can become associated with certain beliefs. We as writers have to take into consideration more than just the features of the genres we produce. We have to consider what people already believe about that genre and consider how those beliefs can affect how people use that genre.

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Shannon Harman is a second-year Master's student studying literature and rhetoric and composition at Illinois State University. An avid fan of metalcore, when she's not writing papers, she's probably writing music.

Let's Go For a Ride: The Genre of Bumper Stickers

Sarah Greenberg

In this article, Sarah Greenberg explores the genre of bumper stickers and studies the ways they communicate information. Greenberg learns what happens when a genre provides an outlet for people to express their feelings to others without having a direct conversation. Along the way, Greenberg draws on aspects of cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT) and how they relate to these funny, optimistic, and sometimes controversial additions to people's automobiles.

For those citizens without wealth or power, a bumper sticker may be one of the few means available to convey a message to a public audience.
—*Judge Myron H. Thompson in* Baker v. Glover *(Hudson)*

Genre Analysis on Board

As I triple checked my rearview mirror and slid my hands back up to ten and two, I smiled at the man who passed by the side of my car. Interestingly enough, he was somewhat perturbed, maybe even mad. But yes, he spared me the middle finger. Quite confidently, I thought, "I am a new driver (beware)! I am on the road to show everyone who is boss." What a teenager mindset I had . . .

Being the oldest child in my family, I felt a sense of pride as my parents sat with me in my brand-new car. Or, at least new-to-me car. My parents, knowing me better than I knew myself, opted for a used Honda Civic. They also opted to accompany me—and be as embarrassing as possible—for a good duration of my driving hours. My Civic already had dents, so any future damage I inflicted on it wouldn't be as noticeable, and the car looked as if

many other new drivers had already taken it for a spin. Regardless of its appearance, I was beyond thrilled to finally be on the journey to getting my license. I couldn't wait to parade my pink, fuzzy wheel and bumper stickers all over my hometown.

That being said, I was completely unaware that the bumper stickers plastered on my vehicle would have such a great effect on the other drivers that passed me. Other cars avoided me, and if they didn't, they made it their personal goal to intimidate the *BEEP* out of me—all for having "Caution: Student Driver" bumper stickers surrounding my car in bold yellow letters. My parents, always thoughtful and wary of their children's safety, had decided before they even stepped foot in the dealership that these stickers (an Amazon purchase) would be a necessary addition to the car.

I share this story about my family's use of bumper stickers because I find them to be incredibly interesting. The paraphernalia that you attach to your car can reflect your ideologies, your values, the presidential candidate that you are voting for, and much more. Like a tattoo, these messages exchanged with other drivers and passersby can affect your experience on the road and the identity that you create for yourself. This choice to visually present myself to other people on the road inspired this investigation into bumper stickers, which is a genre that can be particularly successful at communicating a variety of messages.

Born to Bumper

So, let's start at the very beginning: the idea. As an assignment in my English 101 class, I was to submit a rough draft of a *Grassroots Writing Research Journal* article. This rough draft was to be turned into the teacher or to the actual *Grassroots* editors. To me, this was great! If I already had an assignment that resembled a piece of thorough research, I might as well attempt to publish here at Illinois State University. Surprisingly enough, writing the actual article wasn't much of a problem because I study English and writing. However, understanding cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT) was a challenge. This four-letter, scarily capitalized representation of how communication circulates around society was somewhat unclear to me for quite some time, which I now believe is because I had not done anything hands-on with the theory. Looking back on my various scribbled notes in my daybook from English 101, I seem to have likened CHAT to other English theories I was familiar with. (I always try to find meaning out of words and ideas by relating them to well-known concepts in my field.) By studying literature and exploring it through psychological, cultural, historical, and many other perspectives, I felt that I had a somewhat decent grasp on the intensive study

of texts. So, before my project began, I defined **CHAT** as: "The study of the relationship between messages, representation, and the continuation of their progress throughout a culture." Yet as I got further into my project, it became obvious that I had to grab CHAT by the nape of the neck in order to really feel confident in using it, which meant these somewhat-correct definitions of the theory just wouldn't do.

I then began my initial research process. I disregarded many possible ideas of what my article would cover and perused my passions. Having a car on campus was extremely helpful because I had the ability to travel quickly around town to find possible themes for my research. Obviously, spending that much time brainstorming in the car led me to stare at the rear end of the vehicles in front of me, and *voila!* As I've heard many times before, often the greatest of ideas are right before our very eyes. It was interesting to me that I had never thought of something like bumper stickers as a research topic before. Perhaps I was limiting myself by brainstorming on paper in my room and in the classroom, and by simply changing my surroundings to explore new ideas, I was able to find a somewhat unusual topic for my article. Hence, the birth of my project and research process began.

I snuck off to the library to take my next step in familiarizing myself with cars, bumper stickers, and other visual media topics. Researching this topic was much more difficult than I thought; many of the sources and databases available to me had little to no research about what I felt necessary to include in the article. It seemed that a few textbook and article sources would have to suffice. Here is a little bit of what I initially found important for my reader to know.

The Ford Model A, introduced in 1927, was revolutionary in its new safety features, including what we now call a "bumper." This metal plate on the back of Ford's Model A was made as a protective measure in the event of a car accident. Nonetheless, consumers soon realized that with the latest invention of adhesive tape and cardboard, they could easily attach brand messaging onto this otherwise empty piece of metal. At first, bumper stickers were mostly composed of company names: car companies, organizations, and other chains that saw the future success of these stickers (Goldblatt). These companies found an easy way of advertising that literally went all over the world. With the immense amount of routes, detours, and trips that people took in their cars, the possibility of companies' information being viewed by others who saw their name on car bumpers was guaranteed. Although the company name might not be entirely important to the driver, the catchy slogan or opinion included on the sticker often was worth displaying. Moreover, if other drivers wanted that same bumper sticker and could find out where it was being distributed, interest in the company might skyrocket even more. Similarly, as other bumper stickers were created, the more popular and the

wittier the bumper stickers were, the higher the demand for whatever product the bumper stickers were promoting.

Compared to the cardboard product that people initially taped onto their bumpers, adhesive and plastic bumper stickers have come a long way. Today, printing companies can quickly produce mass quantities of almost any design, color, and layout of sticker. The stickers' price range is also extremely manageable, ranging from approximately one dollar to ten dollars. In this way, almost any member of society can get their hands on these powerful communication tools, and bumper stickers may be one of the best ways for the poor and powerless to convey what they want to the public (see introductory quote). Before diving into the texts that I used for this article, I had overlooked these somewhat obvious conclusions. Never before had I considered these stickers to be such a powerful vehicle—ha ha—of communication.

Figure 1: Autism awareness ribbon and peace sign bumper stickers in Kroger parking lot in Normal, Illinois. Photo by author.

I Brake for Analysis

It is rather astounding that in just a twelve-inch by three-inch rectangle, some of society's most important messages are being broadcast. Although there are risky and humorous statements that make their way through town, there also are a variety of inspirational or informational bumper stickers. The crossed ribbon, colored to match what it symbolizes, is one of my favorites. By having a ribbon on your car, you are letting other drivers know that a disorder, complication, or condition has had a major impact on your life, that it is worth being recognized, and that knowledge is worth spreading. What better way to show support for important causes than to spread awareness of them on the vehicle that takes you everywhere? These small ribbons, whether representing breast cancer or autism awareness, symbolize much more than a sticker. They communicate a fight for a cure or a community that cares. They express our need or desire to share our values with each other.

In addition, people often are proud to showcase bumper stickers from local companies. Just in the last few years, a nearby drive-in movie theatre located in Gibson City was on the verge of shutting down. In an attempt to increase interest in and raise funds for the theatre, the managers opted to make hundreds of bumper stickers for moviegoers to purchase. With buttery fingers, the moviegoers did exactly what the company wanted: they posted "Save Harvest Moon Theatre" on their cars and drove off to raise awareness of the struggling business. Although the company did more fundraising than just selling bumper stickers, the amount of funds raised by the bumper stickers helped support the Harvest Moon Theatre. Not only that, but the theatre also gained a number of new audience members. This example of how companies use bumper stickers shows the communicative ability that this genre has; in other words, if we are speaking in terms of CHAT, the **socialization** of bumper stickers is what's really being highlighted here. As I define it, socialization is the way in which the product, consumer, and audience mutually communicate with each other, sometimes without even being aware of it. It also has to do with preconceived notions and what each group values. Socialization can be subtle, as it is with bumper stickers, or it can be quite the opposite. By communicating both with the consumer and the eventual viewer, the companies that make the bumper stickers are able to converse quite easily; they promote their value, humor, or goal on the product itself and then leave the information in the hands of drivers to further distribute to viewers via their bumpers.

Following along with the references to CHAT, the **representation** of bumper stickers is another crucial aspect of their communicative capabilities. According to what I have understood this concept to mean, representation is how the creators want the bumper sticker to appear to viewers. It comes into play in terms of what the graphics on the sticker convey to the audience. Are there certain symbols that hold value or meaning? Is the text or font conveying subtle messages? How is the size of these graphics or dimensions affecting the way the text is represented?

I became interested in how this specific aspect of the bumper sticker genre compared with other texts. Because the bumper stickers are placed on a vehicle that (often) moves, the audience has a specific distance at which it is able to view the product. That means the graphics and text have to be extremely clear and sharp. If the information is not easily read, the audience may pass by your car without seeing your sticker (or, if they attempt to read what your bumper sticker says, their bumper will end up way too close to yours!).

Audience members that do not particularly like what you have to say can also easily alter the representation of bumper stickers. Back when Barack Obama

was running for his second term as president, my mother proudly displayed an Obama bumper sticker on our van. After only two weeks, the attention that this sticker brought to our family was noticeably negative. We were not surprised to find "Nobama" scribbled onto our bumper sticker with thick, black permanent marker—certainly an interesting way of altering the genre.

Although my mom couldn't believe what strong emotions her bumper sticker had caused, this act of vandalizing our vehicle did not stop her for a minute. Because **distribution** of bumper stickers is often so accessible, my mom was mailed a new one in a matter of days. Distribution, the dispersion of the product, can occur in a variety of modes. Bumper stickers can be purchased online or in stores, distributed for free at special events, and even handmade and passed along to friends. In the case of the company my mom purchased the Obama sticker from, they made sure that their product could be distributed very quickly. Distribution can also mean where the text moves, not just in terms of sales, but also how far it spreads. So my mom's pro-Obama sticker was seen by people who disagreed with it (and then socialization kind of intersected here and one person responded back). In the case of bumper stickers, distribution and socialization have a lot of overlap.

Speed Bump

In the case of my Honda Civic, and many others, the bumper stickers that exist on your car are there without your permission. Either the owner before you decided that they were important enough to keep on the vehicle throughout its sales process, or the current owners/other drivers of your car would not be pleased if you removed their personalized car graffiti. Unfortunately, this aspect of permanence with this genre can be extremely inconvenient if the messages that you are transporting all over town are not aligned with what you actually stand for. The same goes for bumper stickers that are years old. Quite possibly, your ideals, political views, and supported organizations have changed over the years. Unless the driver is willing to peel off their pride (and the paint on their bumper) or slap a new sticker on top of the other one, this problem is almost inevitable. In this way, bumper stickers are made for the cocky; there is no room for error or indecisiveness.

We shouldn't be surprised, then, to find that drivers with the most reported road rage having something in common. Their personalities are very similar: they are outspoken, driven (pun intended), and usually very opinionated. Branching off from these traits, the drivers reflect these attributes in the way they decorate their cars. William Szlemko, a social psychologist, calls these "territorial markers" (Vendantam). Such drivers distance themselves from

others in society who have opinions other than what they promote with their bumper sticker. Whether we are conscious of this precautionary choice or not is hard to say, but it appears that bumper stickers have the ability to make or break our perceptions of others. Similarly, drivers promote groups, beliefs, or jokes they think others might find interesting. In this way, bumper stickers are territorial markers for the drivers or, indirectly, passengers.

Without a doubt, the stickers on our cars help others form ideas about who we are, what we believe in, and how careful we are in regard to other drivers. As Mark Goldblatt, author of *Bumper Sticker Liberalism*, so eloquently writes, "Your bumper sticker says, in effect, 'This is how I roll'" (3). Whether or not the audience likes how you "roll" depends solely on their **reception** of the genre. The more controversial the driver tends to be in the graphics or text displayed on their bumper, the more unlikely that the driver behind them will agree with their viewpoints. On the other hand, most drivers will not become aggressive after seeing a hot pink breast cancer ribbon posted on your ride. Regardless of your purpose in posting these decorations, it is necessary that your logo, text, and image convey exactly what you want it to—bumper stickers are just as much for you as they are for everyone else.

Because we have freedom of speech, it seems that there would be almost nothing off-limits to display as a bumper sticker. LEGALLY. However, bumper stickers can insult the belief systems that other drivers have worked so hard to build. This might be because the bumper sticker is extremely out of hand in terms of what it expresses (its representation is radical) and/or viewers may have a particular sensitivity to it (other drivers' reception of anything said on this particular topic is negative). Yet drivers are free to express themselves via bumper stickers however they may choose. In fact, the Supreme Court states, "the government may not prohibit the expression of an idea simply because society finds the idea itself offensive or disagreeable" (*Texas v. Johnson*). The only obvious law violation would be that of profanity on bumper stickers. Different states often vary in their decisions to enforce fines or warnings about obscene, vulgar, or inappropriate language and may indeed prohibit you from displaying extreme ideas regardless of the First Amendment (Hudson). Obscene language or material is sometimes successful in getting its point across, but it's not always appropriate for young drivers or passengers to see as they drive to Chuck E. Cheese's.

Thank You for Not Tailgating

By stalking many cars, trucks, and vehicles in parking lots in the town of Normal, Illinois, I found out how hands-on the process of research sometimes

can be. However, I struggled a little with the thought of someone walking up to their car as I took a picture of it for "research." Fortunately, this did not happen. It was comical to me that I assumed the bumper sticker owners would be so aggressive or private that they would be offended by my taking pictures of their bumpers. It made me wonder if picture taking oversteps an unspoken boundary between messages and their owners. Or perhaps that sense is just a part of my socialization.

I soon realized that one of the most common bumper sticker themes in this area is religious. This includes bumper stickers that read "follow Jesus," "coexist," and a variety of symbols that have a religious connotation. The most common is the ichthus fish. Although the fish's meaning has changed a little over time, it is mainly understood today as a symbol that identifies a believer of the Christian faith. This simplistic drawing is not always in the form of a sticker, but is sometimes made out of metal and pressed on the bumper of the car. In my driving, I have also seen a very creative variation of this same fish. Instead of having just a tail, this fish has legs. Yup, you guessed it. Evolution! Because of this symbol, evolution or Darwinism can now be presented to the other cars on the road. I find it particularly interesting how bumper stickers can be subtly altered to represent an entirely new idea (like NObama). Regardless of their religion or worldview, many drivers find it important to reflect their beliefs about creation on the backs of their cars. Because they cannot see it while they are actively driving, we can conclude that it is more for the other drivers to see or reflect upon. I am a fan of this non-confrontational way of sharing beliefs, religious or not. It shows that sometimes communication can be brief, impersonal, and without any verbal exchange of words. In this way, drivers on the road can communicate important messages to others.

Figure 2: Religious bumper sticker in Walmart parking lot in Normal, Illinois. Photo by author.

Another common bumper sticker theme is that of politics. Although bumper stickers are often focused on national elections, local candidates also use the power of bumper stickers to get their name out to the public. What better way to have your name advertised than on a vehicle that stops all over the town you want to represent? In this way, political bumper stickers do more than just tell the other cars whom you're voting for. They get the candidate's name out to further reaches than a sign in a yard. Because so many drivers commute and travel to a variety of spots around town, the likelihood of the political statement being seen is inevitable. Unfortunately, the permanence of these political stickers can be a little annoying. If you voted for Obama years ago, you might not want this sticker plastered on your car now. This makes the information being communicated somewhat unsuccessful—it's outdated. The same goes for a bumper sticker representing an organization you don't belong to anymore, ideologies you don't stand by anymore, and other information that no longer remains prevalent to your life. Perhaps the makers of bumper stickers were pretty stable people who assumed that the person who slaps on the sticker has unnaturally solid viewpoints that are not going to change until: 1.) they buy a new car; 2.) they ruin their present car trying to scrape off the sticker; 3.) they slap a different sticker right on top of the original one. Having thought through these options, I started to wonder why companies that make bumper stickers didn't make their product less permanent and less of a long-lasting choice. Perhaps an erasable bumper sticker or one that doesn't ruin the entire paint job of your car's rear end? Then I realized this product exists! It is called a decal.

Making the Journey

Having completed the background research of how bumper stickers came to be and my initial firsthand research about them, I moved on to exploring the future of this genre. In the Normal area, I have seen the number of bumper stickers dwindling. They are being replaced by a sneaky competitor: the car decal. This sticky sheet of adhesive is a mom's best friend. It doesn't rip off paint, it is not permanent, and it has the freedom to be stuck on any surface of the car. But, by changing the **production** of bumper stickers, new factors come into play in regard to the genre. Production is the manufacturing of an item; it can include many machines, people, and systems. Over time, products may be altered before they are produced in order to make the item more appealing to the consumers. This is the case with the decal that is replacing the bumper sticker. Car owners have flexibility in where they choose to place their decals. However, according to my observations, the back car window is usually the most popular location for these decals, which means in many cases car bumpers now remain unadorned.

Conclusions Are My Copilot

By having such an inexpensive and accessible way to advertise one's beliefs to all other drivers, it is surprising to me that more people don't obtain bumper stickers for their cars. This led me to ask the following questions: What types of cars have the most bumper stickers? Do drivers with bumper stickers have anything in common? What would cause someone not to have bumper stickers? As I pursued my research, however, it seemed highly unlikely that I would be able to find the answers to all of these questions on my own in the time I had available to tackle this investigation, particularly since it would involve catching people with bumper stickers as they got into or out of their vehicles (or shouting at them through my window as I drove next to them). As such, I was limited in both production (the time I had and my timing), and socialization (shouting might be seen as off-putting). And, unfortunately, there is not an overwhelming amount of existing research on the subject of bumper stickers. I also discovered that, because many car bumper stickers are viewed while the audience member is driving, it became extremely difficult to capture pictures of the stickers that I saw. Similarly, people do not always want their vehicles to be in pictures. For these reasons, one limitation of my investigation is that I was able to draw only surface-level conclusions as to patterns between drivers with bumper stickers. But perhaps this is something that another writing researcher can take up further after me.

Another difficulty that I have discovered in my research is how CHAT played a role in my thought processes. Because I only had one class that depicted these new concepts and terms, I felt somewhat naïve to their overall meanings. I did my best to incorporate my thoughts, my teacher's definitions, and other explanations of CHAT into how I represented the concept here, yet I know that each of the terms I discussed above is much more complex than they appear from my descriptions of them. I have simply attempted to share their definitions as I understood them. To me, CHAT is a fluid structure for how we organize the texts around us. For the most part, this theory is flexible; each of us can bring our own ideas about the meaning of the concepts involved.

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Writing Our Love Generic: Finding (Some) Value in Greeting Card Rhetoric

Benjamin Sutton

Though intended to express sentiment felt by one person for another, greeting cards involve a third party–the greeting card writer. In this article, Benjamin Sutton begins by examining his own bias toward the greeting card genre and goes on to explore its conventions and expectations through both personal experience and analysis of critical essays on the genre.

It may seem melodramatic to say that it was a Thursday and raining, and what I needed most in the world was to grab a card from the local pharmacy on my walk home, so that when I finally did open the front door to my apartment, I was met with something other than disappointment. Nevertheless, it's true. It's true that it was a Thursday night after class, it was raining, and I had procrastinated in picking out a birthday gift, again, as is all too common in the run-and-gun lifestyle of most graduate students. My logic was that I would make up some sort of excuse about online shipping dates being off, referring to last year's Amazon Christmas debacle, and then swear off the postal service altogether—as long as I had a card in hand to prove that nothing was forgotten and the whole thing was entirely out of my control.

So out of the rain and into the store, past the chips and dip, the photo scanners, and the leftover Halloween candy I shouldn't buy but know that I am going to buy, I finally reach what must be the world's longest aisle of card-dom (Figure 1).

Figure 1: The card aisle at my local CVS.

I am sure you have been in one of these aisles before, as you encounter a card for literally every occasion, even occasions that are arguably not card-worthy. There are age-, religion-, and gender-specific cards for everything from birth to death to major and minor holidays. Arguably, a solid percentage of these cards are offensive in their interpretation of gender roles, while others are even more offensive in just how poorly they compose jokes. Some use famous comic strips on their covers in a sort of copy-and-paste job that couldn't have taken more than a few clicks and a run to the printer to produce. "You had a boy/girl," "You're really old," a bunny, a baseball cap full of kittens, a sad dog with a bow on its head wishes your family happy holidays in a way that only a sad dog with a bow on its head can.

At this point it's been almost half an hour. Dinner is surely getting cold, and I am having trouble not choosing the wrong card. The difficulty in this activity is not simply choosing the *wrong* card, but finding even one that is any kind of *right*. And that's just the outside of the cards. I open up a few, hoping to find something moderately acceptable, but what's inside the cards is somehow worse, if that's even possible. Inside, the true pinnacle of sentiment is found in the statements used to express the feeling of the occasion. To call it sentimental would be an understatement. "Wishing you love and happiness on your special day and all others!" "Hoping your birthday is full of love and

laughter!" Regardless of the occasion, the same rhetoric is echoed throughout. Maybe a handful of hedgehogs singing in the tune of the Chipmunks when you open the lid of a card would appease somebody, but I don't know that person. Like anything else, these cards have a clearly defined audience—but I'm not part of it, and neither is anyone else I know.

I don't give in, deciding instead to change aisles altogether. I buy a bottle of wine and a bag of kettle chips, but nevertheless spend the rest of my walk home—and the next few days, in fact—analyzing the absurdity of the entire greeting card genre. The whole ordeal really has me wondering, why are greeting cards so terrible? And who in the world is buying them? In 2013 alone, Hallmark—just one of several major players in the greeting card industry—made $3.9 billion in revenue (Suddath 84). Clearly, not everyone shares my aversion to greeting card imagery and rhetoric. Despite the overwhelming shift toward digital communication, people are still buying and sending greeting cards. Maybe the problem isn't with greeting cards after all, but with me?

To combat my lack of knowledge of the genre, I decide to approach the greeting card not at its level of sentimentality or consumerism, but academically. To begin, I scour our university library's online databases to find a solid starting point by which to compare the genre to those more often understood as "literary" within academia. Searching Milner Library's database for "greeting cards" results in 420,705 hits—even when I limit results to full text only. Even the slightly narrowed term "greeting card verse" lends 221,326 results. Apparently I'm not the only one with a scholarly interest in greeting cards.

Lack of Originality

I decide to begin my research with what I see as the biggest flaw of the greeting card genre: the unoriginality of greeting card imagery and verse. Maybe it's because I'm pursuing a doctoral degree in creative writing, but this is one of the biggest strikes against the genre as far as I'm concerned. As it turns out, greeting card verse isn't unoriginal because it can't be original, but because it doesn't want to be. That's because a greeting card serves a very different purpose than a poem or short story. Originality and craftsmanship may be of utmost importance in creative work, but in the genre of greeting cards, the recipient matters most. As Frank D'Angelo explains in "The Rhetoric of Sentimental Greeting Card Verse," the idea behind the language in greeting cards is not to "[call] attention to itself" or "[put] the emphasis on us as speakers or writers" (343). The focus is instead, as it should be, "on the

receiver of the message and on the occasion" (343). That's not to say that the reader of a novel or play doesn't matter at all, but the relationship between greeting card-writer and receiver is very different from the relationship between writer and reader of creative work. There's an additional step when it comes to greeting cards—that is, the person buying the card (in this case, me). In most situations, the person buying a collection of poems or short stories will be the same person reading them, yet when I buy a greeting card for my wife, I am acting as mediator between her and the person who wrote the card. However, the ideas expressed in the card are supposed to come from me. In that case, maybe the card writer is acting as mediator between my wife and me? Whatever the case, the relationship between card writer and card recipient is not a direct one.

In most situations, passing off someone else's work as your own is somewhere on the spectrum from unpalatable to criminal. As it turns out, the very quality that I find so distasteful is actually one of the strengths of the genre as far as its target customer is concerned. It is this lack of originality, achieved through pronoun choice as well as diction, that enables the average person to walk into any store and pick out a card for practically anyone in his or her life and go on to earn points for sending that card, despite having done little more than swipe a credit card and address an envelope. What is this phenomenon and how is it possible?

Universal Specificity

In the greeting card industry, the term "universal specificity" is used to describe this phenomenon. As defined in Emily West's "Mass Producing the Personal," Hallmark's concept of universal specificity is both "super personal and broad simultaneously" (240). The logic behind universal specificity, as West explains it, is that, "If writers draw inspiration from the self and from their own experiences, then greeting card sentiments bear the stamp of their authentic self, according to the ideals of expressive individualism" (240). Though this is certainly, at least in part, Hallmark's way of mediating some of the inherent awkwardness of the greeting card genre, I can also see how there might be some truth to it. After all, the people who write greeting card verse are indeed people, and their sorrow upon losing a parent or pride in a friend's accomplishment is not unlike anyone else's.

In many ways, this reminds me of lyric poetry, and when I sift through a stack of greeting cards lying around my apartment, I notice that—just like in lyric poetry—the second person pronoun *you* is by far the most common. *You* appears fifteen times in the five of them that are pictured in Figure 2. (The

image also includes two blank cards in which people actually composed their own messages; their use of *you* doesn't count.)

Figure 2: Greeting cards from my wedding.

D'Angelo's analysis of a much larger sample supports my findings. He points out that out of the sixty-five cards he analyzed, the personal pronoun *you* appeared 167 times, while *I*, by contrast, appeared 84 times. As D'Angelo explains, this is because "people who send greeting card messages want to put the emphasis on the receiver of the greeting, rather than on the sender" (342). And here's the point at which analysis of my own cards hits somewhat of a snag. Since the emphasis is on the receiver of the greeting (me or my wife), people who know us know that we're not really into sappy, flowery verse. The cards from my closest friends and family members are either blank or very brief with longer handwritten notes. For example, the front of the Hallmark[1] card from my brother and his wife (the second card from the left) simply reads, "Hand in Hand," while the inside elaborates, "It's a great way / to go through life." The Papyrus[2] card from my sister and her husband (the second card from the right) is even more brief, with a blank front and an interior reading, "Wishing you both much happiness / and joy in your life together." Luckily,

[1]The line is *Expressions from Hallmark*, a line from which two of our cards come. We also have a *Connections from Hallmark*, a straight-up *Hallmark*, and a *Hallmark Mahogany* card.

[2]From what I can gather, Papyrus is actually not affiliated with Hallmark at all. The other non-affiliated card seems to be handmade, if not by the sender then by a human being at least.

my wife saved a card her great aunt gave her at a church bridal shower, so I do have at least one stereotypical greeting card to analyze. Retailing for $3.99, it's from Hallmark's Mahogany line[3] and is the third card from the left in the photo above. This card is by far the longest, and it contains the most instances of *you*; I did not count the instances of implied second person, of which there were many. Here's an excerpt, from the last six of the card's forty-one lines:

> Be honest, be loyal, and be trusting.
>
> Be friends as well as lovers.
>
> And promise you will hold each other so close
>
> that nothing in the world
>
> can come between you.
>
> *Congratulations*

So it doesn't actually rhyme and, in fact, doesn't even read like a poem, despite the name greeting card verse. Maybe it's the pearl finish, silver script, and glittery flowers that make it feel, well, flowery?

Though the verse above is certainly applicable to my marriage, I'm still unconvinced that the concept of universal specificity is anything other than slick marketing. West also acknowledges this, at least in part, explaining it as the greeting card industry's way of "redirect[ing] the potentially negative associations with 'mass,' commercial cultures into the positive association with universality" (244). Perhaps that's what I really don't like about them after all—not the lack of originality for originality's sake, but the attempt to express something fundamentally personal through something that, however heartfelt it seems on the surface, is ultimately mass produced.

Context

But then again, were my wine and potato chips not also mass produced? Maybe it wasn't the greeting cards' mass-produced nature after all, but the context in which I encountered the cards—the artificial lighting and flimsy display shelves. Seeing the cards en masse is a much different experience than receiving a single envelope in the mail or with a gift. D'Angelo seems to agree, comparing greeting card verse to "proverbs, maxims, quotations, and anecdotes" (337), and likening my experience at the drugstore to a compendium of quotations—in a word, decontextualized. As D'Angelo

[3] *Mahogany* is Hallmark's line marketed exclusively to African Americans. I'll talk a little more about greeting card companies' push for diversity in just a bit.

asserts, "When it is put on racks of cards in card shops, drug stores, and supermarkets, greeting card verse is decontextualized" (337).

If I had been able to find a card that I wasn't offended by on a visceral level, the act of purchasing, signing, and handing it to my partner would have recontextualized it. In other words, as D'Angelo explains, "there is a dialogic relationship set up between the writer's intention and the sender's intention, between the writer's words and the sender's words" (337). Perhaps my lack of understanding of this dialogic relationship prevented me from seeing greeting cards as anything other than generic, mass-produced—and thus ultimately false—sentiment. At least, that may be part of it, but only part. Another, potentially larger, objection I feel has to do with the nature of the greeting card industry in general. Like many people, I've always held the suspicion that many of the holidays we celebrate were invented or somehow mangled by the greeting card industry (in cahoots with others, such as candy manufacturers, I'm sure) with the primary goal of convincing us to buy stuff we ultimately don't need.

A Historical Perspective

I was pretty confident the research would side with me on this particular issue. After all, ways of celebrating have historically been incredibly personal and varied according to the occasion in question and the religious or cultural tradition. Yet greeting cards seem to be antithetical to that. "Designed to fit a wide range of rhetorical situations," as D'Angelo points out, greeting card verse is equally appropriate for "general holidays such as Christmas, New Year's, Thanksgiving, and Easter, special occasions such as Father's Day, Mother's Day, and Valentine's Day, and christenings" (338). Greeting card manufacturers attempt to fit *every* holiday into the same five-by-seven-inch rectangle. Don't celebrate Christmas? No problem, here's a cartoon menorah! Two guys getting married? Here's a pair of cartoon stuffed animal grooms! Don't get me wrong—I couldn't be happier that greeting card companies are embracing diversity. It's not the diversity that bothers me, but the fact that it all seems a bit artificial, and ultimately little more than an attempt to wring money out of yet another group of people. As is to be expected, greeting card champion D'Angelo disagrees, choosing instead to see greeting card verse as part of, "a rich commonplace tradition that goes back to antiquity" (343). He goes on to assert:

> As Walter Ong, Eric Havelock, and others have pointed out, formulaic modes of expression derive from oral practice. They are common expressions on standard subjects stored up in one's head or in commonplace books for subsequent use. They were loosely strung together by the singer of tales to form narratives or by the rhetorician to frame arguments. (343)

As it turns out, what I see as a relatively recently contrived racket, D'Angelo interprets as a rich tradition of ceremonial discourse. Though they share similar surface characteristics, I'm not sure greeting cards and commonplace books share much in common when it comes to their function. While the former is meant to convey sentiment, the latter tended to be more practical in nature. Yes, commonplace books included poems, proverbs, and quotes, but they also included medical recipes, legal formulas, and weight and measurement references. As with universal specificity, I'm not sure I buy this comparison, but tomato, tomahto I guess.

In "Writing Mother's Day Cards at Hallmark: An Inside Look," Claire Suddath doesn't trace the roots of greeting cards quite *that* far back, pinning their origin instead on an art shop in London around 1846. She explains, however, that though Hallmark didn't exactly invent the greeting card, "its modern day form is almost exclusively the creation of [Hallmark founder] Joyce Hall." In 1910, eighteen-year-old Hall was traveling around Kansas City selling postcards out of shoeboxes—talk about humble beginnings. Within five years, he had switched to selling greeting cards, and after a fire destroyed his inventory, he saved up to buy a printing press to make the cards himself. Store owners sold cards from behind the counter until 1935, when Hallmark provided the freestanding display shelves we see today (Suddath 84).

And while the display shelves haven't changed much since 1935 (because, really, how many ways are there to go about displaying a series of pieces of folded paper?), greeting card verse itself has evolved quite a bit since Hall first began selling his cards. As D'Angelo explains, within the past few years cards for everything from divorce to a diet to belated graduation have hit the shelves. Patti Brickman, spokesperson for the Greeting Card Association, refers to these as "non-occasion" greeting cards (D'Angelo 338). Suddath asserts that, "Because Hallmark cards are designed to appeal to as many people as possible, their evolution is a window into America's cultural shifts" (85). Whereas the cards Hall sold in the early 1900s featured "grandiloquent, multistanza poems about friendship, thankfulness, or love," over time the messages got shorter and more prosey and conversational (85). Within the past few years, Hallmark cards have even come to feature curse words. As a writer from Hallmark's Shoebox line explained to Suddath, "You can say 'ass' in a card now! That changed my career!" (85). Something tells me if I had been able to find a crude greeting card, I might not have ended up in the wine aisle.

Conclusion

Ultimately, however, I think the wine and chips were a better choice, at least for me. Despite having a better understanding of the functional purpose of

generic verse and imagery, I'm still not sure I really buy Hallmark's notion of universal specificity or D'Angelo's claim that "it exemplifies beautifully an important kind of ceremonial discourse" (337). West comes closer to articulating the true source of my discomfort when it comes to greeting cards when she explains that the greeting card companies' tendency to use vague terms or animals to represent people "suggest that these companies want to reach all customers without having to make cards that reflect the diversity of society and complexity of human relationships" (238). It's this inability to express the true complexity of human relationships that I find so off-putting about greeting card verse. It's not that I see no value whatsoever in greeting card verse, but—despite their assertions of universality—I don't think I'm within their target market. Until they make a "You're my favorite person to get Chinese food and binge-watch *Supernatural* with" card, I'll probably keep getting my last-minute gifts from other areas of the drugstore—either that, or maybe I'll stop waiting until the last minute.

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Texts and Conventions of Volleyball

Millie Dunbar

In this article, Millie Dunbar explores the texts and conventions of the game of volleyball. Her use of a variety of strategies including ethnography, interviews, and secondary research illustrates the ways writing researchers can dig into the specifics of a complex activity system.

As a long-time player and fan of volleyball, I started to wonder what texts and conventions relate to the sport I am so familiar with. In order to really dig into an exploration of volleyball and the different genres involved with the game, I decided to look at volleyball as an activity system. The activity system of volleyball involves all the people, texts, tools, and rules that work together in the course of a volleyball game. So, in my research, I looked at the culture of volleyball, including features of the sport such as the supportive talk of the players and the uniforms they wear. As I explored the volleyball activity system, I came to realize just how big of a role power plays in relation to the actors involved in the activity system (both human and nonhuman). In this article, I describe the research I conducted, what I discovered about the volleyball activity system, how power comes into play, and some of the key aspects of cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT) that I found connections to along the way.

My Research

A major part of my knowledge of the rules of volleyball is based off of my prior experience with coaching, playing, and refereeing volleyball games. In other words, when I started this study, I brought quite a bit of **antecedent genre knowledge** with me to the project. However, for the purpose of this article, I also researched the history of the sport and the rules of volleyball to ensure the information in this article was credible. To find information on volleyball rules, for instance, I conducted a Google search for "official volleyball rules." Out of the 2,820,000 results, I chose to use a PDF file of official volleyball rules from the Fédération Internationale de Volleyball (FIVB) to fact-check what I already knew about the sport. I chose this source because FIVB is the international governing body for volleyball. In addition, I conducted a search for "history of volleyball" on Google. At first the 83,700,000 results that came up seemed overwhelming, but I began by browsing the websites that appeared at the top of the search engine. One of the websites that seemed most reliable was *Volleyball.org*, because it was hosted by an organization called Volleyball World Wide, which has more than 23,000 members.

Beyond my secondary research—that is, the research I conducted online—I also decided my project would benefit from some primary research methods. These included conducting an ethnography, in which I took detailed notes on a key NCAA volleyball game from 2013 that I watched on YouTube. This allowed me to observe the activity actually taking place during a specific volleyball game. I also interviewed two people with whom I played intramural volleyball. One of them has played volleyball for seven years, and the other has played for eight. They both have experience playing volleyball in both club and high school settings. I thought this experience gave them credibility as sources for my research, so I asked them a variety of questions about volleyball, including what positions they played, how they saw the setup of the court affecting their activity in those positions, how jersey colors influenced their perception of both their own and other teams, and more. Their responses contributed to the information presented here.

A Bit of History

Cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT) provides a means of studying an activity system while also considering how the objects, ideas, and genres used are closely tied to certain cultural values and certain points in history. For my research project, I knew I wanted to start out by learning more about the history of the sport I was studying. From *Volleyball.org*, I learned that the game of volleyball was created by William G. Morgan in 1895 at a YMCA in Massachusetts by combining basketball, tennis, baseball, and handball. Morgan created the game

"for his classes of businessmen which would demand less physical contact than basketball. Morgan borrowed the net from tennis, and raised it 6 feet 6 inches above the floor, just above the average man's head" ("History of Volleyball").

Learning about the history of volleyball provides us with an idea of when the sport was invented and what sports it was derived from. If people are not familiar with volleyball, knowing about the other sports involved in its creation may help them better visualize what volleyball is like. For example, when someone wants to serve, they might dribble the ball before they throw it up in the air to serve it. Dribbling is a key component of basketball, and often basketball players have a routine in which they dribble prior to shooting a free throw as well. Volleyball also has many similarities to tennis with regard to how the two courts are set up.

The Volleyball Court

The volleyball court is a particularly important component of the game. There are many different rules that go along with playing volleyball that influence the actors and activity that takes place on the court. The lines on the volleyball court (Figure 1) are designed to provide certain players with certain privileges that other players might not have. Many key rules revolve around the ten-foot line, which is the white line between the net and the end line that separates the back row from the front row. The ten-foot line is the most important line in volleyball. Front row players are allowed to hit from wherever they want to on the court, while back row players who hit the ball over the net can only jump in the back row behind the ten-foot line.

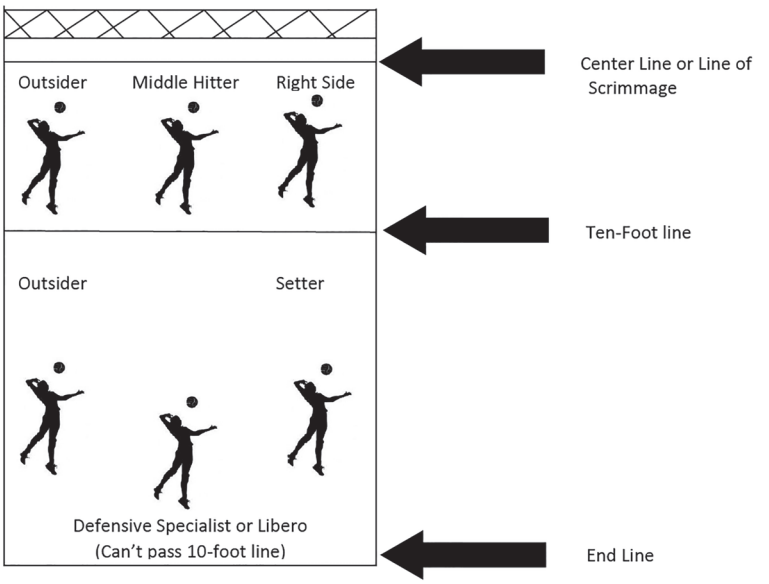

Figure 1: The lines on one half of the volleyball court in relation to where players are positioned. Diagram created by author. Volleyball player from Clipart Panda.[1]

Another important line is the line of scrimmage, which is located at the center of the court underneath the net. This line, along with the net, separates the two teams from one another. The players are allowed to cross the line, but not with their entire body or a limb. For example, players are allowed to put their toes over the line, but not their entire foot. Players are also not allowed to touch the white tape along the top of the volleyball net (Figure 2). Two antennas are attached to the volleyball net. One of the antennas is lined up with the out-of-bounds line on one side of the court and the other one is lined up with the out-of-bounds line on the other side of the court. If the ball goes outside of the antenna, it is out.

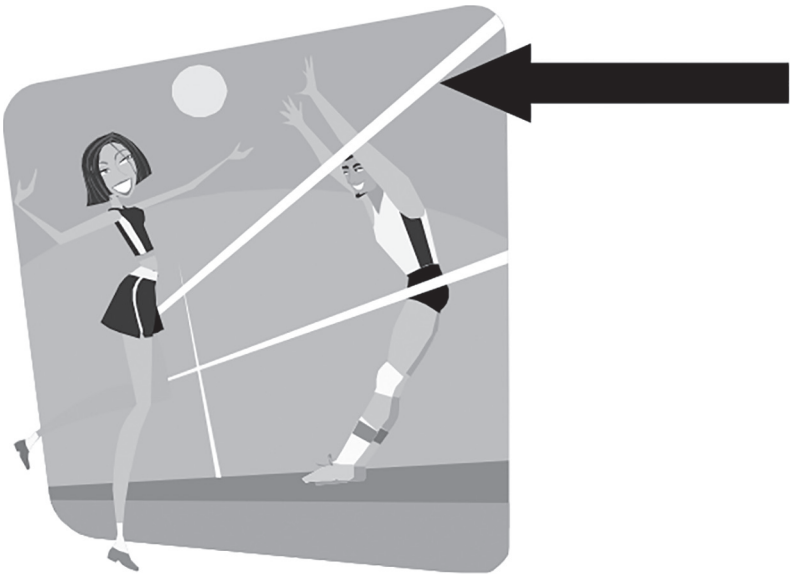

Figure 2: Notice the white tape along the top of the volleyball net. Players can't touch this tape. Diagram created by author. Volleyball clipart and arrow from Microsoft Word.

In addition to the ten-foot line and the line of scrimmage, the end line also influences the activity that occurs on the court. Players have to serve from behind the end line. Touching the end line when serving results in a foot fault, which means it is automatically the other team's serve, unless the player does a jump serve. With a jump serve, players have to jump before the white line but are allowed to land inside the court ("Official Volleyball Rules 2013–2016").

These particular details of the court are important because they help signify to the players what they can or can't do during a game. If the players who are on the court during the game do not follow the rules associated with these different lines, their team could potentially lose. Yet the overall dimensions of the court—fifty-nine feet by six inches—also influence the activity that takes place on the court. To gain a point, the players have to keep the ball inbounds, which means they have to use hand-eye coordination

and the right amount of force to hit the ball in the correct spot. If they use too much power, they could hit the ball out of play on the other side of the court. However, if the ball is on their side of the court, then as long as they stay on their side of the net, and the ball doesn't hit a wall or leave the sport court, they can use all the physical space they need to keep the ball in play, even if they go outside the lines of the court.

Although the six players on each side of the net are the key actors in the activity of the volleyball game, other actors are also influenced by the setup of the court. The coaches as well as the players who are not currently in the game have to stand just outside of the court on one side of the out-of-bounds line. Referees also have very specific positions on the court (Figure 3). The "up referee" is the head referee who oversees the entire game, while the "down referee" makes net calls ("Official Volleyball Rules 2013–2016"). The line judges, as the name implies, watch for whether people serving step over the line and determine whether the ball is inside or outside the parameters of the court when it hits the ground.

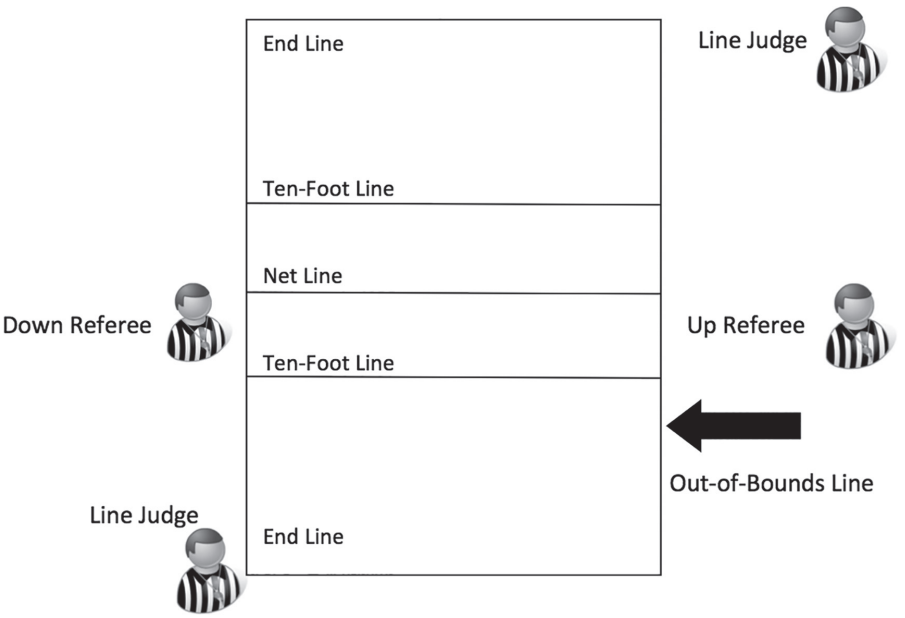

Figure 3: Diagram of the different lines on the court and the positions of the referees. The down referee is located on the floor. The up referee is located on a stand positioned next to the net. Diagram created by author. Referee image from Microsoft Word.

The rules the players on the court have to follow and the referees have to enforce can seem really complicated, but these rules are necessary, partly because of the many different positions on the court. It might be complex, but the net, the lines on the court, and the rules all work together to ensure everything proceeds as it should during a volleyball game.

The Volleyball Players

The players on the court were central to my research into the volleyball activity system, as illustrated in Figure 4. All the other actors involved in a volleyball game—including the bookkeeper, the court, the scoreboard, the uniforms, the coaches, and the referees—can be connected together through the player. Each volleyball player on the court has a specific position he or she is assigned to play. Certain players are assigned certain positions so there is organization on the court rather than the chaos of everyone aggressively running for the ball at the same time.

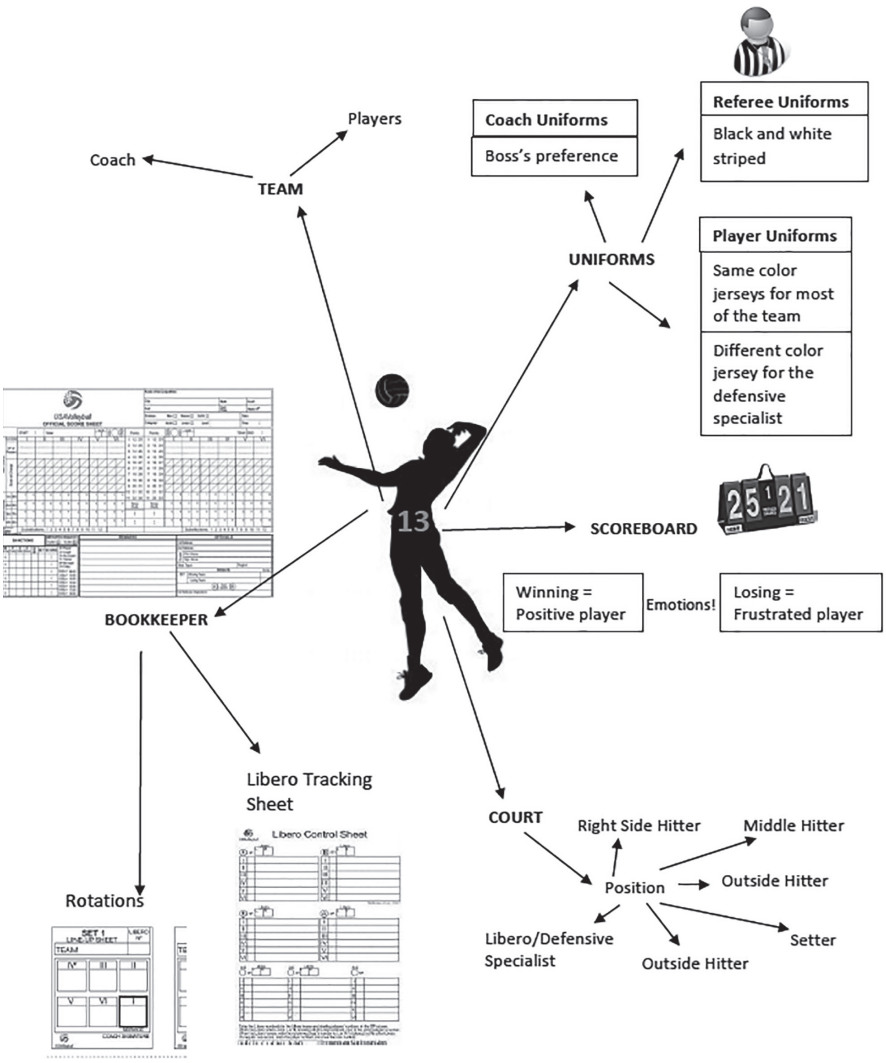

Figure 4: The volleyball player is the central component of the activity system. Diagram created by author. Volleyball score sheet and libero tracking sheet from Strength and Power for Volleyball.[2] Volleyball line-up sheet from CoachRey.com.[3]

At any given time, six players on the court will fill the following roles: two outside hitters, one middle hitter, one right-side hitter, one setter (optional to have two setters), and one libero, or defensive specialist. The outside hitters are supposed to be some of the strongest people on the court, with diverse ball-hitting skills and the ability to pass extremely well. The middle hitter is the tallest player on the court and also one of the strongest players. Middle hitters have to hit the ball straight down on the other side of the court so it stays in, often around the opposing team's blocker. This means that the physical space or allowance for movement around middle hitters is much smaller than for other players. Right-side hitters are normally left-handed players, which gives them the same ability the outside hitter has. The libero is considered the best passer on the court and stays in the back row to hit balls being spiked over the net. The setters usually get the second hit so they can set up their teammates for a hit over the net.

The Uniforms

Uniforms are a huge part of volleyball culture. The players, coaches, and referees all wear different uniforms that distinguish them from one another. The players on a team all have the same color jersey except the libero, who wears a different color jersey. The different color jersey signifies to the referee that the libero can move around differently than the rest of the players. The libero can enter and leave the court in the back row whenever they want without having to worry about an official substitution into the game. Often, the libero comes in to replace a middle or outside hitter whose passing skills aren't as good ("Official Volleyball Rules 2013–2016").

Uniform color combinations can influence perceptions about a certain team. For example, my club's colors were blue, green, and white, which weren't nearly as intimidating uniform colors as the combination of red, black, and white that other teams wore. The red, white, and black were more intimidating because they look sharper as a uniform and made the girls look tougher than those who had on the lighter colors.

Yet there also are a number of key components besides jersey color that are important when it comes to players' uniforms. Players' numbers, for instance, help to identify them on the court and make it easier for bookkeepers and team managers to keep track of statistics during the game. When it comes to club volleyball, uniforms can say a lot about how well a certain club is funded. For instance, certain clubs with sponsorships may have matching knee pads or shoes for all players on the team. Although matching uniforms don't necessarily mean a team is better, they can create the impression that certain teams are more prepared.

Other actors involved in volleyball wear certain clothes for certain reasons as well. For instance, coaches may be expected to dress up or dress more casually in team colors. Referees always have to wear black-and-white striped shirts with black pants. The exception to this is when the down referee is actually a player from the game, who will be in a team uniform. During a tournament, club teams may be required to supply people to keep score, keep track of the libero, serve as a line judge, keep track of the score book, or serve as a down referee. In these instances, they will not wear the black-and-white uniforms the up referees have to wear.

The Mental Game

Volleyball isn't just about the physical act of hitting the ball. It's also a mind sport. If a player makes one mistake, she has to shake it off and try to get the next point. Some players let their mistakes get the better of them and that makes them frustrated, which the majority of the time makes their playing worse rather than benefitting them. One way that players try to overcome "head games" is by working as a team to cheer each other up. This is called "supportive talk." Supportive talk can include saying things like "good job," "good try," or "shake it off, you will get the next point." The scoreboard can also mess with players' emotions, as shown in the previous diagram (Figure 4). If the team is winning, a player may be positive, but if the team is losing, they are more likely to become negative or frustrated, which can then lead the activity on the court to break down if a player's teammates do not utilize supportive talk or other means to help their teammate stay focused.

Communication is a huge component of volleyball. If there isn't communication, then mistakes are made and games are lost. The necessity of communication in volleyball isn't something that is easy to see from reading rulebooks or finding sources online, however. So, in order to better understand what team communication looks like on the court, I conducted an ethnographic report. An ethnography is a study of people and a culture that involves taking detailed, in-depth notes of everyday life and practices in that culture. In this case, I watched a recording of the Wisconsin versus Texas 2013 NCAA National Women's Volleyball Semifinals game on YouTube and closely observed and took notes on the activity happening during the game. As I watched the game, I noticed that whenever someone made a mistake, the teammates on the floor would all group together in the middle and tell each other to shake it off and offer encouragement. If someone got a point for their team, then the same thing would happen, except they would all cheer for each other.

I also realized just how important it was for the main actors on the court—the players—to work together. For example, if one of the girls made a bad pass and the ball went the opposite way of where it was supposed to go, every player on the team would then chase after the ball to try to save it. No one would give up on a ball or let it drop without attempting to dive for it. As the saying goes, "There is no 'I' in team." Although each player had her own individual position and job on the court, they all knew that their actions had to come together in order for the team to succeed.

As I took notes on the semifinal game, I also noticed another group of actors I had not previously considered: the crowd. The crowd's support can have an effect on the team. When a player made an awesome play, or the team earned a point, the crowd supporting that team would cheer. However, sometimes the crowd would not be supportive, particularly of a referee's call or a coach's decision. This may result in the crowd yelling at one another or at the other actors because they are so invested in the game.

Power

During the course of my research regarding the activity system of volleyball, I realized just how much power comes into play. There are multiple actors who have power throughout the game. As discussed previously, different players on the court have power in different situations—for instance, the setter generally has control over the second hit for his or her team, and the libero has a level of power other players don't because of his or her ability to go in and out of the game with more flexibility. Coaches also possess power in regard to determining who is allowed into or taken out of the game. In addition, the bookkeepers who keep track of statistics for the game have the power to identify whether someone is out of rotation.

Yet of all the actors on the court, perhaps those with the most power are the referees. The referees are certified and are hired to take charge of the game and enforce the rules. Certification varies depending on whether a referee is working for club organizations, high school or college teams, or the pro circuit. When I researched volleyball referee certifications, I came across information on becoming a referee with USA Volleyball, which is a club organization at the high school level. In order to be certified, referees need to attend multiple trainings or complete certification online. Referees must choose which level they want to be a referee for; whether they want to be trained for indoor, outdoor, or beach volleyball; and which position they wish

to hold. Once referees are certified and begin working at games, they wear uniforms as a signal of their authority. Another object that affects referees' power is the rulebook. The rulebook has been around since volleyball has started, but it evolves from year to year, and referees are the actors in the activity system who are most up-to-date on what all of the rules are because they are charged with enforcing them.

Through my research, I have learned that all the actors who are involved with the game of volleyball have power at some point, but the overall outcome of the game depends on how the actors use their knowledge of that power to help them succeed during a game.

For the Win

My study of the activity system of volleyball explored the history of the game and the actors involved, ranging from the players on the court and the uniforms they wear to nonhuman actors such as the rulebook and net. In order to conduct this research, I drew on my own knowledge as a volleyball player, online secondary research, and interviews with two former volleyball players, and conducted an ethnographic report of a specific NCAA volleyball game. From researching and writing this article, I discovered just how much we can learn about a topic that already seems familiar to us if we are willing to explore it in greater detail, particularly by delving into a specific activity system. I grew up with the game of volleyball and, once I started playing, it became second nature to me. However, through my research for this article, I came to realize just how complex volleyball really is.

Endnotes

[1]Volleyball player silhouette image used here and in Figure 4 found at http://www.clipartpanda.com/categories/volleyball-player-silhouette-clipart.

[2]Score card image found at http://www.strength-and-power-for-volleyball.com/images/scorekeeping-volleyball-scoresheet.jpg. Libero tracking sheet image found at http://www.strength-and-power-for-volleyball.com/libero-tracker.html.

[3]Volleyball line-up sheet image found at http://coachrey.com/resources/volleyball-coach-resources/.

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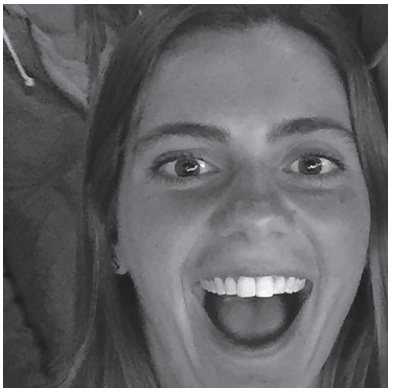

Millie Dunbar is currently a junior in the College of Education at Illinois State University. When she is not at school, she lives at home in Chicago, Illinois, with her family. Her interests include hanging out with family and friends, playing volleyball, and being adventurous. Once she graduates, she hopes to teach first or second grade somewhere in the Chicago area.

The Literate Practices of a Division II Men's Basketball Team

J. Michael Rifenburg

J. Michael Rifenburg argues that one way Division II men's basketball players learn complex texts (i.e., plays) is through the cognitive process of spatial orientation, which is how a player positions himself in regard to others and areas of the court. Rifenburg's study considers the role of spatial orientation in the literate practices of a basketball team and how such a role helps writing researchers expand their understanding of what writing is and how it's accomplished.

A Wednesday night. I am standing in the men's locker room surrounded by players, managers, coaches, trainers. It's halftime and I'm in the losing team's locker room. The head coach is screaming, sweating, and imploring his team a more impassioned performance during the second half against their rival Young Harris College. While the team has largely struggled throughout the season, this is the first time I have seen the head coach *this* mad. I'm holding my digital recorder with my right hand, my notebook with my left, and staring at the ground. I feel I don't belong. Even though I've followed the team for the season and have the support of the coach, the players, the athletics director, my boss, and my boss's boss, I tell myself I shouldn't be here, that I'm trespassing. I hear the coach drop the f-bomb; with his slight southern drawl, he elides the g.

Then silence.

I look up.

The coach has turned his back to his players, picked up a dry erase marker, and is writing on the board. I crane my neck to see around his large

shoulders to his markings on the board (Figure 1). He's composed an offensive play the team commonly runs. At this point—with only six games left in the twenty-six-game season—the players most assuredly know the nuances of this play. I wonder what he is getting at.

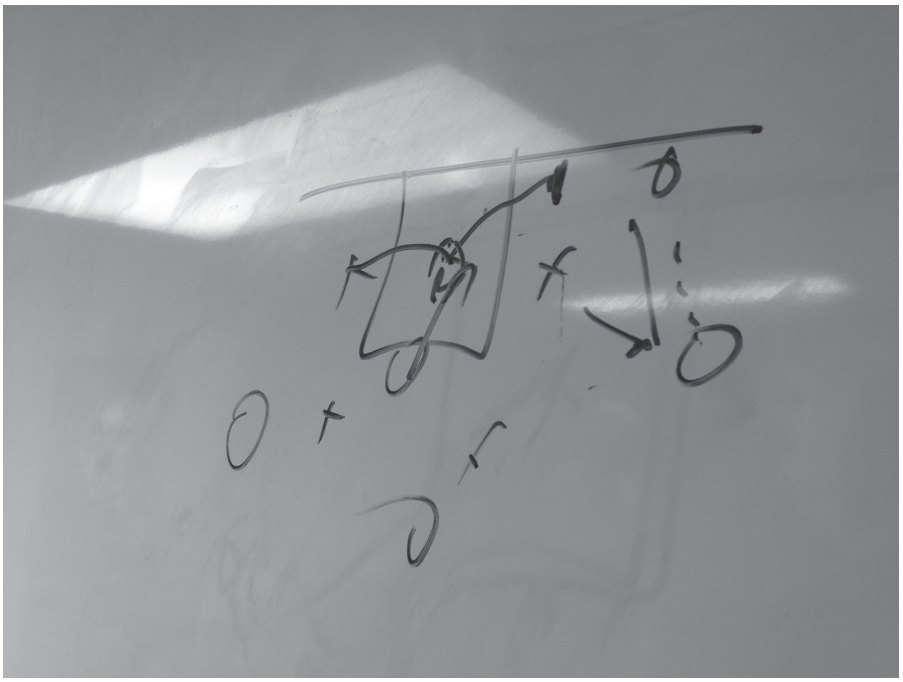

Figure 1: Hand-drawn play by head basketball coach Chris Faulkner. Photo by author.

He takes a breath. All are able to hear the steady in and out of his breathing in the silent but smelly locker room.

Then he speaks. His tone is even and resolute.

"OK, guys . . . " he begins.

Coach starts teaching.

During the 2014–2015 basketball season, I followed the men's basketball team at the University of North Georgia (UNG), a Division II school competing in the Peach Belt Conference. After receiving the permission and support of the Faculty Athletics Representative, the Athletics Director, and the head basketball coach, I completed an Institutional Review Board (IRB) proposal in which I explained to my university how and why I was planning on gathering data for my research. Once the IRB approved my proposal, I began data collection and had the coaches and players sign consent documents granting me permission to talk with them and then publish my findings.

As a qualitative researcher, I am interested in capturing the voices of my participants and developing a strong sense of how they use and understand writing for their sport. For this project, I wanted to observe the team using plays and then spend time looking at plays with the players and coaches. I attended practices, traveled with the team, sat on the bench during games, and listened in on film sessions and locker room talks. I was given access to the coaching staff and the players, so I could understand how players learn the complex plays they embody during practice and games.

For the past decade, I have undertaken similar research across a range of NCAA member institutions. As a former high school soccer coach and now as a college sports literacy researcher, I have grown increasingly weary of the deficit model of student-athletes broadcasted by mainstream media and, frankly, many college teachers: here is what the student-athlete *cannot* do, here is what the student-athlete does *not* know. And this line of reasoning makes its way into my college writing classroom, albeit in a different guise. I see students who excel at non-school writing and reading (who might, for example, write song lyrics, fan fiction, blogs, or memorize baseball stats) but struggle with school writing and reading. Therefore, they tell themselves or listen to others who tell them that they are poor writers and readers and deficient in literacy. Because I am frustrated with the pervasive myth of academic reading and writing as *the* standard level of literacy, I seek out non-school forms of literacy in hopes of gaining a more complete picture of what writing is and how it works.

I am not alone in this approach, as many other writing researchers are now looking at non-school writing practices. Articles in *Grassroots Writing Research Journal*, for example, are evidence of such research: analyses of documentary films (Steiner), Facebook (Marshall), mixtapes (Kampmeier), and many other locations of writing that expand, refine, and problematize long-held notions of what writing is and how and where it's accomplished.

Focused more directly on sports, my larger research agenda starts from the premise that student-athletes—particularly those competing in basketball and football—operate in a space marked by constant engagement with text. During practice and games, many student-athletes engage with a wide variety of texts, traditionally called *plays*, created with and for the body. Going one step further, I believe players learn plays through the cognitive process of spatial orientation, which is how a player positions himself in regard to others and areas of the court. I start with how I understand the term *literate practice* and then offer a narrative from a November basketball practice that speaks, I believe, to a central way text operates within basketball. I end by considering the role of spatial orientation in the literate practices of a Division II men's basketball team and how such a role helps writing researchers expand their understanding of what writing is and how it's accomplished.

Literate Practices and Basketball

What writing is and how it's accomplished are not concretely defined. As such, scholars all around the world dedicate their research and teaching careers to thinking about these ideas about writing. One concept that writing researchers in the UK and the US have thought much about is the concept of *literate practice*. New Literacy Studies scholars working largely in the UK suggest *literate practice* refers to specific ways a community uses literacy. Such a general understanding that connects literacy with utility is a helpful foothold. More recent work by US writing researchers Paul Prior at the University of Illinois and his mentee Kevin Roozen at University of Central Florida enlarge this foothold by offering an additional term: *literate activity*. Related to literate practice, literate activity attends to what Roozen refers to as the "broader spectrum of action of particular communities" (569). Channeling Prior's helpful definition of literate activity as "not located *in* acts of reading and writing, but *as* cultural forms of life saturated with textuality, that is strongly motivated and mediated by texts" (138; emphasis in original), Roozen argues literate practices are "situated in and mobilized across broader literate activities" (569). In other words, many literate practices give rise to a literate activity. For our purposes, we can understand the literate activity of basketball as composed of a wide variety of literate practices, such as reading and running a play. These literate practices are, as Prior suggests, "saturated with textuality" in that they anticipate and enact bodily action through a reliance on text.

It's an odd read to see "saturated" and "textuality" paired; I know I am still scratching my head over some of Prior's thoughts. But I understand Prior's quote this way: when basketball players prepare for a game, they run endless plays in practice. These plays are scripted and written down performances. Basketball players are enacting lines on a page through bodily movement on a field. Think about it this way: an architect works from a set of blueprints to construct a home, so that the lines and dimensions captured in writing on the blueprint are then realized as physical, tangible objects constituting a home. Returning to basketball, whoever drew these plays—a head coach, assistant coach, player, or graduate assistant—anticipated how a player would be able to perform the play through bodily performance just as an architect anticipated how her blueprints would be realized by a builder. When the player runs these plays during a game, viewers are able to watch a body enact a scripted text. While not able to see these plays as a traditional physical text, viewers do watch a body perform an action undergirded and situated in a text. Finally, with the term *literate practice*, I hope to signal the tight connection between body and text. This connection is very much a part of how the men's basketball team at the University of North Georgia make sense of their plays as text.

A November Practice and Spatial Orientation

It's Friday afternoon, November 7. The first game is eight days away. The head coach of thirteen years, Chris Faulkner, stands in the center of the court, staring at sheets of papers, periodically looking up and around at the action surrounding him.[1] He blows his whistle seven minutes after 3:00 pm, and the team huddles around him. Basketballs quiet fast. He provides an overview of the practice and the team breaks with a collective shout of "1 . . . 2 . . . 3 . . . Hard work!"

The coaches run the players through a five on zero transition: five players on offense without defenders. Faulkner tells his players to emphasize the dribble drag both ways. The assistant coach, Josh Travis, shoots the ball off the backboard, intentionally trying to miss. A player rebounds and leads a fast break in the opposite direction. Again and again, the players go. According to the scoreboard operated by the graduate assistant, Jared Hawkins, the drill only has three minutes left. The players and the ball are whipping around the court with the frenzied squeak of rubber-soled shoes. Suddenly, Faulkner sees something he doesn't like. He blows his whistle. The players stop.

Faulkner walks over to the players and picks up the ball. He says he was thinking about this play last night and then watched how players ran it today. He takes sophomore guard Shaquan Cantrell by the elbow and moves him slightly and says, "I don't think we need to screen him [the defender]. I think we can just cut." The players are breathing heavily but listening and nodding.

Travis Core, a senior on the team, speaks up and suggests doing the same thing with a different play. Faulkner agrees and makes the change to that play. These changes are not inscribed into a document or even scribbled on a loose sheet of paper but are verbally stated. The impetus for this change arose from Faulkner watching how his players physically moved through the play during practice and allowing a player's voice to be heard. By physically moving players around him, he saw that this adjustment would be effective.

Faulkner steps to the side, blows his whistle, and the practice begins again.

As the season unfolded, I found myself returning to this moment often in my thinking and writing. I was and still am struck by the boldness of Travis, his ability to suggest adaptations to additional plays and vocalize these suggested adaptations in front his teammates and coaches. Part of what strikes me was Faulkner's rapid acquiescence. It's not a power struggle for Faulkner as it is for many coaches. In my decades of working in college

sports, I have come across many coaches who would have ignored or turned down Travis's request simply because the idea offered came from a player and not another coach. Finally, not only do the sender and receiver of this message still strike me, but so does the message itself and how rapidly a verbal query can morph into written text. While Faulkner did not physically make the alternations to the play by getting out his white board and marker, his verbal acceptance will lead to an assistant coach later making that physical written alteration. Text, for this college basketball team, is fluid and collaboratively constructed.

And here I think of Jeff Rients's smart piece in the Spring 2014 issue of *Grassroots Writing Research Journal* where Rients offers a close reading of the genre sets comprising the popular—and lucrative—game *Dungeons & Dragons*. At the end of the article, Rients is musing on the text comprising *Dungeons & Dragons* and how players modify these texts through the course of gameplay or during later reflection. Rients writes, "Such texts need to be dissected and examined by the end user and, if found wanting, redesigned" (16). So, too, with basketball plays. The end user of these plays is, of course, the player. Players are the ones who will embody the text, the play, on the court. They are the ones who physically feel how the play unfolds and feel if the play puts them in an effective position to do their job. Travis here is the end user, to borrow from a phrase from Rients, and Travis suggested modifications to a text based on his end user experience. Moreover, and this point leads to the final section, Travis suggested this alteration based not only on felt sense but also on where his felt sense would or should occur. In other words, players' location on the court is central to them effectively embodying a text.

Spatial orientation is vital to how UNG players engage with and use the literate practices of basketball. For the players I studied, spatial orientation took the form of their spatial relationships to others (teammates and opponents) and areas on the court. When I asked players in my office to draw and explain to me some basic plays they are running this year, all drawings started the same way: with graphic representations of the basketball court. While some players added additional details, all included a circle for the basket and a semicircle for the three-point line. Before they moved into graphically representing themselves, their teammates, the opponent, or physical movements—such as passes and screens—all players orientated the play in regard to the spatial location of the court. And Faulkner did the same. The white board he scribbles on during time-outs in a game has the black outlines of a full court imposed on it (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Head coach Chris Faulkner draws a play during a time-out. Photo taken by author.

When he sketched out formations and plays in the locker room during that heated halftime talk I observed, Faulkner began with drawing the basket and the three-point line (see Figure 1). He went the additional step of adding the paint but no other details, like the out-of-bounds line, the half-court line, or the opposing teams' basket. Faulkner began teaching by orienting himself and his players to specific areas on the court. The players' movements are intertwined with their location on the court. For players to understand a play, and for Faulkner or any of the assistant coaches to teach a play, the players and the coaches must first begin with the location where the play will be enacted and where the players will stand on the court to begin the play.

Location also figures into how players and coaches brainstorm and develop plays. During the November practice, Faulkner saw how the play unfolded on the court and knew he wanted to make a change. It wasn't enough for him to run through the play in his head or even on a sheet of paper; he needed to see how the play spatially developed. The genesis of this play comes from watching how opponents spatially oriented themselves on the court. When the team looks to develop a new play or add a wrinkle to an existing one, location factors into invention.

Finally, the spatial arrangement of teammates can help players remember and then implement the correct play in a game. I asked sophomore forward T. J. Williams if he ever forgets a play during a game. He responded,

> I feel like that happens sometimes because like when [another player] moves, you know that the spot that they just moved from is where you are supposed to be or in the general area. Like if someone is near me I will be like 'Oh, crap, I gotta set a screen for them.' I feel like that happens sometimes. Because the speed of the game sometimes you might call something and be like 'uh' and taking a minute and then you go right into it.

As a forward, one of T. J.'s jobs is setting screens for guards. If he forgets a play, he looks to those around him. If a guard is near him then, in his words, "I gotta set a screen for them." T. J.'s basketball literate practices, the literate practices of the entire team, hinge on spatial relationships.

Spatial orientation is just one way these student-athletes hone the literate practices for their sport, but we—many of us non-student-athletes—often don't directly think of spatiality when we sit down to write. Yet in her book *Geographies of Writing*, University of Rhode Island professor Nedra Reynolds argues that the "*where* of writing" (176; emphasis in original) impacts the *how* and *what* of writing. Such a declaration might be easily accepted by readers now, but for a long time, writing researchers would often divorce location from writing and believed that good (or bad) writing wasn't impacted by the when and where of writing. Now writing researchers understand the centrality of location in the writing process. What a study of a men's basketball team teaches us is that location extends beyond our location in regard to external objects and our location in regard to others. As we move and write in this world, we do so in relation to a host of external variables impacting the how and the why of our writing. Looking at the complexities of student-athletes' literate practice, then, not only helps us rethink the deficit model unfairly leveraged against student-athletes but also helps us rethink how the people and places we come in contact with facilitate the how and the why of the words we write. Within American higher education, college sports and academics often struggle to coexist. And while there is solid historical and contemporary fodder for this struggle, writing researchers can learn a great deal about what constitutes writing and how it is accomplished by turning attention to the nearly half million student-athletes currently competing in NCAA sports.

Endnotes

[1]All names are people's real names, used with permission. I collected data in accordance to IRB protocol and guided by the CCCC Guidelines for Ethical Conduct of Research in Composition Studies.

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Play-by-Play:
Literate Activity On and Off the Football Field

Annie Hackett

Wes Gaddis, Little League Youth Football coach for the Junior Varsity division of the Bloomington Cardinals, engages with writing in a variety of ways every time he coaches his team. *Grassroots Writing Research Journal* intern Annie Hackett and Illinois State University Writing Program Coordinator Maegan Gaddis (who is married to Wes) sat down with Wes to learn all about how his football-related research and writing strategies have evolved over the years.

ANNIE: So we want to start the interview by asking you about any and all kinds of writing that you might do as part of your work as a football coach. This doesn't just have to include text with words, it can also include visuals, layouts, maps, pictures—anything, any type of communication.

WES: Playbooks are basically the beginning of the circle, I guess. Then from there, it goes to installs, schedules, and how to implement the playbook, and writing out the progression of how we're going to do that so your coaches know exactly what they need to know. Then you get into practice plans . . . these are the goals that we're trying to achieve, what's helping us get there, how much time are we spending on this, that, and the other, and that's a constant thing. Scouting reports—so when we play teams, we will watch film and do a lot of data entry on the film. And that's another thing: just the data entry in labeling film. With every play you have to go through and label and define basically what is going on in that play. That basically helps you spit out your scouting reports to figure out what this team does, what their tendencies are, those sorts of things. That would be pretty much the writing standpoint. There is a lot of communication that involves kind of making our own language. And there's a lot of communication via hand signals. So we do, in essence, out of the English

language, make our own language. We can sit there and talk right in front of people and they have no idea what we're talking about, but we all know what we're doing. But that's never written. Those calls can be named whatever—we let kids name them so they remember them. We let them actually make the hand signals a lot of times because they remember them. For whatever reason, my brain doesn't work like that. My idea of what is obvious isn't always obvious to them. It's usually easier to leave it up to them if you can. That's pretty much the communication process that goes on throughout the whole thing.

ANNIE: Tell us a little bit about, if you can remember, how you learned these types of communications. Did you learn them at school, did you learn them by doing them, did somebody else teach you how to do them?

WES: Right, a lot of it's through experience, playing football when I was younger, and even as a young football player, I knew I wanted to coach, and I got in and started drawing plays, started trying to figure out what I was doing, you know, based on what I'd seen in my own experience. For playbooks, I'd seen and been given those kinds of things, so you start trying to develop a playbook at a young age. It's trial and error, you know, there is no standard in coaching football for a playbook or communication or terms, so there are a lot of different ways to skin the cat. You kind of try ways that you see, that you've learned from other people. I did a lot of research. Before the Internet it was, man, any kind of book you could find, any magazine article you could find, you'd find pamphlets sometimes that some guy got at a clinic and gave you. I mean, you'd read anything. The Internet has made the information so much more readily available that you get a lot of other exposures to the ways other people are doing it. Before the Internet, no one really knew how other people were doing them, and once people start seeing it, now you see this integration of different systems that are coming together and making new systems and there's just a lot of different ways to do it. It's just based on the individual guy and how he wants to develop it. And then through coaching—I've coached for fifteen, sixteen years, I've worked with a lot of good coaches and basically got the experience and learned how they write their playbook. I had to learn their playbook, their terminology, their communication system, their practice plans. So a lot of it's just been experience and just researching what you could on your own and trying to find new ideas.

ANNIE: So you're talking about researching ways to do things. Is there a particular moment when you realized, "I figured it out?"

WES: Every six months, every year. *laughs* No seriously, you have that moment where you're like, "Oh I should have been doing this!" and it might be a slight change, but it helps. And this is the way most coaches go: as you're younger, you want all these options and to be able to do all these different things and you want to have these things readily available to you so you try to make your system and playbook. It becomes pretty complex. And as you get older, most coaches do less.

They just simplify, and simplify, and simplify and it's not so much about schemes, it's about teaching a kid a particular technique, a fundamental, and you find ways to make things simpler and easier, because the simpler and easier things are for football players, the better they play, because they have to think fast. There is no thinking on a football field. If you're thinking, you're not playing. It's a reaction sport, so the less possibilities in your brain for options that could happen for you, the better off the play [will be]. So I personally ran, probably, five or six different offensive systems—completely different terminology, different ways to write the playbook, different ways to communicate, and then as I worked with someone else, I'd start all over. The basis of what I actually am doing doesn't really change, but the way I'm communicating it or using the system or trying to simplify the system is what always seems to be evolving.

ANNIE: Sort of a weird question: What can you tell us about the types of tools that you use? It can be anything. Do you use computers when you're writing stuff out?

WES: [At] first, everything was handwritten. You'd rarely have anything typed. You'd have playbooks that were handwritten and drawn (Figure 1). The film was all on video, not on a computer, so you couldn't label it. You had to write it out. So then from that handwritten list you had to figure out tendencies and what they are doing. Guys have tried methods of circling with different colored pencils. I'll circle this kind of play in red, this play in yellow and kind of see, am I more red or am I more yellow? Or whatever color combinations. We've actually been given film and drawn every play using a different colored pencil. You just draw the play and then they're literally trying to figure out a scouting report by looking at the line that you drew. Where are they going? Where is more of this color or more of that color? And it was very hard to actually get the information you really needed. It's time consuming.

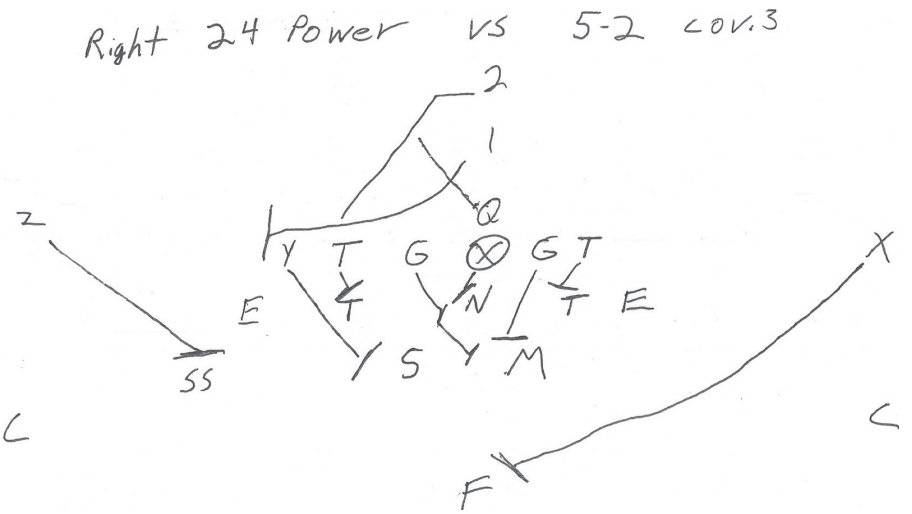

Figure 1: A hand-drawn play from an old playbook belonging to Wes Gaddis.

The next best development was Excel spreadsheets. We started putting these things in Excel spreadsheets and making these different formats and trying to create this spreadsheet that you could then make filters for, and the filters would then help you see what they're doing more, how many of this or how many of that, to the right, to the left, those kinds of things. They helped. But they were very hard to maintain, very hard to develop. If anything ever got weird, somebody had to go back and go do all this back work and see . . .

MAEGAN: Where'd that formula get messed up?

WES: Well, a company called Hudl came out probably eight years ago and they basically had a system that they made available to high schools where you could get your film, watch it on the computer, label it on the computer, put your playbook on it. It gave you playwriting tools, it does its own scouting reports, it's amazing. You just do all the data entry and say, "Here, collect me out a bunch of scouting reports" and it'll give you more stuff than you could ever even digest. So that's been the greatest, newest, latest development, and it's a hundred times better than anything we've tried to do or had before. It actually gets us on the level of college football teams and pro football teams in what we actually have the power to do. And it's great because you can communicate instantly with the kids from these things. They have access to them, we can send messages to them, you can monitor if they're watching the film that you're asking them to, you can monitor if they're looking at their playbook. It's just, it's an unbelievable tool and that's where we are today.

ANNIE: Yeah, it involves everything.

WES: And actually I have a couple different teams that I have Hudl for. I was doing high school the last few years, and I have Downs' Tri-Valley's Hudl. And this year the little league organization that I came to coach for, we got them to actually start using Hudl.

ANNIE: I'm sure they love that!

WES: Everyone loves it because it gives everyone access to watch films. Before we didn't even film these kids, these games never even got filmed, so the kids didn't get to watch themselves play. If a parent couldn't make it, you didn't get to watch them play. Grandparents never got to watch them play. Now everybody can have access to it, so from that standpoint, that's really great. In high school and stuff, no one else had access to it besides us. We're a little more lenient here. That is the one thing, the privacy. Who has access to your account? If someone got in your account, they could get all your information and use it against you. I've never heard of it, never known of it happening, but everybody worries about it. But that's kind of the progression. There were some playwriting programs, something called "Playmaker Pro" I used for a

few years, and it was just a program on your computer. It would help you draw plays and label players, write notes and stuff, but it had nothing to do with the film. With Hudl you can attach film to plays, you can do all these things.

ANNIE: So how do you write your playbooks now? Is it on the computer?

WES: Yes, I do everything through Hudl now because it gives everyone access to it. I'm actually pulling plays out of old playbooks and re-entering these things (Figure 2).

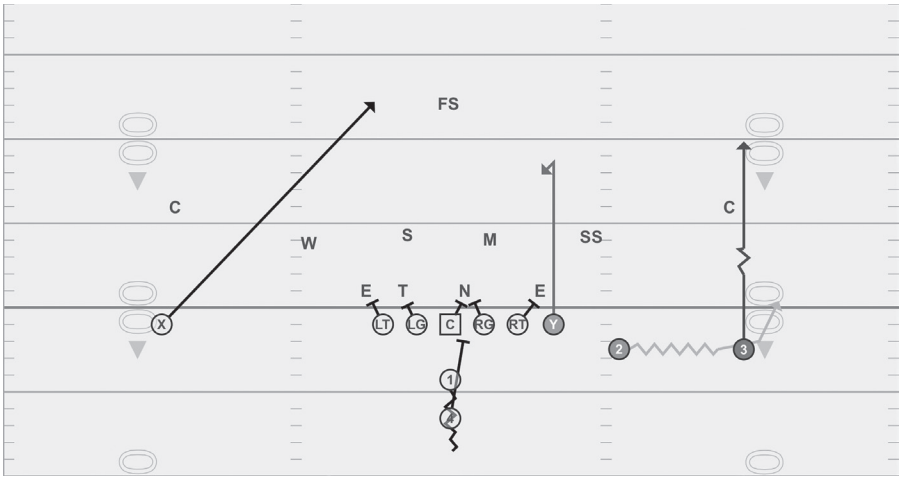

Figure 2: A computer-generated play created by Wes Gaddis.

MAEGAN: Today's technology.

ANNIE: Yeah, that's crazy.

WES: And again, I've always said the same thing on these plays, but my wording changes all the time to try to simplify it, to make it better defined, easier to understand.

ANNIE: Have you ever had to, or ever tried to, teach anybody how to do the kind of work you do?

WES: Yes.

ANNIE: How'd that go?

WES: Never very successfully. Things have changed and developed so much and at such a fast rate that I felt like I've always been trying to stay on par with it, but to teach someone when I have all these experiences built up as I've done this for years . . . you can give them advice but, again, it's your own individual thing. It has to work in your brain. My system might not work in your brain, so don't use my system if it doesn't perfectly work in your brain,

you know what I mean? What I've had trouble with is actually having people help me with things like doing data entry into Hudl. They don't see things the way I see them, so sometimes they label them differently or they use different terminology than what I use and so then you have to define all the terminology. It's so experience-based that it's very hard to teach. I've never had very much time, where I could sit down for an hour a day for two weeks with someone. It's been trying to teach someone to do something in ten or fifteen minutes and see if they can help lighten the load on my shoulders and take some work off my table. So when I say it's unsuccessful, I've never invested much in it either, so it could be done, but I've never really, really taught anybody.

ANNIE: Can you think of any types of writing you did learn in school that help you write what you write now?

WES: Basic third and fourth grade English: how to write a sentence, how to use correct grammar. You have a misspelling or you have a word you mistyped that it autocorrects to something else. Everybody gets a big laugh out of that and to save yourself that, that is like the biggest driver to actually have correct grammar and sentence structure and all that kind of thing. I'm not a very good writer, I don't claim to be at all, but I have become proficient at communicating through writing to players. And most of that has been writing less and trying to simplify what I'm saying to them. We want to tell them too much, we want to do too much, we want the whole world open to us, and by having all that open to us, we really never get good at anything. We're kind of OK at a bunch of things.

ANNIE: Can you talk a little bit about the big picture of your writing? Who's affected by it? Is it just your players, other coaches you work with?

WES: Yeah, definitely the other coaches you work with and the players. Generally always on a football team, there's an offensive coordinator and a defensive coordinator and they ultimately make the plan of schematically what the team is going to do. They write the playbook and then from there that's how they communicate to their assistant coaches, "Okay, this is what I need you to teach this year. This is what your players, the positions that you're going to teach, need to be proficient at." So yeah, all coaches and players. Outside of that I can't imagine it affecting anybody besides the other team.

If you're not the head coach and you're the defensive coordinator—I've been in that position the last few years (Figure 3)—[the head coach] will let you draw it all up and do it all and then you've got to show them and they'll tell you what they don't like. They'll tell you what they want changed and then either you have to fight for what you want or concede to what they want changed. So, yeah, you can definitely have outside forces that influence what you write and how you write it and what you're responsible for.

Figure 3: Wes Gaddis is congratulated by his team after his defense keeps the opposing team from scoring.

MAEGAN: And that even goes into your defensive coordinating. You kind of are dictated somewhat by what you know the other team is going to do, right, based on the film that you've watched?

WES: Sure, you're not dictated necessarily, but—

MAEGAN: It influences.

WES: Yeah, it better influence! We sit there and watch it all and study it all and figure it all out. I mean, there are a lot of decisions based on that, but it doesn't necessarily . . . they don't control what we do. They influence us. They put constraints on what you can and can't do, what you should or should not do, I guess, because you can do anything, but you're going to have consequences for whatever you do.

MAEGAN: I've watched every week, you're changing little things based on the team information that you've got. So they do influence your writing on a weekly basis based in that aspect.

WES: Oh definitely.

ANNIE: We did already talk a little bit about how you feel about grammar and writing correctly, as well as simplifying and making things easy, but is there ever a "just right?"

WES: No, I don't believe there's ever a "just right," there's always a better way and I seemingly find myself always striving to find the better way and adapting.

ANNIE: Every time you write?

WES: Right, I could write the same playbook ten years ago, five years ago, and today and it'll be the exact same thing but it will be written and drawn in a different format, a different way to say the same thing. So yeah, I've never found the "just right." In fact, trying to write a kid's job in football is darn near impossible in the small space that you need to be able to get it in because you don't know what the other team is going to do and, therefore, you have to have either a rule that covers every situation in the world, which there isn't one, or thirty rules that cover thirty situations—and you can't cover it all.

ANNIE: Okay, for our last question, do you feel like you know anything, either important or something new, about the writing that you do in your work that you want to tell students who are still in school?

WES: Get on Hudl. Find a way to get some exposure to Hudl. If students want to get into coaching and contact a high school team around here and offer to help break down film for them, I bet you they'd be more than willing to say, "Oh yeah, no problem, we'll kind of walk you through it." I would get exposure to Hudl or a program like Hudl.

MAEGAN: Can we elaborate on that one a little more? So as you've reflected on all of the writing that you actually do for football, is there anything that you would tell readers about what you've learned about writing? Maybe when you were in Little League and you wanted to be a football coach and had no idea the amount of writing that you'd be doing?

WES: Oh, I got you. Define things, simplify things, and—

ANNIE: Make things as clear as possible?

WES: As clear as possible in the fewest words that you can use. The longer the sentence, the less it's going to be read, the less it's going to be remembered. If it's over ten words, they don't comprehend past word eight, I don't think. I don't know why that is. But . . . what I'm telling you might not be the right answer for you. Maybe you can do it in three sentences and I'm terrible at it. I don't necessarily know that my way is always the best way. I've exposed myself to as many experiences that I could get. So if could you do Hudl for one team one year and go do Hudl for another team the next year, that would be outstanding for you to see how two different people develop their systems differently. Once you understand two different systems, then you have a better idea of what you want to do. I've never come across somebody's system and went, "Oh that is exactly how I want to do it." I came out of it saying, "I really like that, I want to implement a lot of this, but I really like the way I do this." It becomes a mix. Another thing is to just research. Get

out and find a way to do it. Go look online. The resources are unbelievable. Free sources out the wazoo and guys that will take your money all day long to show you stuff. It's amazing, if you want the information, it's available for you nowadays. There is no "this is the way to do it," even at the pro level. There's not a school to go to, there's not someone who wrote a book that everybody goes, "That's the Bible on how to write a playbook and practice playing." Guys have written books, there's hundreds of them out there too, exactly labeled like that. I've read a bunch of them, parts of them. The key if you want to get into coaching is just find a way to expose yourself to it.

ANNIE: Cool, I think that's it. Thank you so much.

Annie Hackett is a senior publishing major at Illinois State University and a *Grassroots Writing Research Journal* intern. When she's not spending time with friends and family or singing with her a cappella group, you can find her at Chipotle. She's not exactly sure what to do with her English major, but she aspires to become a writer for the Chicago Blackhawks.

CHATting About NaNoWriMo

Matt Del Fiacco

Writing a novel is a daunting task, and National Novel Writing Month (NaNoWriMo) tries to condense all of the work into thirty days. Through CHAT analysis and surveys, Matt Del Fiacco learns that NaNoWriMo as a genre changes the way writing practices take place, and these practices do nothing short of demand work from writers.

The first full-length novel I ever read was *White Fang* by Jack London. It is a story told primarily from the perspective of a wolf-dog hybrid named White Fang, and revolves around his struggles. Ever since I read that story, I wanted to write a novel. It wasn't really the prose that captured me or the significance of the book as "literature." It was the idea that I had just lived, if only for a second, as a wolf. Something about my perception had been altered, and something in my world had changed. That's what good books do to you. And so, with this idea of the gift of perception came the desire to create, to write something myself, because if reading could alter my perceptions, then what could writing do?

Like most aspiring novelists, I've tried all the tricks. I've gone to writing workshops to listen to experienced authors talk about what it takes to be a great writer. I've read books by Stephen King, Orson Scott Card, Anne Lamott, Steven Pressfield, Ray Bradbury, and many others, all of whom talk about how to be successful. I can't even count how many creative writing courses I have taken in my academic career, hoping that there was some formula that everyone else knew and I was missing. If there was a get-rich-quick-type

equivalent for completing a novel, I gave it a shot. I never made it past the first few chapters before struggling with my ideas and being discouraged by the scope of what I was attempting. As Steven Pressfield puts it, I was "corrupted by resistance" (67), struggling to find a way to churn out those hundred or so pages of the next great novel.

It wasn't until my sophomore year of college that I completed my goal, and it wasn't quite what I expected it to be. It wasn't a lucid, manic episode of typing for days at a time, inspired by some astute observation of the human condition. The opposite, really. It was a struggle. A forced process. And it was no great novel. But it was mine. After all those years of waiting to be struck by inspiration, it wasn't a muse or unseen force that finally got the work done. It was NaNoWriMo.

National Novel Writing Month, dubbed NaNoWriMo, calls for participants to write 50,000 words in the thirty days of November, which is about 1,667 words a day. This does not include an outline or any other "outside" work, only the main novel itself. There are no prizes or awards, not much recognition, and no other rules. Only the struggle. Despite this, in 2010, out of 200,530 registered participants, 37,479 individuals reached 50,000 words, which is an 18.6 percent completion rate (Grant). That is 37,479 people who wrote 50,000 words each, roughly the length of John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* or Douglas Adams's *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*.

With statistics like that, one can't help but wonder what goes into writing a novel. The purpose of this article is two-fold: to examine the sort of practices and activities that National Novel Writing Month participants engage in, and to relate those practices to **cultural-historical activity theory** (CHAT), a theory that aims to explore the ways in which activities are complex, connected, and socially situated.

What is NaNoWriMo?

NaNoWriMo has grown over the years, from humble origins with 140 participants in 2000 to 310,095 participants in 2013 (Baty, NaNoWriMo.org).

The contest is largely unregulated, although NaNoWriMo operates as a nonprofit organization that assists aspiring writers participating in the contest and also sponsors programs such as the Young Writers Program, which promotes fluency and creativity in classrooms around the world.

Traditionally, participation in NaNoWriMo lends itself to prose writers, although one can write poetry as well. Other than the word count, however, there are no rules in NaNoWriMo. There is no page count, no need to write daily, and no worksheet to complete. There is only the 50,000 word limit. There is no official need to register, and *NaNoWriMo.org* is the online hub of activity during this month. The site has three primary uses for participants. First, it is a source of information for individuals who may be looking for help on their novel. This includes informal seminars and web-writing workshops, which are free. Second, the site allows users to track the progress of their novels using a word-count function, which updates a graph tracking a user's daily word count. Finally, the site also has forums that allow users to discuss their work and the experience of the contest with one another.

For me, completing NaNoWriMo successfully for the first time was a sign that writing a novel was possible. Reactions to NaNoWriMo are varied, with people like Deana Anker noting that NaNoWriMo "was the single most transformative and enlightening experience of my life. November 2010 was when I became a writer," whereas others adamantly refuse to participate ever again. The labors of NaNoWriMo do not go unrecognized, however, and many notable published works were born in the contest, including James Strickland's *Looking Glass*, Hugh Howey's *Wool*, and Sara Gruen's *Water for Elephants* (Published Wrimos, NaNoWriMo.org).

The Activity of NaNoWriMo

If it isn't obvious by now, NaNoWriMo demands a certain kind of commitment. That commitment demands a certain kind of activity. In my exploration of the contest, I decided to examine the writing practices of individuals who participate in NaNoWriMo and learn what sort of activities those individuals engage in, both in and out of November. Specifically, I surveyed six individuals who had varying levels of experience with writing and with National Novel Writing Month.

Rather than examine the responses of each individual, I will focus on some key points of the survey and the responses to those questions. In the next section, I will provide the questions and answers of the survey and discuss those answers. By doing so, I hope to paint a picture of what writing looks like for writers in the contest of NaNoWriMo, both during November and throughout the year.

Writing Outside of November

These questions were meant to serve as a way to understand how writers acted outside of the contest—in other words, what their writing practices were like during the other eleven months of the year.

What are your writing practices like throughout the year?

Subject One: I typically write when I have the motivation or inspiration to do so. When I'm in school, I rarely write because of time constraints but I'm always thinking of what I want to write next.

Subject Two: I write sporadically. I may not write for over a year, then inspiration strikes and I binge for a couple months, unable to think of anything else.

Subject Three: I try to write at least once a week, for about twenty-five minutes I go over past writing and edit more than I write new things.

Subject Four: Very rarely, if at all. Typically, I spend time journaling or toying with ideas, but actually engaging those ideas is rare.

Subject Five: I write when I have free time, which is rare as a graduate student. I usually write short stories, but don't spend a lot of time thinking about writing outside of actually writing.

Subject Six: I write very often, mainly poetry but occasionally short fiction. I think about writing quite a bit!

Does writing typically get in the way of, or take priority over, other parts of your life?

Subject One: Writing eats into my sleep but that's the extent of my priorities. Everything else comes before writing unless I'm truly inspired.

Subject Two: Not usually. If my life, as well as my room/apartment, is cluttered, I cannot focus, let alone flow creative thoughts.

Subject Three: No, not typically.

Subject Four: Nope.

Subject Five: Not really, it is just a way I spend free time.

Subject Six: Not really, but I do try to set aside time for it. It is a priority after school and sleep, really.

The group I surveyed is made up of people who consider themselves to be writers. They spend at least a little time thinking about their writing, although some of these individuals write more than others, with varying levels of dedication. The only individuals who believe writing throughout the year takes priority over other parts of their lives are Subjects One and Six. I can relate to many of the responses, as I am an incredibly inconsistent writer throughout the year. My academic and professional work takes precedence, and I typically only write when I have no other plans (including recreational).

It is interesting to note the NaNoWriMo experience levels of these individuals. Subjects One, Three, and Five have all participated in NaNoWriMo once, in 2013. Of the three, only Subject One met the 50,000-word goal by the end of the month. Subjects Two and Four have both participated in NaNoWriMo twice, with Subject Two having completed it once and Subject Five completing it both times. Finally, Subject Six participated in NaNoWriMo three times and completed it once, in 2013.

Writing During November

Now that we have established what the activities of our subjects are like outside of the month of November, let's see what it is like for them during the contest.

What are your writing practices like during NaNoWriMo?

Subject One: I had to actually schedule time to write. It became part of my homework.

Subject Two: I write almost every day for a while, until I fall behind and end up writing 5k+ every couple days to try to catch up until I give up because of other class or work obligations.

Subject Three: I try to write an hour a day during NaNoWriMo. While I'm working on my writing during this time, I tend to think about my story in nearly all my free time.

Subject Four: Pretty stressful, I have to dedicate time to it.

Subject Five: Intensive, almost like a ritual. I would intentionally get up an hour earlier just so I could have the time to write for a while. I would always be thinking about the story, because I knew it wasn't much longer and I would have to write a whole new part of the story.

(continued)

Subject Six: Much more regimented than when I normally write. I have to make sure I really get my word count for the day; I have a tendency to fall behind and then spend an entire Saturday just writing so I can catch up.

Does NaNoWriMo get in the way of other priorities in your life?

Subject One: Absolutely. I would put off some homework in order to fill my writing quota.

Subject Two: No, unfortunately I don't have anything that is able to be sacrificed to a novel that I probably will never finish or get published, so it is the first to go.

Subject Three: Sometimes this is true, especially depending on how many classes I'm taking at the time.

Subject Four: Yes, absolutely.

Subject Five: It did, like sleep. I just really had to make time for it. I fell behind pretty early on, and I ended up with about 30,000 words. It really needs some dedication to complete.

Subject Six: Absolutely, but I like it that way. It makes the writing better, more of your life.

What technology do you use during NaNoWriMo that you don't use during the rest of the year? For example, the website.

Subject One: I didn't use the website at all, and I didn't use anything different than the rest of the year. I used Microsoft Word to write everything and a journal to plan it out, but nothing out of the ordinary.

Subject Two: The only thing I did differently was try programs like Scrivener to keep track of my writing. I ended up liking it a lot, but it isn't really necessary and I still fell behind.

Subject Three: I kept up with tracking on the website, but that was really it as far as other technology goes.

Subject Four: I used this word processor that blacks out your whole screen except for text and your word count, which was really just to keep me off the Internet.

Subject Five: Nothing new really, I was introduced to NaNoWriMo through a class so we kind of worked in a group there. I didn't think the website was necessary.

Subject Six: On Reddit there is a subreddit called /r/NaNoWriMo, and I went there a lot to talk about my story and see what other people were doing. I usually don't go online for writing community, so that was pretty new.

Is there anything else you would like to add about how NaNoWriMo affected your activity?

Subject One: It was constantly on my mind. Even more so than my homework for that night, I kept thinking about what I had to write and sometimes I'd want to put it off, before remembering I'd just have to double up on it later.

Subject Two: Not that I can think of!

Subject Three: NaNoWriMo is a goal-oriented program. It helps you focus on your writing so you can accomplish your writing goals. For those lazy writers like me, it gives us something to achieve.

Subject Four: Nope.

Subject Five: NaNoWriMo made me feel like a writer, it made me make time for writing and it actually made the writing itself more engaging. It just seemed like I was a writer, rather than someone who spent time writing.

Subject Six: Everyone should try it once!

The drastic shift in the mindset and activities of these writers is fairly obvious. Each of them noted how much work writing became during NaNoWriMo. I personally believe Subject Five expressed it best when they said that the writing was almost like a ritual and became a part of casual thought because of how quickly they would need to continue the story or risk falling behind. If you weren't thinking about NaNoWriMo throughout the day, you weren't going to be ready to continue your story. All of the writers except Subject Two noted that NaNoWriMo made writing a priority in their lives, and that this shifted their schedules and thoughts around the writing. Subject Three's comment that "NaNoWriMo is a goal-oriented program" may express the reason for this, since it turns the process into something quantifiable and achievable rather than "the novel" that must be written.

However, the writers of NaNoWriMo don't just write more often; their writing practices change as a result of this activity. Obviously, their cognitive

processes change, as most subjects noted that they think about NaNoWriMo more often during the month of November. Another practice is the obsession with word count. I only check my word count during the month of November, because the genre of NanoWriMo writing demands it. This practice is widespread, which is evident from the tools provided by NaNoWriMo.org to track word count (see Figure 1 below). During NaNoWriMo, I also found myself searching for a community, for a group of people who followed the practices NaNoWriMo demanded. This led me to explore new technologies. I accessed the Reddit community to discuss writing, while others used writing programs such as Scrivener to organize their activity. Some even tried sites such as Scribophile, an online writing workshop and writer's community, to get quick feedback on their work.

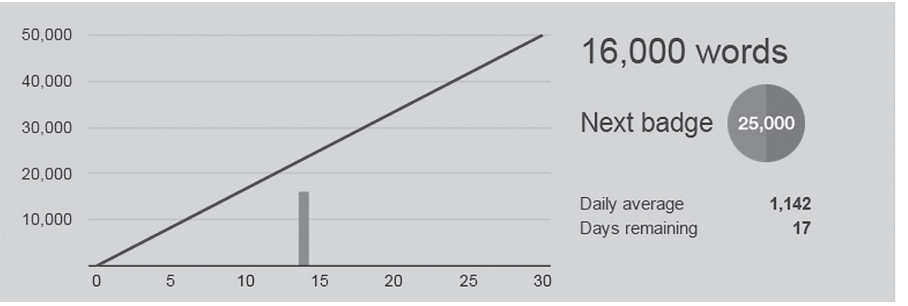

Figure 1: A measure of word count over a 30-day period. Retrieved from NaNoWriMo.org.

Clearly, during the month of November, writing practices of these writers were shaped by the contest, and the idea of writing changed with it. The activity of writing and the cognitive engagement of the narrative shaped both writers' writing and the amount of time dedicated to it.

CHATting about NaNoWriMo

To contextualize this change in activity, I intend to observe and interpret this activity through the lens of cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT). CHAT is a means of looking at activities and understanding the social conventions that went into shaping those activities. In order to understand what goes into making NaNoWriMo what it is, I will analyze NaNoWriMo in relation to the seven aspects of CHAT. These aspects are:

Production: What people, places, and technologies shaped the text?

Representation: How do people think about and plan this text?

Distribution: How was this text produced and distributed?

Reception: What are the reactions and responses to the text?

Socialization: How is this text related to the social and cultural norms of particular groups?

Activity: What are the practices and actions that create the text?

Ecology: How does the environment impact the production and distribution of the text? (Sharp-Hoskins and Frost 2012)

NaNoWriMo is certainly related to **production**, specifically to the ways in which we construct a text. Wonderful examples of this are the survey responses of Subjects One and Five. Subject One notes that during November, writing is always on their mind, and Subject Five shares a similar sentiment when they say that they are always thinking about the story because they know they will have to write more. Personally, I share the experience of Subject One. During NaNoWriMo, the writing is always a clause in your day. You wake up and NaNoWriMo. You go to class and NaNoWriMo. You write for NaNoWriMo and right around the corner is NaNoWriMo. NaNoWriMo demands a schedule and a certain form of production in order to complete the task.

Figure 2: NaNo Prep page. Retrieved from *NaNoWriMo.org*

NaNoWriMo doesn't require you to do anything outside of writing for the contest. It's not that people don't spend time doing things for NaNoWriMo that don't involve writing, it's just that it isn't necessarily acknowledged or needed. However, in terms of **representation**, the organization's website is a clear example of how the contest is prepared for and discussed. One example of this is the "NaNo Prep" web page (see Figure 2), which encourages participants to make a commitment to participating in NaNoWriMo and to use site resources to plan in advance for November (NaNo Prep, NaNoWriMo.org). These resources also reflect the ways in which the perception of NaNoWriMo is constructed. The resources, written by previous NaNoWriMo participants, provide information on everything from starting and researching the novel to creating conflict and building a NaNo "survival" kit. Personally, I was cocky going into NaNoWriMo. I thought it would be easy. I considered myself a great writer and thought I would be able to breeze through, despite my previous failures with regard to writing a novel. There is more to NaNoWriMo than the intimidating word count or time frame; the idea of the contest itself is a behemoth, an Everest, and yet this doesn't seem to stop writers from attempting the challenge. Even though there is no specified rule to prepare for and engage in the contest or the community outside of the writing itself, participants and organizers obviously understand the representation of NaNoWriMo and the activity that it demands.

Thanks to the Internet, writing niche groups are becoming increasingly widespread. This is evident from sales of subgenres in indie publishing and the prevalence of fan fiction. The sharing of material is encouraged by the NaNoWriMo community and is facilitated by the organization's website via forums. This **distribution** is made possible by the fact that NaNoWriMo texts are often written on the computer; however, I make this assumption based on NaNoWriMo writers I am familiar with. Certainly, NaNoWriMo does not demand the use of a computer; however the current material circumstances of participating in the contest, which is based online, seem to favor communities with online participation. Even the local writing groups that I have participated in often share documents over the Internet. These methods of distribution shape the way NaNoWriMo is both performed and constructed, specifically, the ease of writing and maintaining word count and the writing communities that participants have access to.

As a movement, NaNoWriMo has been met with varying levels of approval. For many, the "game" style of NaNoWriMo facilitates this writing, as Subject Three points out when they mention that NaNoWriMo is a goal-oriented program. For others, this goal-driven nature is problematic. These individuals note that the program does not facilitate "serious" writers, who

write consistently throughout the year. I always feel NaNoWriMo is rushed. Because of the time and word count constraints, re-writing and editing is often discouraged by the community. While it is not explicitly frowned upon, the task of rethinking the words you have written for the day can lead to frustration given the demanding timeline. For me, NaNoWriMo is about knowing that you can write a novel and learning that not every first draft will be perfect. November is about word count. Editing is reserved for December. During the contest, I'd wake up in the morning and there would be 1,500 unwritten words hanging over my head. On a limited time schedule, your first idea is typically the idea you go with. These constraints can obviously lead to some friction among members of the writing community. The writing community is typically divided into two groups, what I call the "Muses" and the "Cartographers." The Muses are driven by inspiration, the divine spark that tells them to meet their word count for the day and to write whatever their heart tells them, regardless of whether or not it makes sense. The Cartographers follow their charts, maps, and outlines, writing what they had planned even if other inspiration strikes. Really, the process ends up being somewhere in the middle for most writers, but NaNoWriMo forces that identity out of you and teaches you how to get to work.

NaNoWriMo is a highly social activity. During my second time participating in the contest, my writing group worked like a support group. As indicated by our survey participants, NaNoWriMo is stressful. It encourages stressful thoughts and activity, and being able to relate to others through those practices adds to the experience. In many ways, the **socialization** that takes place in the genre helps shape it. I would argue that the increased socialization of NaNoWriMo results in the same phenomena of running or diet groups, the warrior mentality that comes with mutual suffering. Group communication is a well-documented success technique, most recently by Dr. Gail Matthews, who notes that individuals who set goals and discuss the progress of these goals with peers are bound to be far more successful than members of other groups (Matthews). This social activity is not required. Individuals can participate in NaNoWriMo on their own, and they don't need the support of other NaNo'ers to be successful. However, it is incredibly prevalent. NaNoWriMo, as a practice, stems from group activity, and its roots in community-oriented writing have led to social activity being encouraged in the contest.

NaNoWriMo is defined by its **activity**. The parameters and conditions of the activity are what make it NaNoWriMo, as opposed to other acts of writing. As made clear from the surveys, NaNoWriMo encourages the activity of writing—and thinking about writing—often. These practices, as noted specifically by Subjects One, Four, Five, and Six, demand the time typically

dedicated to other activities, making the genre even more invasive then other "writing" genres. During my first attempt, I was studying abroad in England. Outside my window was the Canterbury Cathedral, this great, almost mythic thing. Someone had designed it, and people had built it. And there I was, sitting at a desk, unable to even churn out enough words to begin a chapter. I also had coursework that involved writing and reading in an entirely different way, which often left me with little energy or desire to write creatively. Needless to say, I wasn't exactly feeling inspired. The figure of the cathedral, along with my coursework, served as a roadblock to my writing. But NaNoWriMo cares less for the conditions of your writing than the writing itself, a side effect of the game-like nature of the contest. Not feeling inspired? Intimidated by the work being done? Too bad. Your muse isn't going to write those 50,000 words for you, so churn out some nonsense because you need to get moving. Once I started writing because I needed to, it got easier. I still wasn't inspired, I was still intimidated, but even though the game-like "win or lose" nature of NaNoWriMo has its problems, it teaches you to write when you don't feel like writing. That was a huge step forward for me as a writer.

NaNoWriMo is simple, it has no **ecology** besides the words involves. It does not demand that its participants write with certain materials. Writing can be done via any medium, from a phone to a computer to a notepad. The word count is what matters. For those participating in NaNoWriMo via the website, or those who wish to be active in the NaNoWriMo online community, an Internet connection is required to complete certain activities. The material circumstances of the distribution of the text itself are varied in NaNoWriMo, since the genre does not dictate a particular production method. Many writers use services to produce a physical edition of their text, while others submit their texts to publishers. Some others, like myself, let their text gather metaphorical dust on their hard drive.

NaNoWriMo is a brutal genre that not only encourages but also demands certain activities from its participants. Looking into the practices of NaNoWriMo through CHAT and the survey changed the way I see the contest. In the midst of the struggle, the writing process becomes second nature. The planning, the thinking, the waking up early to write all seem to make sense. Yet in the midst of studying NaNoWriMo for this project, I realized it doesn't make sense at all. Subject One's planning and Subject Five's ritualistic approach aren't "standard" writing practices; they were NaNoWriMo, and they were genre-specific for these writers. For me, NaNoWriMo is all about the chaos of writing, the scramble to finish. The contest forces you to be a writer, to write when you don't feel like, and just the idea of the contest seems to guide you along the path to finishing. I find that pretty amazing.

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CATUM: A Story of Trajectory

Kristen R. Strom

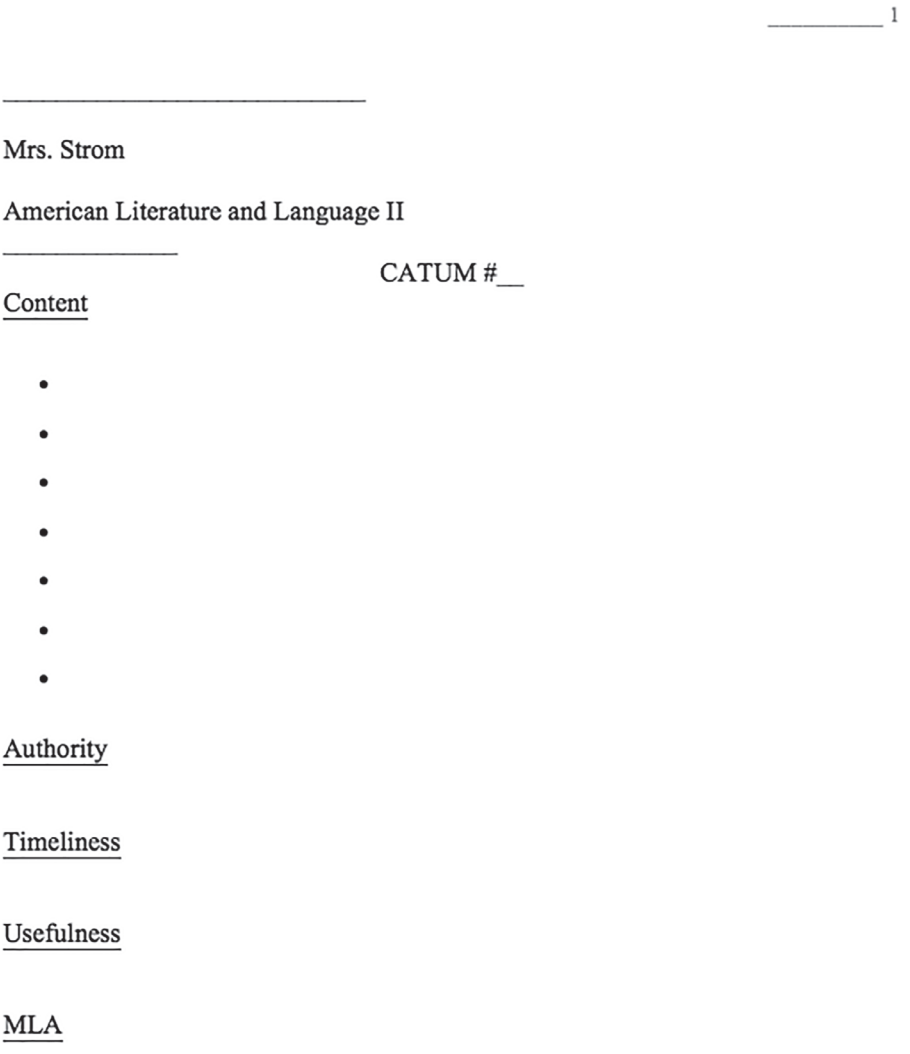
Kristen R. Strom researches the trajectory of CATUM, a writing research tool she taught to her high school students. Through first-person point-of-view, CATUM narrates Strom's writing research as they explore the writing tool's trajectory through classroom spaces and students' transfer of research and writing skills beyond high school.

Hi, I'm CATUM! And I'm a tool. Yep, you read that correctly: I'm a tool—a writing research tool, that is. You may have never heard of me before, but hundreds of students have. Actually, I've become buddies with so many students in so many classrooms over the years, I've lost count. I'm also friends with teachers, and I reside in their toolboxes. Throughout the school year, they pull me out and introduce me to students. In fact, I've been a tool in Kristen Strom's teaching toolbox for ten years (and I'm not rusty yet). Because of all my friends—students and teachers alike—I continue to live on as a writing research tool that is carried through time and space. Thankfully, Kristen, other teachers, and students have helped me figure out where I came from and where I'm going. I'm excited for you to meet them as you read how they have helped me on my journey. This is my story of how I'm used, where I came from, and where I'm going.

So, What Am I?

I am an acronym. I stand for C: Content, A: Authority, T: Timeliness, U: Usefulness, M: MLA, and I help students evaluate their sources. For each

source they find during the research process, high school students complete my acronym and, in so doing, students look critically at who wrote the information (Authority), when it was published (Timeliness), and how they plan to use the information (Usefulness). In addition, while completing me, students pick out the most important "content" that they might use in their paper and either type direct quotes from the source or paraphrase ideas. The MLA citation comes in handy for students as they compile their sources and can easily list them on a Works Cited page. All of the pieces that make me CATUM ask students to think critically about what they are researching and how the information will be used in the future. Here is a selfie of what I look like before students fill me out (Figure 1). In my 12-point Times New Roman outfit, I feel sleek and classy.



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Mrs. Strom

American Literature and Language II

_____

CATUM #__

Content

-
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-
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-
-
-

Authority

Timeliness

Usefulness

MLA

Figure 1: My template selfie.

The Circumstances of My Birth

I'm adopted, and I've continued to be adopted by teachers for over ten years, but I've never really known who created me. Since Kristen and I have such a close working relationship, she offered to help me figure out where I came from.

During her first year teaching high school English, Kristen was introduced to me by two other teachers, Kate and Monica (Figure 2). All three of them were going to be teaching a Rhetoric class, and they decided that I would be one of the writing research tools their students would use during their research paper unit. I still remember the day like it was yesterday: the three of them were sitting around a table, and Kate and Monica introduced me to Kristen since their students had success using me in the past. It was friendship at first sight! That was the beginning of my trajectory with Kristen. But that isn't the beginning of my trajectory.

Trajectory is defined as "the ways that texts move, i.e. how a text might move through a process of production or how texts move through institutions and spaces and in relationships to different people" (Sharp-Hoskins and Frost). In order to see the way the text (in this case, myself) moved, I needed to see what it was like before me. Why did I need to be created? What were they missing? Only then could I see the impact I have had.

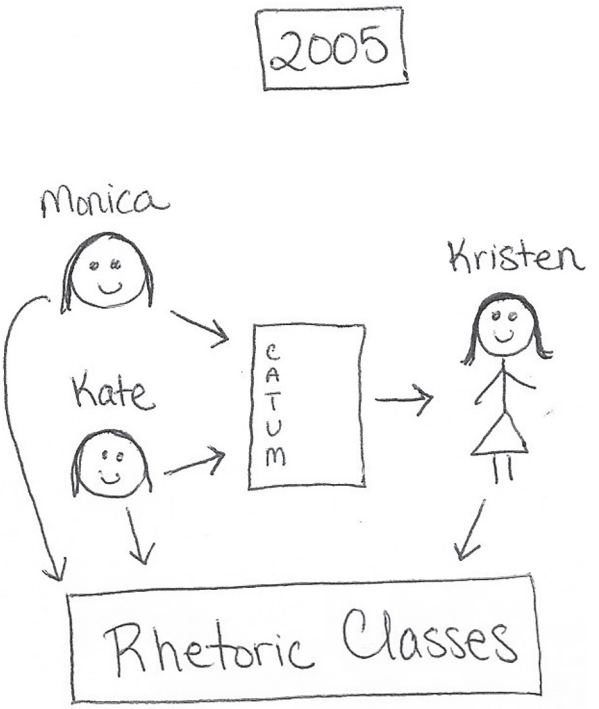

Figure 2: This is how Kristen and I first met.

Since Kristen and I remember that first meeting fondly, Kristen reached out to Kate and Monica to see if they knew where they had first met me. Kristen's attempts at contacting the women through Facebook, e-mail, and text messages resulted in both women telling her that they didn't know where I came from. Kate didn't even remember using me! I was hurt! However, Monica remembered me and suggested Kristen contact two past colleagues, Sarah and Chris H., who might know the circumstances of my birth. In addition to offering more people to contact, Monica texted Kristen a link to a wiki that belonged to Kristen's current colleague, Chris F., who uses me in his English classes. While they were texting, Monica had googled "CATUM" and only found Chris F.'s website. Her quick search of me led to someone that Kristen introduced me to and who currently uses me as a writing research tool for his students.

Our next step in the research process was for Kristen to follow Monica's lead and contact Sarah and Chris H. Kristen used Facebook to reach out to Sarah. Sarah's response is shown in Figure 3.

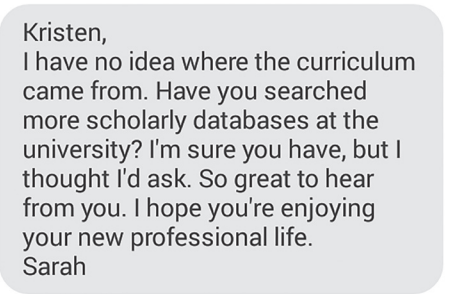

Figure 3: Sarah's Facebook response to Kristen.

Sarah had no idea where I came from either, but she did remind Kristen of something we should have started with when we first decided to research where I came from. We never thought to look through databases! Last year, when Kristen became curious about how I was created, she used Google and typed in my name, "CATUM," but nothing came up other than Chris F.'s wiki that Monica also found. So, Kristen figured that the deep web may not be any help. But since we weren't having luck with the personal sources, we thought we'd give the library databases at Illinois State University a try. Kristen opened up Milner Library's website, logged in from her home laptop, and typed in "CATUM". The search results were not what we were looking for: CATUM insurance, a birth announcement for a girl named Catum, and multiple results for articles written in a different language. We also tried searching "CATUM research paper," and again, there was no reference to me being a writing research tool. Before giving up, we tried searching "CATUM and research paper," but we had no luck. Our search on the deep web failed.

We then decided to move on to e-mailing Chris H., the other colleague Monica suggested Kristen contact, who was still teaching at the same high school where Kristen and I met. In the e-mail to Chris H., Kristen requested any information she might have about where I came from. Kristen also asked Chris H. what she thought about her next step of e-mailing the department chair. By adding that into the e-mail, we thought Chris H. would have suggestions about the next step in our research process, since she was the only person we had contacted who still worked at that school. The next day, Kristen received an e-mail back from Chris H.: "Hi, Kristen! I'm so sorry I don't have good news for you—I don't recall using it at all. Good idea to talk to David—he might be able to help."

Big sigh . . . this writing research thing was hard work. And we didn't seem any closer to figuring out where I came from because my past trajectories were still unknown. I started to doubt that we'd find out where I was born. By this point, we had contacted the two people who we thought would have known about my birth. We followed up on a suggestion to contact two more people, but had no luck. From here, we decided the next step was to e-mail David, the department chair. Kristen asked him to forward a request for information about myself—CATUM—to all English department teachers. The following day, Kristen was included on an e-mail sent out by David to thirty-five English teachers in their department. Soon after, Kristen received a response from Myles, who wrote, "I think I 'created' CATUM years ago when I added Usefulness and MLA citation to the standard Content, Authority, Timeliness check sheet for Expos, English 3 and/or AP Literature and Composition. I was really just tagging on two more things I wanted kids to provide." Myles, you are my, UM . . . father! Kristen and I were beyond excited to find out where I had come from. To gather more details about my creation, Kristen e-mailed Myles a list of questions. Below you will find the questions, along with Myles's responses:

1. **How did creating the CATUM come about? Why did you create it?**

   CATUM came about simply because we had been using a standard source evaluation sheet for Content, Authority, and Timeliness of articles. CATUM came about because we wanted to have students demonstrate they had actually READ the article by commenting on how Useful it was for their purpose. And the M I just stuck on to have them create an MLA citation for the article to get them started on building a Works Cited for later.

2. **What purpose did it serve?**

   It served the purpose of having students consider each source more thoughtfully (at least in theory) and of giving the teacher a more detailed at-a-glance of each source the student was using.

3. **Was the CATUM replacing anything? Or was it adding to anything you were already using?**

   It was just adding to that standard format of CAT, probably introduced by one of the librarians we were working with at the time.

4. **What type of unit was it used with (research paper, etc.)?**

   It was used with junior and senior research papers.

5. **Is there anything you can remember about creating the CATUM itself/how you intended your students to use it/how it actually was used/etc. that you didn't mention above?**

   As I've said, I really didn't create CATUM, just made the acronym after adding the content of the U and M.

So they took CAT, a research tool students were already using, and changed it to CATUM. This means I wasn't actually "born"; I was an expansion of a previously used tool as the users' needs had evolved over time. I was disappointed to find out that I didn't have a mother or father. But that's when I realized everything is just an expansion on a previous idea. Kristen and I could have dug into CAT further if we wanted to see what the origin was for that part (finding my CAT mom). Or we could have followed up with Myles to see what experiences he had as a teacher, or even to go back further, as a student, that made him think of adding my UM. We felt, though, that this could have gone on forever (as trajectory-searching is apt to do). So we set this as my point of origin.

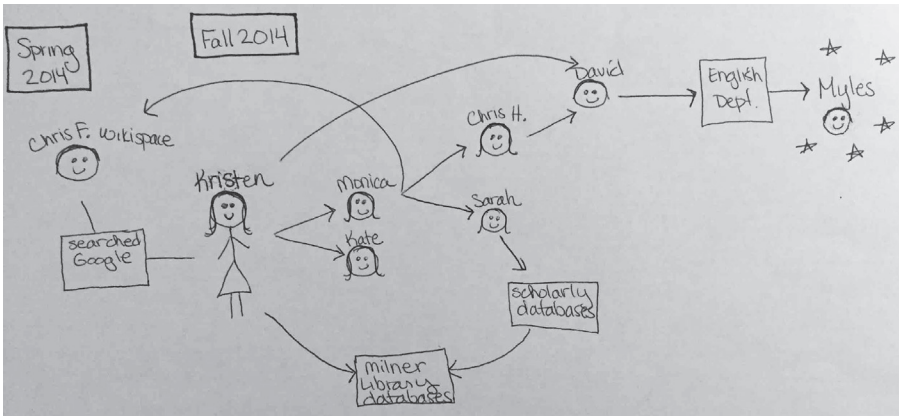

Figure 4: A map of our research to figure out where I came from.

My Trajectory: Moving Through Spaces

Trajectory is a funny thing when you look at it. You can study it going backwards or forwards in time. Up to this point, Kristen and I had used

trajectory to look backwards, to find my origins. Now, we wanted to look at it in a forward motion, starting with the point Kristen and I met to see not why it happened, but what impact our friendship had on how far I could travel.

Because of the success her students had using me as a writing research tool, Kristen moved me through space to an entirely new school. While preparing to teach a research paper unit at her new school, Kristen was speaking with a new colleague, Chris F., about the American Literature class they both taught. Chris F. had mentioned that during the research paper unit he had students use notecards to organize their information. Upon hearing this, Kristen introduced us. I had a new friend! During the conversation, Kristen told Chris F. that by using me as a writing research tool, students would have a more organized way to document their research and it would be easier for him to grade. From then on, Chris F. wanted to learn more about me and use me in his classes as well. I moved from Kristen's classroom space to another classroom space. Soon after, more teachers started to hear about me, and before I knew it, I had five new teacher-friends and had hundreds of new students as friends. I became popular! Cue song, "Popular, I know about popular . . . la la, la la."

Two years after I was introduced into Kristen's new school, I became so popular that I was adopted as a common assessment (or genre) that would be used throughout the sophomore American Literature curriculum. All sophomore students, no matter the teacher, would get to know me and use me to organize their research for the large research paper. I was honored! In addition, teachers would instruct students on the steps to using me from the start of the year, so that the students would be prepared to work with me for each source they planned to use on their research paper. My adoption as a common assessment further expanded my trajectory, leading me into multiple teachers' classrooms and toolboxes and into even more students' repertoire of writing research tools.

A year after I was adopted into the sophomore curriculum, the teachers of freshmen students realized that they could start to introduce me to their students for various writing assignments. Then, the English teachers who taught junior and senior elective courses wanted to meet me so they could introduce me to their students for research projects. Soon after, seventh and eighth grade Language Arts teachers were introduced to me, and they considered using parts of me to discuss the reliability and credibility of sources with their younger students. My trajectory continued to move throughout the school district as I permeated more classroom spaces. Teachers and students used me as a writing research tool for a variety of purposes when research was involved.

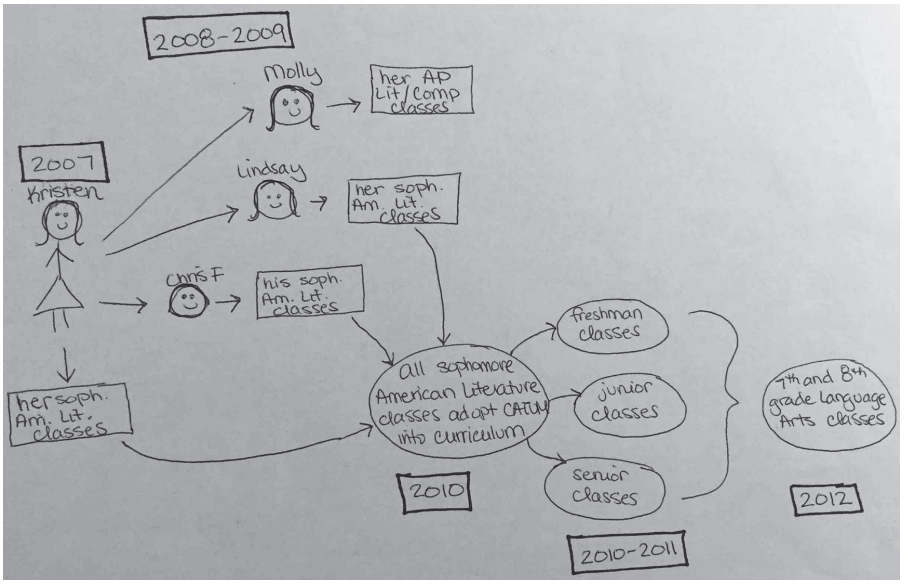

Figure 5: A map of my trajectory through classroom and school district spaces.

So, Why All This Trajectory?

For Myles and the teachers he was working with, along with Kristen and her new colleagues, I was useful for two main purposes: 1) for teachers to use as an assessment, and 2) for students to use as an organized and effective writing research tool. *But why?* CAT was already a research tool for Myles and his colleagues, but it wasn't entirely serving the purposes they needed it to. Therefore, they expanded it. However, when Kristen moved me to her new school, I was an entirely new tool for teachers and students to use. In many classrooms prior to introducing me, students documented their research using notecards, and teachers would have to read each one of them. I am like notecards on steroids, without the mess (or anger/frustration issues!). Plus, I'm friendly and good-looking! With notecards, there are piles of small cards with pieces of information written on them from various sources. The process can be messy and unorganized: the information is handwritten, notecards can be lost easily, and a piece of information the researcher wants to find requires sifting through numerous notecards. However, I, the CATUM, am completed on one source of information. All the information from one source can be found on one to two pages of documentation. I am also usually completed using a word processor and saved on a flash-drive to easily transport from home to school. There is no mess. In fact, I'm an organized, easy tool for students to document the Content of the source and its Authority and Usefulness (which notecards don't even do). And my Content section can be copied and pasted into students' research paper outlines and rough drafts. I'm also an effective and efficient text for teachers to grade. Teachers can grade a word-processed, organized assessment that documents students'

research rather than piles of notecards. If I had a slogan, I would sing: "Less mess, more efficient!" Because of this, I have a trajectory that moves through classroom and school spaces, and I continue to do so to this day.

My Trajectory Beyond High School Spaces

Now, we know where I came from (more or less), and how I spread, but how far does my friendship go for my individual friends? Since I remain in my teacher-friends' toolboxes, I know they value our friendship. But as for the hundreds, maybe even thousands, of students I have met throughout the years, am I still their friend beyond the classroom spaces we met in? Do the skills students learn from using me as a writing research tool have a trajectory of their own? Do they transfer to new writing situations? And do students have a hand in moving me as a text through space?

When I asked Kristen about **transfer**, she mentioned that Perkins and Salomon name two types of transfer: "low-road" and "high-road" transfer. Low-road transfer happens automatically when "well-practiced routines" are transferred to new writing situations (it is not something someone actually consciously thinks about), while high-road transfer is a "deliberate, mindful abstraction of skill or knowledge from one context for application to another" (Bawarshi and Reiff 315). So, if students use skills they learned by completing and using me in high school in their future spaces automatically, then low-road transfer happens. However, if students reflect upon the research tools they've used in the past (me and/or parts of me) and the processes they went through to compile me in order to complete a new research task, then they'd be making a connection of using skills from "one context for application to another." In that case, high-road transfer happens. Furthermore, if students use the skills they've learned by completing me in order to organize research in whatever space they find themselves in, either through low-road or high-road transfer, then my trajectory has again taken me into new spaces.

Since Kristen and I wanted to figure out if the transfer of skills has indeed happened, Kristen contacted four of her past students who are now in their first or second year of college. They all knew me in high school during their sophomore year and may have also used me their junior and/or senior years in English elective courses. Kristen e-mailed them asking if they remembered using me, CATUM, in high school and then sent a list of three questions asking them to reflect upon the skills they learned using me and how/if the skills had transferred to college research situations.

In response to the first question Kristen asked ("Has your experience using CATUM as a research tool affected how you complete research now that you are in college?"), all four students said that, yes, CATUM has helped them realize not

only the necessity for finding credible and relevant research, but how to go about finding credible sources. They take into consideration the Authority, Timeliness, and Usefulness of the source when they begin to search for information.

Kristen's next question asked students if they use any of my components when they are documenting current research they complete. All of them stated that they do use parts, or all, of me, but three of the four say that they don't actually go through in the order of C-A-T-U-M when looking at a source. However, one student responded, "I do find myself going down the list in order when looking through sources. I read the content first (the C) then move down the list making sure that each piece of [sic] criteria is met before I use that source in my research, and I tend to go in order C-A-T-U-M." For this student, he is actually using me, CATUM, as a research tool just as he learned it in high school: hence, low-road transfer is happening. The other three students responded that they always look for the Authority, Timeliness, and Usefulness of the source in addition to the Content to make sure it fits their needs for research. Even though they now all use APA to cite their sources and not MLA, they make sure to document the information they need. In the words of one of the students, she "still cite[s] sources consistently within a set of recognized standards" that she learned by using MLA citations on the CATUM. These three students demonstrate high-road transfer because they have taken the skills they learned from using me in high school and applied them to the context of what their new research requires of them.

All four students responded to Kristen's last question ("Have any of the skills from learning to use CATUM in high school transferred into college?") with a yes. They all agreed that the knowledge they learned from completing a CATUM helps them find credible and reliable sources. Although only one of them uses my actual format as he learned it in high school, all of them use parts of me to organize their research. They are all using the skills they learned from using me, CATUM, in new spaces that require research; the skills have indeed transferred, and I, CATUM, have a trajectory that moves me into college spaces.

A Story of Trajectory

The process of going through my acronym helps to demonstrate skills that are important when doing any type of research. Teachers and students alike have continued to use me in various spaces because of my effectiveness as a writing research tool. While students may not use my exact text to organize their information when they are in college, the skills and knowledge they've learned transfer to the future spaces they find themselves in. I move with them through their lives, continuing my trajectory to wherever those students take me. The friendships I form with teachers and students in high school are very far-reaching indeed.

Student Last Name 1

Student's Name
Teacher's Name
Course Name
Date

CATUM #1

Content

- CATUM is a writing research tool (Strom 89).
- CATUM stands for C: Content, A: Authority, T: Timeliness, U: Usefulness, M: MLA (Strom 89).
- Students complete one CATUM over each source while they are researching (Strom 90).
- Sharp-Hoskins and Frost define trajectory as "the ways that texts move, i.e. how a text might move through a process of production or how texts move through institutions and spaces and in relationships to different people" (qtd. in Strom 91).
- To learn about CATUM's trajectory, Strom contacts past colleagues (Strom 92).
- One colleague, Myles provides her with information of how CATUM came from CAT (Strom 93).
- Strom brought CATUM to her new school space because her past students had success using it (Strom 95).
- CATUM was used in Strom's classroom and then more teachers learned about it and started to use it in their classrooms (Strom 95).
- CATUM was adopted as a common assessment (or genre) for the sophomore American Literature curriculum (Strom 95).
- Not only were American Literature classes using CATUM as a research tool, but freshman, junior, and senior English classes started to use it along with some middle school Language Arts classrooms (Strom 95).
- "CATUM was useful for two main purposes: 1) for teachers to use as an assessment, and 2) for students to use as an organized and effective writing research tool" (Strom 96).
- For Myles and his colleagues, CATUM was an expansion of a previous tool; for Strom and her colleagues, CATUM replaced the use of notecards as a research tool (Strom 96).
- Strom cites Perkins and Salomon's findings of "low road" and "high road" transfer (Strom 97).
- Strom interviews four past students to see if transfer and the trajectory of the CATUM takes place beyond high school spaces (Strom 97).
- All four students said, "yes, CATUM has helped them realize not only the necessity for finding credible and relevant research, but how to go about finding credible sources" (Strom 97-98).

Student Last Name 2

- All four students use the skills they learned from using a CATUM in new spaces that require research; "the skills have indeed transferred," and the CATUM has had a trajectory into college spaces (Strom 98).
- CATUM narrates, "While students may not use my *exact* text to organize their information when they are in college, the skills and knowledge they've learned transfer to the future spaces they find themselves in" (Strom 98).
- CATUM has a "far-reaching" trajectory with teachers and students in high school (Strom 98).

Authority

The author of this piece is Kristen Strom, who has been a high school English teacher and is currently a graduate student in the PhD English Studies Program at ISU. Her experience having her students use the CATUM as a research tool shows her authority on the subject. Through CATUM's first-person narration, Kristen is a writing researcher as she researchers were CATUM came from and how it has moved through space. This article is found in the *Grassroots Writing Research Journal* used by the ISU Writing Program, which supports writing instruction and writing research.

Timeliness

The article was in Issue 6.2 of the *Grassroots Writing Research Journal* published and used by the ISU Writing Program, which supports writing instruction and writing research. Because the article was recently published, the information is timely and relevant to information on the CATUM as a writing research tool, its trajectory through high school and college spaces, and how Strom takes on the role of a writing researcher as she researches the CATUM's trajectory.

Usefulness

This article is an example of writing research because the author, Kristen Strom, writes about the writing research she did to figure out how CATUM was developed. I plan to use the information in this article to support ways that writers can research genres of writing, trajectory, and transfer, and also how they write about their research.

MLA

Strom, Kristen R. "CATUM: A Story of Trajectory." *Grassroots Writing Research Journal*, 6.2 (Spring 2016): 89-101.

Figure 6: A CATUM completed over this *Grassroots Writing Research Journal* article.

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Kristen Strom is an English Studies PhD student at Illinois State University focusing on English Education. She is passionate about teaching and loves to read, travel, and spend time with family and friends. When she is not at ISU, she is busy spending time at home with her two little kids and visiting her farmer-husband at their family farm.

Tracing the Trajectories of (The) *Humans of New York*

Tharini Viswanath

Humans of New York is a photoblog started by Brandon Stanton that was initially supposed to be an exhaustive collection of photos of New York City's inhabitants plotted on a map. Over the last four years, however, *Humans of New York* began to take on a very different character as Stanton started to collect short stories and quotes from the people he photographed. In this article, Tharini Viswanath traces the many trajectories of the *Humans of New York* Facebook page by linking it back to some basic concepts of cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT), including production, distribution, reception, and socialization.

What is **trajectory**? Where does it happen? When does it happen? And how is it connected to those sticky **cultural-historical activity theory** (CHAT) terms, such as production, distribution, reception, and socialization? One definition of trajectory is that it is "the life of a specific text, during its creation, distribution and use" (Jarema 25). The trajectory of a text traces its path—it shows us how the text is produced, how it reaches a particular audience, and how it ends up in numerous places, sometimes unpredictably and unexpectedly so.

My colleague, Frank, once used football as a metaphor to explain trajectory to me. "Think of the football as a representation of your work," he said. "Once the football is thrown—that is, once your work is released to the public in some form—there are several routes it could take." You can score a touchdown, or the football can be fumbled, intercepted, or passed. Similarly, there are a number of things that can happen to a text at every level. It can be misrepresented, remixed, completely misunderstood, or understood perfectly—those are only some of the trajectories your work might take. Trajectory is all about adaptation and response—not only does the audience adapt and respond to a particular work, but the work responds

to the audience as well. A home team tends to play better because their fans are there to cheer them on. Texts, like football games, can have multiple trajectories in terms of both how they are produced and how they are taken up and used. The text exists within a context where the history and culture of the region influence the text as much as it influences history and culture. It is important to remember that the trajectory of a text *cannot* exist in isolation. The trajectory of a text—no matter how intangible it may seem—usually begins with its conception and ends with its reception. Of course, not all trajectories have an obvious "ending," as we shall soon see.

Tracing the trajectories of social media can be quite difficult. The text—which for my purposes includes words, pictures, or both—doesn't necessarily move in just one direction. This increases the various characteristics of the text one has to consider, as each factor influences it in one way or another. In this article, I will be tracing the trajectories of a Facebook page. To understand the trajectories of the Facebook page, I must first focus on the initial form of the text (the photoblog), before moving on to its more complicated incarnations.

When a Facebook page is the offshoot of a photoblog, pictures are the main things that are posted. Sometimes there is writing along with the pictures. The writing varies widely, ranging from a journal-like entry to a caption about the picture(s). But how are these pictures produced? Who reads these words and pictures? And what do the people who read them get out of reading them? What do the people who read them do once they have read them? As online media, where do these pictures go, once they have been read? All these questions will get answered by understanding the trajectories of the text in question: the *Humans of New York* Facebook page.

A Word About Pictures

First thing's first. Why do so many people like photographs posted on social media so much? Part of our ability to post such a huge quantity of pictures has to do with our access to smart phones with cameras, which allow us to capture every moment. Perhaps it is because today's technology facilitates the sharing of thoughts, feelings, and experiences almost as soon as we have them that viewers feel connected to the people who post these things. In a TED Talk in 2008, psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi talks about the notion of "flow." He defines flow as "a state of heightened immersion in activities" that could include anything from art and play to work. It is that creative moment when we get involved in an activity for its own sake. This might happen at times like when we are watching a movie or reading a book, where our sense of time disappears and we forget where we are. That feeling of being a part of

something larger, that state of focused relaxation, happens to us when we look at photographs. When we look at photographs—usually several of them at once—we enter this state of flow. Sometimes, when we look at pictures online, we realize that we have spent an hour when we never intended to spend more than ten minutes! Nothing outward has happened in that time, but internally, several things have changed. When we enter the flow and look at pictures, we enter a state of mindfulness, we glimpse a world that might not necessarily be part of our own, not influenced by what we know/how we see the world. We are able to relate, connect, commune, and share through photographs.

According to a study called "13 Reasons Why Your Brain Craves Infographics" conducted by NeoMam Studios, we are "visually wired," and almost fifty percent of our brains are involved in visual processing. In fact, it only takes 150 milliseconds for a symbol to be processed and another 100 milliseconds for us to attach meaning to it. Given that we consume thirty-four gigabytes of written information on an average day—that is around 100,500 words—visuals come as a relief from information overload. Although the studies conducted by NeoMam Studios are about infographics, the research can be extended to cover photographs as well. We need to remember, however, that photographs don't just convey information. They also convey feelings, drama, and humor associated with those events. More importantly, the photographs and captions allow us a glimpse into strangers' lives and, therefore, into other realities. Although we do not know these people—or perhaps because we don't know them—we are able to not only empathize and support the subjects, but also be inspired by them. The photographs connect us. They allow us to share and be part of a secret and intimate conversation.

Of CHAT and Trajectories

CHAT and trajectory don't necessarily have to go together. However, CHAT is a useful tool when it comes to breaking down a text for understanding how it is created and how it is received and/or remixed by audiences. One needs to keep in mind that a text is not received by one particular person/audience, and that no two people/audiences receive a text in the same way. Let's take the relatively simple example of a text message. Let's say you text your mother, "In twn 4 da weeknd. Sat dnnr?" One option is that your mother reads your message, understands it correctly, and can know to expect you for dinner on Saturday. Alternatively, she could misread or misinterpret your message, especially since you may have used SMS lingo she might not familiar with. What if someone else had been using her phone at that time? They may or may not have passed on your message had they seen it. But if your kid brother happened to be playing Angry Birds when you had texted, and had

not even noticed the text, the text's message might never have reached the intended audience (your mother). Moreover, had you accidentally texted a wrong number, or had the message failed to go through, she would not have even received the message. There are several variations of this very scenario. The text might have been received in any number of ways depending on the recipient's involvement with the situation and frame of mind at that point. Needless to say, Cousin Becky at her bachelorette party and your ex would have gotten two completely different meanings from the same message. Now, instead of texting your mother, had you been planning a burglary and texting your accomplices, the police would have been able to access your messages at a later point if you were caught. The intent behind your message would then be analyzed by a set of experts in the field, thereby giving a whole new interpretation to said messages. In short, although trajectory itself is not one of the elements of CHAT, it is extremely useful to link trajectory and CHAT, as the path a text takes is constantly influenced by its production, distribution, reception, and socialization.

While a text message is a fairly simple text (in that it is produced at point A and is received at point B), the trajectory of a post on a social networking site like Facebook is a LOT more complicated. There's so much liking, commenting, sharing, and transferring to other social media—and that's just from the people who actively interact with the text! That's why I decided to look more closely at *Humans of New York*, as it beautifully combines visual images with text such that they work together to create a mini story. Also, to trace the trajectories of a text in a particular form, we sometimes need to begin even before that form. That is why I have begun my analysis with the photoblog, as I feel that it plays a role in how the text is received. I will go on to define the different CHAT terms and explain how four of these terms affect the trajectory of the *Humans of New York* Facebook page.

Tracing the Trajectories of Humans of New York

Production: *The process of combining different material and immaterial inputs to create something for consumption. This includes everything from physical elements to intangible elements like plans and the know-how needed to create an object.*

Humans of New York began as a photoblog in the summer of 2010, when Brandon Stanton lost his job trading bonds in Chicago and moved to New York. He walked around New York taking photographs of strangers. Stanton's original plan was to photograph 10,000 New Yorkers and plot their photos on a map. He was going to organize all the photographs by neighborhood, so you could click on any neighborhood in New York City and scroll through

the people who lived there. Soon, the blog evolved into something different. To quote Stanton, "it became much more about picking a random person off the street no matter where they happened to be and celebrating them on a stage" (Humans of New York).

In a TED Talk at Columbia University, Stanton mentioned that he noticed when he was photographing events with other photographers in New York that everyone migrates towards the same people to photograph. These people who get photographed often represent the most extreme elements of the crowd. For instance, at Occupy Wall Street, the focus was on the extremely weird. At the World Trade Center Memorial on the anniversary of 9/11, the focus was on the extremely emotional, so much so that the mourners were not allowed to grieve in peace. The press covers a small group of individuals, rather than providing a representative coverage of all attendees. Photographers migrate towards the extreme or the most graphic because news genres tend to value the unusual over the ordinary. By choosing to focus on random people on the street, Stanton gives the smaller, more personal stories precedence over the more sensational stories. The people who get photographed usually talk to Stanton for a few minutes and share a thought or a quote. Stanton then posts them together as a portrait comprised of both images and words.

So how does Stanton record what people say? Given that he walks several miles a day and talks to several people (sometimes in groups), it is not really possible to take copious notes. So what does he do? Shorthand, of course. Everyone Stanton features in his posts seem very articulate when their pictures are posted, but that is because of the creative license Stanton takes while posting the pictures (UCD). He paraphrases some of the sentences rather than transcribing. "It's all about looking for that one thing a person might say," Stanton said in an interview. He added that he instinctively knows what the caption will be almost as soon as he talks to the person (UCD).

Distribution: *The process of making a product available to the intended audience. This can be done directly (think of a farmer selling his produce at the farmer's market) or indirectly (the farmer sells his produce to a wholesale store, who sells it to Jewel Osco, who sells it to consumers).*

All these portraits—around six or seven a day—are posted on Brandon's blog and are then uploaded onto Facebook, Twitter, and other social media. In turn, these photographs get liked, shared, commented on, reposted, tweeted about, and reblogged. And each of these retweets, reposts, shares, and reblogs get tweeted, posted, shared, and reblogged over and over again, resulting in an ever-growing and extremely complex web of likes, shares, and posts. Indeed, several things happen at once, where distribution, reception,

and socialization merge, making it difficult for us as readers/observers to distinguish one from the other.

Reception and Socialization: *Reception involves people's reaction to the text. Socialization is the interactions of people and institutions as they interact with the text. Think of a recipe—if someone didn't like a recipe you handwrote for them (reception), they might change it on the card to fit their tastes better. If enough readers of your online recipe/baking blog left comments with the same complaint on a recipe post, you might edit the post. The readers would have influenced the actual recipe (socialization).*

At every level of this process—from Stanton taking these photographs to the million likes and shares—there is reception and socialization. It is not surprising that *Humans of New York* has a global audience. We want to read these stories, because maybe we are just curious about how other people live. Or perhaps we want to see ourselves in these pictures, to know there are others like us, perhaps in another city, in another world, who have similar anxieties, worries, or even senses of humor. Some people look for the aesthetic appeal of these pictures; others see what they can do to help. There are instances where the audience is inspired by what they see and they try to emulate the people in the photographs; other times, people misunderstand these pictures, and the comments and responses take a new trajectory on their own.

We must remember that this is not any old Facebook page. No, indeed! This is a page with more than ten million likes that at least six million people follow and another million or so comment about. There typically are ten thousand likes and four thousand comments (not counting the likes for each comment) less than ten hours after Stanton uploads a picture. It's no longer just a photographer taking a picture of a person on the street—this person will soon (by virtue of social media) be famous. Given how intimidating it is to be on *Humans of New York*, it is not surprising, then, that sometimes people want to say something different after reading the comments on the post about them. Stanton states that however much he tries to set a positive culture and tries to get people to be supportive, it becomes very difficult to do so when there are five million people sharing opinions in that space. Therefore, it might become an unpleasant experience for some, however much Stanton tries to moderate the comments. The trajectories of these posts change once they have been commented upon. The content and the context of these portraits don't change every time someone comments; however, how we as viewers receive and understand the photographs will change.

As with any other text, there have been several instances where conversations have gone off on a complete tangent. Given that some of these people share about very personal details, ranging from drug abuse to time spent in prison or even the death of a loved one, readers' comments range

from inspiring or empathetic to downright judgmental. Although Stanton employs an assistant to ban nasty comments, sometimes, right under the caption, you will see a comment that reads something like, "How dare you call this person ugly?" or "That is very unchristian of you!" that might be part of a longer conversation, but the entire conversation is not visible because Facebook displays only around ten comments at a time. Moreover, *Humans of New York* has a global audience, although most of the people photographed are New Yorkers or people visiting Manhattan and the areas around it. Sometimes, differences in the belief systems of the people viewing the images and captions can spark debate. These debates in turn color our reception of the portraits and our own personal responses to one/some of the comments. We might choose to reply, or not, which, in turn, will affect other responses, including our own future response. In fact, reception of a photograph can change so many times that I personally have stopped reading the comments. I read only the picture and the caption so that I can decide for myself what my uptake and reception will be.

Here is an example of what happens in regard to the reception of a specific photograph and caption posted on the *Humans of New York* Facebook page: Stanton took a photograph of a man who happened to be the manager of a teenage rock band called Xero Gravity and the father of the drummer. The picture itself is just his side profile, as he is talking. His comments, however, made ripples. He told Stanton, "I pay for everything and handle promotion. Work is stressful, so it's my release. I'm always checking my phone to see if there are any new likes or wall postings on their Facebook page" (Stanton).

"After the picture was spread around, we had a massive surge of likes," said Jack Rose, Xero Gravity's bass player, in an interview with *The Independent*, a British newspaper. "On the morning of 4 July (2014) we had 2,026 or so likes on Facebook—12 hours later we hit 22,000. It was massive and we had people from all around the world interested in us and talking about us. It was insane" (Culzac). The band released their debut, EP, in August 2014. Of course, this does not mean that all the comments or responses were accurate—there were misunderstandings as well. Jack Rose went on to say, "people were saying that our manager paid for everything and paved our way without us paying any dues, which is completely false. We all earn money together, have money saved up from concerts and merch, and have jobs and try to put anything we can to the band" (Culzac).

Here, we see two things happening. Some readers, based on their understanding of the band manager's quote, are judging his role with the band. Yet many people also were motivated to go to the band's Facebook page and like it, thereby giving the band much-needed publicity. The social media, therefore, functions both as a tool and as a medium, influencing people's real-

life decisions in the real world. In this instance, a new trajectory for the band featured in the Facebook post has sprung from the photo and caption.

Conclusion

The trajectory of a Facebook page is far from self-contained. The many trajectories not only trace the path of a text—or, in this case, text and picture—from conception to reception, but also influence the content and context. The many trajectories of *Humans of New York* made it so popular that it was published as a book in 2013. Another offshoot of *Humans of New York* is *Little Humans*, a forty-page picture book for children. More recently, Stanton was funded by the United Nations to travel around the globe and take pictures of people from other countries. This not only increases his (already) global audience, but also highlights how CHAT categories such as production are not static—the production of Stanton's posts would differ as he traveled to other countries, where he would need translators or interpreters to help gather the comments of the people he photographed. In addition, we can't discount the effect *Humans of New York* has had on other people to not only notice, but also photograph what they see on a day-to-day basis.

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Flash Fiction and Remediation: Ironing Out the Details

Eric Pitman

Eric Pitman recounts an experience involving the need to learn a better method of note-taking as a college freshman. The strategies he developed eventually came full circle when he encountered the concept of remediating larger stories into flash fictions. In this article, he explores what implications might arise in the shifting of one text into another.

I may not have been aware of it at the time, but looking back now, it makes sense that I'm a writer, and a fiction writer at that. I can't pinpoint exactly when it was, for certain, that I knew I wanted to write stories, or whether it was the worlds of Dr. Seuss or The Berenstain Bears that had the most influence. I can only say that during grade school, at any point during the year when the teacher would tell my class that we were going to have to write a story, I became very excited. This feeling stayed with me all the way up through my senior year; even though the stories and books that inspired me changed quite drastically. You might be able to imagine my discomfort upon entering community college, when I learned what sort of writing I had to look forward to in courses like English 101, Art History, and Psychology. Academic writing certainly doesn't come naturally for the majority of creative writers, so you could say the essays and notes (primarily for quizzes and tests) I was assigned to write in these classes were the first step in a long trend of writing assignments I hadn't dealt with before.

My undergraduate experience is a long story. No, no, trust me. It's a long, boring story. I'd certainly be weaving a tall tale if I claimed otherwise, and you might not like reading a lot of information, or boring, personal information

at that, so just take my word for it. The point of the matter is that while I had more time to plan out my essays for English 101, I didn't have enough money to afford a laptop, and electronic tablets hadn't been invented yet. My notes were handwritten, so I had to learn how to make quick decisions during my instructors' lectures about what information was crucial. I developed my own method of writing down what I felt was important. In doing so, I abandoned the sentence, wrote only key terms or phrases, and abbreviated so that I could write more quickly. I also arranged the information in a specific way on the page, in case I needed to revisit a point later to add more. I wasn't just writing what was said, word for word. I gave the information a new purpose, one that allowed me to study more effectively. I didn't know it at the time, but what I was doing had a name: remediation. This practice, I discovered much later, can be applied not only to lectures for the purpose of making crafty notes, but also to something I care a whole lot more about—fiction writing.

Some Important Details

Remediation is, simply put, the process of translating one text into another, and it tells us that how information is arranged has a great deal of impact on how it is perceived. Remediation can involve more than just translation, however. It can sometimes be used to take existing information and repurpose it to create a new text and a new meaning entirely. In regard to my own circumstances, I didn't have time to write down everything my professors said, word for word, and that wouldn't have been practical anyway. How would I have been able to study dozens of pages of notes? I just needed the details, and what I was doing in the act of remediating the professors' lectures into my own personalized notes seemed to be working, even though it worked only for myself.

I came up with a unique way of taking notes that only I would be able to read with ease, as it followed my own unique way of writing. I used a lot of abbreviation, slashes, and odd paragraphs to separate thoughts—it was a bit of a mess. I was OK with that because sometimes my fiction writing seemed like a mess. As I began practicing how to clean up some of those writing practices and create stories in an even shorter form called flash fiction, remediation eventually came back. Remediation was important for writing flash fiction, because, as you may have guessed, it required that I preserve only the information that was essential to the story I was working on, in order to seek a much shorter yet successful version of it.

My aim is to share some of these practices here, but first, there is an important distinction I should make between flash fiction and remediation:

remediation is a tool for writing practices, while flash fiction is a **genre** of writing, or, more simply, a type of text, such as one might consider a newspaper article a text, or an essay or poem. You might be thinking of horror, fantasy, or sci-fi now that I have mentioned the word "genre" (as in "literary genres"). However, in genre studies, through the use of **cultural-historical activity theory** (CHAT), "genre" has a different meaning that relates to specific types of literate activities, writing practices, and the types of texts those practices produce, whereas in the field of creative writing, the word "genre" summons into our minds broad categories that relate directly to the content of texts. For instance, the genre of a newspaper article is automatically going to cause us to think of a very distinct object, where to find it, what it is used for, as well as all the activities that went into making it. When we think of genres of fiction, we're thinking about the content of the story. There's a pretty big difference there. In using CHAT to examine genres and the various specific conditions, needs, and resources that produce specific texts, we can gauge the texts' impact on society and we can observe how those relationships change over time. According to Joyce R. Walker, "For our purposes, CHAT isn't really useful as a way of doing large writing-research projects . . . Instead, we use specific categories from the CHAT framework to help us understand a genre in practical ways that will impact our writing" (72). In other words, we might look at the way a text interacts with culture based on the history of things such as technology, different activities, and various norms or accepted standards. We don't look at whether characters inside the text (if it's written in the genre of a novel) are using broad swords, laser guns, or wooden stakes. Put another way, with CHAT we work from the outside in, with literary genre from the inside out.

From The Top Down

Like I mentioned earlier, I'm not talking about fantasy, sci-fi, or horror, although those happen to be some of my favorite literary genres. Again, the term "genre" is a bit more fluid within genre studies. More specifically, when it comes to writing fiction, there are many formats to choose from, but for the purpose of our question of remediation, let's take a brief look at fiction genres that are determined by length or word count. You are likely thinking about books or novels at this point. These are works of forty thousand words or more, and they are typically divided into chapters. Sometimes novels are divided into fairly uniform chapters, as in the case of Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*, where four primary divisions are given five of their own chapters, all of which are roughly the same length, resulting in a total of twenty. The novel *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* by James Joyce, however, is divided into only five chapters, and the lengths of these chapters vary quite a bit.

I'm sure you've heard of a novel before, but you may not be familiar with the novel's close cousin, the novella, which runs significantly shorter, clocking in, generally, at approximately 30,000 to 65,000 words. The novelette, an even briefer genre of formatting fiction, hovers in the 7,000 to 17,000 word range. There is also the short story, which falls under the length of the novelette, but is generally at least 1,000 words. As you might imagine, these genres of length are all somewhat variable. For instance, F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* is under 200 pages (about 47,000 words), while several novels in the *Harry Potter* series stretch far beyond 500 pages. Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged* is well over 1,000 pages.

I'm getting off-topic. As a genre, the short story's **conventions**, or defining qualities, involve more than just word count. These conventions address the content of the story and speak to whether or not the story includes a protagonist, or main character, some kind of an agon[1] for the character to face, and finally, a dénouement[2]. These are classical conventions of the short story, and how the information in a short story takes on these qualities might be thought of as crucial, in terms of how 'choosy' an author has to be when approaching the genre. In other words, authors may choose to place different emphases on how to define their conflicts and resolutions. It comes down to the details.

"What does this have to do with flash fiction, specifically?" you might be asking. More importantly, how do the different lengths of different genres of fiction tell me how to do research on remediating flash fiction? I have to admit, this is one of my favorite parts. We can take a look at how fiction writers have come up with even briefer ways of telling stories, of using just the essential components, in the genre of flash fiction. Don't worry though. If you're concerned about having to read a couple thousand words, I've got good news. As you might remember, I mentioned that flash fiction writers specialize in testing the limitations of the short story, so it's not necessary to read that much. The genre of flash fiction brings the word ceiling down well below 1,000. Here's an example:

> *Laundromat*, by Eric Pitman
>
> I hadn't done my laundry yet.
>
> Granted, it wasn't because I'm a lazy person, a slob, or don't know how to work a washing machine. I had recently moved into a new apartment, and I just hadn't found the time. I'd stayed at two different complexes in the past year and a half, both of which

[1]An ancient Greek term used to describe the conflict or test that a protagonist must face.

[2]The resolution of the central conflict. The conclusion.

> weren't furnished with laundry appliances in the apartments, but there were laundromats provided on-site. You had to pay for them, of course. $1.50 per load. Anything to make money, I suppose.
>
> My apartment is spacious, but $499 a month doesn't get me my own washer and dryer. It's fine. I'm accustomed to having to pay to do my laundry. Laundromats at apartment complexes usually have a quarter machine that you can just slip bills into, but this one doesn't, and with all the bustle of moving in, it took me a while to get over to the local grocery store to pick up a roll.
>
> My laundry basket is made of wicker and the weeks of clothes made it squeak when I hefted it up to head out the door that day. My pocket clinked with coins on the three minute walk—the complex isn't tiny—between buildings and around bushes, and despite moving four hours north, the July sun ensured I'd work up a sweat. The jugs of Gain and lavender bleach didn't help. I don't know why I didn't drive.
>
> I have to use a separate key to get into the laundromat. Four keys is too many. I have a key for the front door of my apartment, a bedroom key, a mailbox key, and then the laundromat key. My arms were aching by the time I got to the right one. Other tenants happened to be doing their laundry, and one of them opened the door for me, ending my struggle, preventing me from decorating the ground with my dirty laundry.
>
> When I got inside, the washing machines confused me. They had the slots that you'd normally put the quarters into, but the slots were covered. The laundromat is free, I realized, wondering what to do with $5 of quarters.
>
> There are plenty of parking meters on campus.

After reading this text, we might ask ourselves, "What's essential?" There's no academic consensus on what constitutes flash fiction in terms of length as there are plenty of examples by professional authors and amateur writers in which even the thousand-word ceiling is busted. However, it's generally considered that the typical flash fiction be of extreme brevity, and that it feature a protagonist, involve some kind of obstacle or complication, and conclude with some sort of clear ending, even if it is a simple wrap-up to the sequence of events set in motion. There are, however, purists (people who are a little more particular about the form of the genre) who argue that the flash fiction story should be limited even further. For this reason, flash fiction can be found in formats of 500 words, 250, or even 100 words and fewer. As a writer of fiction, I have my own bias to answer to, and my efforts to compose flash fictions typically involve me invoking a hundred-word limit. If we're to be remediating this type of work, however, it will necessitate a push for even smaller, cleaner word counts.

For instance, along such strict guidelines, it could be argued that the following sentences complete a story: "Free ice cream. Going out of business." The sentences imply the much larger story of an individual, or several, who used to own a business but are now losing it due to various reasons that aren't apparent. However, it might be argued in various circles that these are essential details, and that's really all you need.

Keep It Simple, Keep It Clean

With this understanding, a closer look at the example of flash fiction "Laundromat" might illustrate that many of the details present are certainly not essential. For instance, the entire third and fourth paragraphs, which describe the trip to the laundromat and the different keys the narrator is required to use, don't change the central idea of the story if they are removed. They aren't essential to the story line, and eliminating these entire paragraphs takes the word count of the piece from nearly 370 down to a cool 200, almost cutting the length of the piece in half. Even so, these cuts preserve the central idea, which involves the narrator realizing that the laundromat was free and that he didn't need to get five dollars' worth of quarters.

You might be starting to realize that not only does the skill of skimming the details provide some help in isolating central ideas within writing, but it removes quite a lot of unnecessary information that doesn't affect the overall punch line of the story. Let's see what the flash fiction "Laundromat" might look like if it gets cut down even further:

> I still haven't done my laundry. I just moved to this place, you see, and normally these apartment complexes have coin machines on-site at their laundromats to get quarters from, but not this one.
>
> So I get in my car, get to the grocery just three miles up the road, get my quarters, rush back to my apartment and get my basket of dirty laundry, my detergent and bleach, and I get to the laundromat and discover it's free to use the machines.
>
> $5 of quarters. Oh well.
>
> Guess I got plenty of silver for the parking meters on campus.

Needs more chainmail, unicorns, and spaceships, I think. Regardless, this rendition of "Laundromat" provides the same story line as the previous example in precisely 100 words. Not too shabby. However, you might also notice that the tone and feel of the piece is entirely different. Why? This is a crucial piece of the puzzle when one makes a decision to remediate a text. This text in particular moves from one form, which attempts physical

and psychological humor, to a form which focuses on only the psychological. For instance, the information in the previous version that more physically locates the reader in the main character's environment is not present in the next version. The character's history with apartment complexes in the past is also absent in the second version. The second story opts for a tone that is more immediately humorous, one in which the reader knows less about the character, as opposed to building up historical information about the character. Knowing less about the character, one might argue, allows the reader to relate more to the character's experience. For instance, the absence of details might allow a reader to mentally project their own desired features onto the character. Regardless, even though the second example doesn't evoke the descriptive appeal of its former version, the author has shifted between forms and omitted information that is inessential to the humor of the piece.

This points to a genre of storytelling that we involve ourselves with every day, as the essential details of this piece are something that could, theoretically, happen to many different people. This, in turn, points to an important distinction, especially when we find ourselves researching a new type of writing situation. We've all experienced those moments where the information we think we have is not necessarily the information we need. Alternatively, we might not be using the information in the way we thought it was going to be used. We may be scouring through texts looking for the right details that define the genre we're researching, but once we identify those conventions and locate the details of those different conventions within the genre, they might tell us how to use them in a different way.

Know Your Tools, Spread the Word

To be a little more precise, the essential details of "Laundromat" might be something that you could find yourself sharing with a friend via a face-to-face conversation, text message, or even as a status on Facebook, if it happened to you. Each genre is going to have its own set of rules, its own conventions, based on how you choose to communicate the same information. For instance, see Figure 1 below:

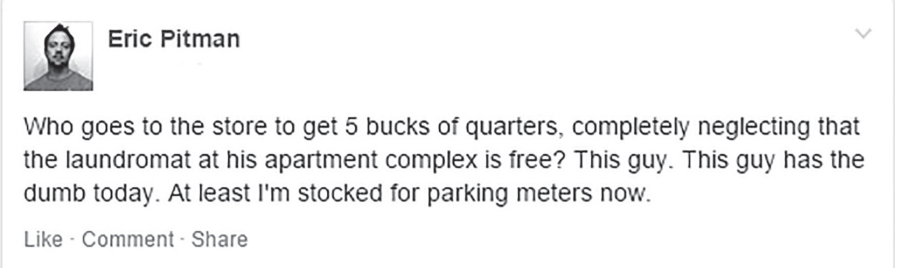

Figure 1: Oblivious male posts a Facebook status about his laundromat misconception.

The process of taking the details of the flash fiction *Laundromat* and transferring them to another genre, in this instance a Facebook status update, brings to our attention a different set of conventions from what the two flash fictions make use of. In terms of a Facebook status update, it becomes apparent that we're already dealing with a retelling of the details in an even briefer word count. In addition, the visual presentation is completely different and follows the rules for how information is communicated on this particular social media website. Granted, you could just as well retype the hundred-word version of "Laundromat" into a status update, but, in the end, you are still dealing with a different text altogether, in that there are additional visual components, such as a photo of the narrator. In addition, the different colors of text within the genre of Facebook indicate to the viewer the ways in which they are able to interact with the text, beyond simply reading it.

The transfer of the flash fiction's details from one genre to another, or its remediation, is a valuable tool in writing research. You might see how using this technique to move information from one text to another equips the writing researcher with the ability to marshal information toward different purposes. In other words, remediation better informs the writing researcher on how to go about using crucial information. It all comes down to a question of essential information—the details—and how authors make use of it. Understanding how the essential components of a brief story in a Facebook status update is communicated isn't all that different from understanding how the ideas of an essay, research article, journal, or any other piece of writing might be conveyed as well—and this isn't limited only to text on a page. Identifying essential structures or ideas comes in quite handy in different types of situations. Let's say you've procrastinated just a bit too much, and you don't have time to do all that reading for class tomorrow. Or maybe you want to summarize a large body of text, and there's just too much language taking up a lot of space to work through. Or maybe it's a rather ordinary situation: maybe you're trying to tell a friend about a movie or a song, and you only want them to "get the gist" of it. The ability to summarize a paragraph or an entire text, whether that text is a song, movie, or lecture, is a valuable skill to have as a writing researcher, and it's something you're already doing on an everyday basis. You just might not realize it.

Alternatively, let's say a friend asks you to take notes for her in Biology class. On any given day, the notes you take for yourself would remain handwritten. In addition, maybe your notes generally look a lot like the notes I described writing for myself, as unlikely as that might seem. Your friend needs the notes that particular evening, and the only way to deliver them is via some digital format, such as e-mail, so it becomes necessary that your notes be easily remediated into a format that your friend will be able to make use of. In this particular writing situation, it becomes clear that you need to

focus on capturing the essential details of your instructor's lecture, so that when you begin the process of transferring that information into another text for your friend, those details remain intact.

Perhaps we might look at another example of how the details from the flash fiction might be remediated into another genre of writing. Figure 2 below features a type of Internet meme known as "advice animals," in which the visual characters symbolize a particular social occurrence or situation. The two characters featured in the example are known as "Socially Awesome Penguin" (top half), who represents charisma, popularity, and attractiveness, while "Socially Awkward Penguin" (bottom half) represents the opposite. The pairing of these two characters together results in a new character, one in which an individual might tell a story that begins rather optimistically, but suddenly takes a turn for the opposite. In short, this particular meme works perfectly for the purpose of remediating the details of the flash fiction story "Laundromat."

Figure 2: A meme created on memegenerator.net concisely communicates how the confident male determined to do laundry suddenly feels self-conscious. In color, the background on the top half of the image is red; on the bottom half, it's blue.

Again, we are confronted with preserving the details of the idea, removing them from one genre, and molding them to fit the conventions of another, but you'll notice that we are now interacting with a visual text.

Visual texts occur with much more immediacy than even a Facebook status update can muster, and they often make use of their imagery to evoke specific feelings in the viewer. For instance, this particular image has a clear division running through its center, in which the penguin's upper and lower halves are in opposition. In addition, this opposition might be interpreted through the coloring (with a red background on the top half and a blue background on the bottom half), as red and blue often signal "hot" and "cold," or in this instance, "awesomeness" and "awkwardness." These visual cues serve as a pretext to the words themselves. In other words, your brain is already aware of some sort of opposition before you read the words. It's a way of signaling that whatever was going right in the top half of the image is going to go wrong in the bottom half.

As you can see, this shift to a visual form has shortened the text once again, but the idea is essentially the same. However, in remediating the flash fiction into this particular genre, we have created something slightly different, in that the advice animal memes add their own distinctive qualities to the story, but without changing the basic idea. This is an example of how different activity systems work to shape the texts that are produced within them and how they can overlap to influence each other. It becomes clear that in some cases, a more drastic remediation of a text has to occur in order for it to move freely between genres. The advice animal version of the flash fiction was shaped by a need to be able to use it across various social media sites, so it took on the form of a visual text that is appropriate for movement from one genre to another. In its current form, the image and text can remain unchanged even as it moves from Facebook to Twitter to an image attachment in a text message.

Time to Wrap Things Up

To further bring things together, let's take another, final look at remediating the information contained within a flash fiction into some other form of narrative storytelling. For this particular example, we'll take a look at the work of Chicago author Christian Hayden:

> *Were They So Comely* by Christian Hayden
>
> Cast-iron stove on the sidewalk. Pans in the snow. I'm looking up at our balcony. How'd she get the stove over the railing?
>
> She's throwing away my cooking supplies. My saffron's in the gutter. She took the caps off the turmeric and cayenne and waved the bottles like glow sticks. She must've, because the snow's stained red and yellow in arcs.

> She used a lot of Elizabethan idioms. In bed she'd make me talk about other girls. After I gave her the rundown, she'd ask: Were they as apple-cheeked as I? Were they so comely?
>
> How do you answer that?

Determining which particular elements of Hayden's flash fiction story to cut might seem a little tricky, considering there are numerous objects that the narrator interacts with as he observes the disarray that his significant other has left for him to see in the street. The humor in this piece is generated in the obvious reversal of stereotyped gender roles, as it is the male character who appears to treasure the items in the kitchen, which tend to be stereotypically associated with women. For these reasons, it may serve us well to get a visualization of what this flash fiction might look like in the genre of a three-panel comic strip. But what information should we include? We don't have a lot of room to play around with if we're talking about a comic strip, and the reversal of stereotyped gender roles isn't the only source of humor. The balcony is also needed, as the male character is dumbfounded by how the cast iron stove was lifted over it. Are there any more crucial pieces of information that will be required for the flash fiction's message to be successfully remediated into a new genre? It seems the stereotyped gender role reversal should be included, along with the male character's supplying of information about his previous love interests. Anything else? Let's turn to the title of the piece. The word 'comely,' as the story mentions, an Elizabethan-era idiom, or expression, seems distinct. The following comic I generated using *Stripcreator.com* (Figure 3) is one of many potential narrative ways in which this abundance of humorous information might be used. Pay close attention to how the defining characteristics of the flash fiction, and its humor, were translated into the genre.

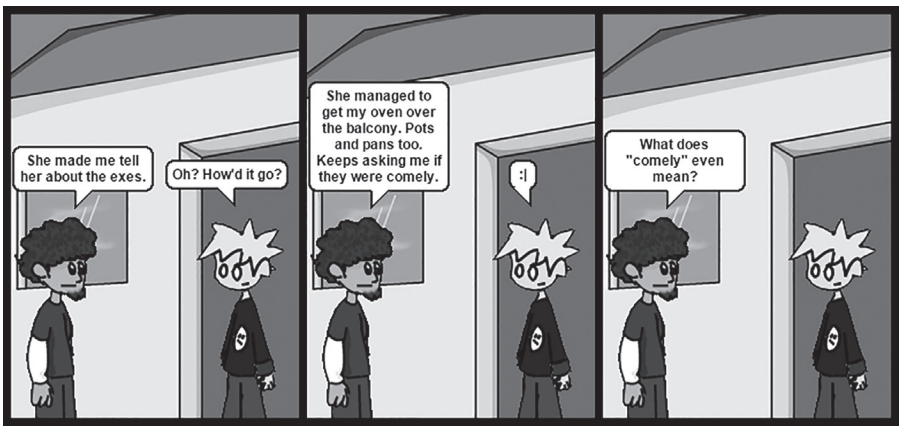

Figure 3: A three-panel comic strip created using *Stripcreator.com* depicts an oblivious male sharing the kitchen-destroying tendencies of his significant other.

While the comic strip preserves the components of the flash fiction that were highlighted, it does take some liberty in further contextualizing and expanding upon some information that is subtly implied by the story. For instance, it isn't being communicated that the male character has been unfaithful, but instead that his significant other is extremely jealous about his previous love interests and obviously reacted quite vengefully after the protagonist "gave her the rundown." As yet another example of a visual text, there are elements to the image to consider. With a comic strip comes the expectation of following the images in a specific ordering and taking note of changes made between them.

There are also spatial and temporal components to consider, or how the images make use of scenery, characters, and so on. The scenery in this comic strip could indicate several things, for instance. The narrator may have been kicked out, or he may simply be seeking comfort from a close friend. The characters are also cartoons, whereas when reading Hayden's piece, the reader is more likely to envision human characters. The bold black lines separating the comic strip's panels might indicate some passage of time; however, the poker-face emoticon does much of the work, as it represents an awkward, perhaps uncomfortable silence. The addition of a second male character in the comic, or in this case, the story being delivered to an audience that isn't specified in the original piece, is another liberty that has been taken with this remediation. However, it should be noted that the second character does not alter the nature of the primary bits of concern and importance from the original flash fiction piece. The original communicative intent has been preserved and used for another purpose, one that, much like Figure 2, with the socially awesome/awkward penguin, incorporates visual components that do a considerable portion of the work in terms of storytelling. These types of visual remediations, apart from those that remain in textual form, such as the Facebook post, offer a significantly different approach, in terms of how we might perceive the information that was initially presented to us.

Final Words

Taking notes, sharing notes with others, writing stories, sharing stories, making those stories smaller and smaller, changing them into self-humiliating jokes and comic strips—is it all linked? It seems like it all has to be, on some level of detail. In sharing my interest of remediating the genre of the flash fiction into smaller and smaller genres, we have been able to see how the development of my own method of note-taking many years ago in lecture courses led to my exploration of other concise methods of approaching fiction writing. These two writing activities are starkly different, but they are linked through the methods we might deploy to navigate their demands.

A brief look at flash fiction tells us a great deal about the vastness of writing and what types of genres we encounter on a daily basis as writing researchers. It also informs us of the minute moments of storytelling, or more simply, the transfer of information, that often goes unnoticed in our busy lives and world. We're telling stories all the time, and sometimes we're telling one story in many different ways, in the brief details that we let slip in conversation, in that Facebook post or advice animal, or maybe in the notes from our boring lecture class that we e-mail to our friend who decided to skip or was out sick.

As we've examined much lengthier texts of flash fiction and seen them through a series of variations, it should be clear now how the shape of a text does not always determine its quality, but that there are details within those texts that might be remediated in many different ways. In addition, training ourselves how to spot those details by becoming more familiar with different genres of writing only strengthens our ability to make use of that information. I can certainly attend to the conclusion, from my own experiences, that as I find myself in new writing situations, a twenty-page article might not be as helpful as a photograph, a blurb, or a quick video clip, and knowing how to make conclusive distinctions about which details are important in those different genres only makes me a better storyteller.

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Eric Pitman is a creative writing Master's student at Illinois State University. As a native Kentuckian, his creative pursuits are driven by the absence of genderqueer/gay protagonists in the worlds of fiction and film.

File That Under "Part of the Process"

Kayla Scott

Kayla Scott takes readers through her first few weeks of English 101: Composition as Critical Inquiry and Art 109: Visual Thinking: 3-D Fundamentals. Scott introduces readers to the different genres encountered in an art class and how she deals with and organizes the different texts she finds. With her transfer of knowledge from English 101 and the use of cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT), Scott is able to demonstrate the different components of these genres and provide some insight into connections between art and English concepts.

English 101 Revelations: Genre Studies, CHAT, and Transfer

The first thing I learned in English 101 is that every type of writing is a genre, including texts, e-mails, critiques, and assignment sheets. This realization changed my life. Dramatic, I know, but really, it kind of did. How is it that texting is a genre? Once I started thinking about a text message as a genre, I began noticing and thinking about texts more and in new ways. That poster? That's a genre. Who made that poster? How did they learn to write in that style?

A whole new way of thinking about texts was introduced in that same English 101 class that taught me texting was a genre; this way of thinking is thanks to **cultural-historical activity theory** (CHAT). It turns out that CHAT is a theory that helps us look at the how, why, and when of writing practices. According to my English 101 instructor, Deborah Riggert-Kieffer, CHAT helps you break down a genre into its component parts to discover its features and boundaries. CHAT is comprised of several essential parts: production, representation, distribution, reception, socialization, and ecology. **Production** and **representation** deal with the process of writing,

specifically what tools were used and what the person was doing while planning and writing. **Distribution** includes how a text goes out into the world, whether on paper or online. **Reception** involves who reads the text and how it is used, whether the audience was intended or not. **Socialization** describes the interactions people have due to the use of text. And, finally, **ecology** deals with physical and biological forces that exist beyond the text.

After learning about CHAT, my mind was blown. Well, not really. But sort of. Sometimes I am a bit of a nerd, and learning a whole new way of thinking was somewhat of a revelation for my freshman year of college.

As of this point, I understood the basics of CHAT (though not nearly everything there was to know about all of the concepts). I knew texting was a genre and that, well, everything can be a genre. *Ta-da*. Newfound genius just waiting to make my mark on the world.

With my new way of thinking and genre knowledge, I began to make connections. Someone once told me that making connections is essential to truly understanding. Well, I now make connections in my everyday life. Connections from math to chemistry: using if A then B logic and that sort of thing. From art to communications: talking about symbolism, with certain words showing up in both classes. And even connection between my Art 109: Visual Thinking: 3-D Fundamentals class to English 101: Composition as Critical Inquiry.

It turns out that there are many different genres in an art class, specifically, 3-D Fundamentals with Tyler Lotz, a professor in the School of Art at Illinois State University. In this article, I will illustrate how I transferred[1] knowledge I learned in English 101 to my art class—in particular, how I applied what I learned about genre and CHAT in English to my art coursework.

Assignment Sheets and Professors

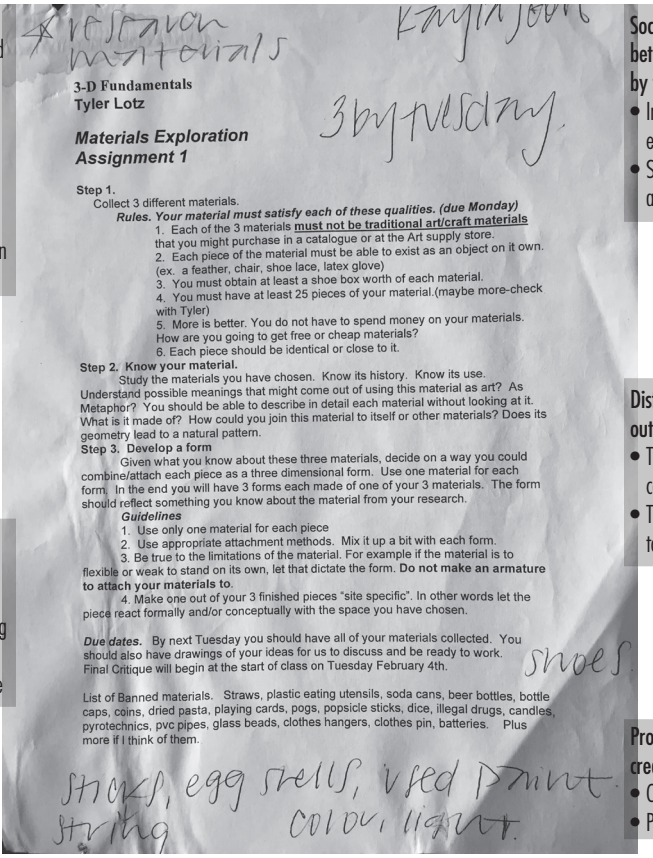
When I received my first assignment sheet, "Brochures," in English 101, I did not recognize it as a genre. I started thinking about the finished product (the brochure I was assigned to create) as being the genre. Yet after all the genre talk we did early on in English 101, when I received my first assignment sheet, "Materials Exploration," in 3-D Fundamentals (Figure 1), I immediately recognized it as a genre.

Although the content differs from art to English, both assignment sheets are in fact a genre, and a complicated one at that.

[1]The term transfer refers to the idea that we approach writing situations with prior knowledge of other writing situations, and this knowledge impacts our choices. Ultimately, we might use the knowledge learned in a writing-intensive course in other writing activities outside of that course.

Reception: How a text is used
- Intended audience is supposed to read sheet and use as reference
- Unintended audience is those who are reading the sheet in *GWRJ*
- Author did not intend for me to spill coffee or write notes on the sheet

Representation: The activities that help plan and produce a text
- Years of experience in teaching
- Trial and error
- Revising assignment over time



3-D Fundamentals
Tyler Lotz

Materials Exploration Assignment 1

Step 1.
Collect 3 different materials.
Rules. Your material must satisfy each of these qualities. (due Monday)
1. Each of the 3 materials **must not be traditional art/craft materials** that you might purchase in a catalogue or at the Art supply store.
2. Each piece of the material must be able to exist as an object on it own. (ex. a feather, chair, shoe lace, latex glove)
3. You must obtain at least a shoe box worth of each material.
4. You must have at least 25 pieces of your material.(maybe more-check with Tyler)
5. More is better. You do not have to spend money on your materials. How are you going to get free or cheap materials?
6. Each piece should be identical or close to it.

Step 2. Know your material.
Study the materials you have chosen. Know its history. Know its use. Understand possible meanings that might come out of using this material as art? As Metaphor? You should be able to describe in detail each material without looking at it. What is it made of? How could you join this material to itself or other materials? Does its geometry lead to a natural pattern.

Step 3. Develop a form
Given what you know about these three materials, decide on a way you could combine/attach each piece as a three dimensional form. Use one material for each form. In the end you will have 3 forms each made of one of your 3 materials. The form should reflect something you know about the material from your research.

Guidelines
1. Use only one material for each piece
2. Use appropriate attachment methods. Mix it up a bit with each form.
3. Be true to the limitations of the material. For example if the material is to flexible or weak to stand on its own, let that dictate the form. **Do not make an armature to attach your materials to.**
4. Make one out of your 3 finished pieces "site specific". In other words let the piece react formally and/or conceptually with the space you have chosen.

Due dates. By next Tuesday you should have all of your materials collected. You should also have drawings of your ideas for us to discuss and be ready to work. Final Critique will begin at the start of class on Tuesday February 4th.

List of Banned materials. Straws, plastic eating utensils, soda cans, beer bottles, bottle caps, coins, dried pasta, playing cards, pogs, popsicle sticks, dice, illegal drugs, candles, pyrotechnics, pvc pipes, glass beads, clothes hangers, clothes pin, batteries. Plus more if I think of them.

Socialization: Interactions between people instigated by text
- Intructor discussed assignment, expectations, and due date
- Students asked questions about assignment

Distribution: How the text goes out into the world
- The instructor distributed paper copies during class
- The paper copy was scanned to be printed in *GWRJ*

Production: Tools used to create text
- Computer
- Printer

Figure 1: Assignment sheet from 3-D Fundamentals, with an example of a basic CHAT analysis for the assignment sheet genre.

In its simplest form, the assignment we were given on this assignment sheet was to create three different sculptures from three different nontraditional materials. This specific assignment is meant to merge technical skill and conceptual thinking. Using nontraditional materials is a large part of the assignment. One must figure out how to construct and fit together different objects that you would not typically use in an art classroom. Not only did we have to figure out the technical stuff, but Lotz wanted his students to understand what using these materials meant to the artwork itself and the effect it had on the concept as well.

Lotz has been teaching art at Illinois State University since 2002 and has taught 3-D Fundamentals almost every year since then. This most likely explains the in-depth and specific assignment sheet. Twelve years of trial and error went into this specific sheet. It undoubtedly changed from year to year as Lotz decided to try new things. But how did this assignment sheet start? With an idea, a concept that this teacher felt every new artist should know and understand. That's what the assignment was built off of.

Every student that receives a degree from the School of Art at Illinois State University is required to take 3-D Fundamentals, whether they are a

graphic design major or an art teacher education major. This class is designed for beginners and meant to teach the fundamentals and building blocks of three-dimensional art. One such building block is that 3-D art can be made of just about anything; clay, leaves, eggshells, bottles, and even paper. Hence the assignment focused on materials exploration.

Conceptualizing and Creating

With Lotz's original concept in mind, the next step he undertook was to design the project. How will students understand the concept? What will the process be? What rules will be put in place?

As I started thinking about the assignment sheet for 3-D Fundamentals, I also began wondering about the assignment sheet I had previously overlooked in English 101. How did my English teacher make her assignment sheet? How did she select what genre the students would study? Did she have to determine a page limit? Would she allow them to pick the topic? How did she decide what restrictions to put in place?

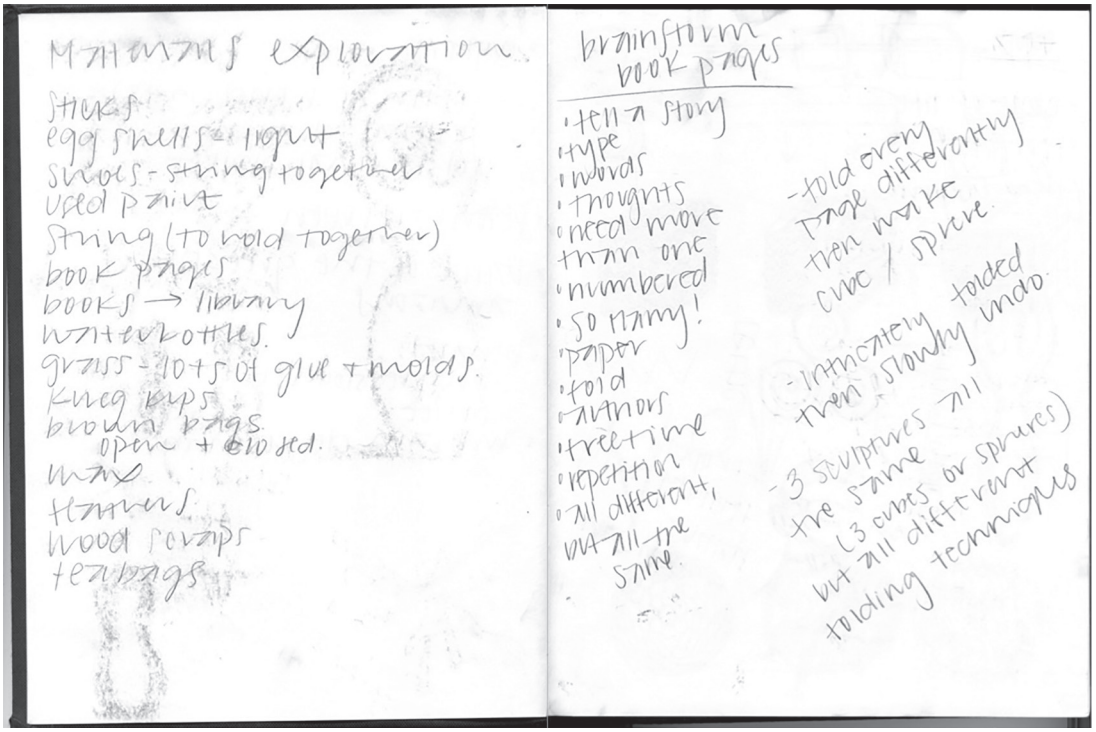
While Lotz continued to talk for three hours, I began to scribble project ideas on the assignment sheet, which he probably did not intend for students to do. Lotz probably expected us to take the assignment sheet, read it, and begin thinking about the assignment—in other words, that was what he intended our reception of the assignment sheet to be. But reception also takes into account how people use or reuse a text, and in this case I chose to use it as a place to jot down my ideas about what I could do for the assignment. Sticks? Egg shells? Books?

This later turned into a long list of materials in my sketchbook (Figure 2). Another genre? I think yes.

Part of the Process: Sketchbook

Maybe I am getting ahead of myself. Perhaps writing in a sketchbook is not a genre, but merely a step in the writing process.

Not everything is black and white, and not everything is a genre or not a genre. The realization that texting was a genre and posters are a genre thrilled me and, in response, had me assuming that every bit of text and writing was a genre. To me, those sketchbook pages looked like a genre. Writing, text, that's enough, right? Not exactly. What I was slow to realize is that those pages were not the final product; they were simply a step in the process, a means to an end.



Reception: How a text is used
- No audience besides myself, because I had no intention of people seeing my sketchbook

Production: Tools and structures used to produce a text
- Lack of format suggests there is no predetermined structure to how the pages are to be used
- Pencil was used to write on the paper

Figure 2: My sketchbook pages with ideas for the Materials Exploration project, with an example of part of a CHAT analysis for the sketchbook genre.

Writing in a sketchbook is a form of brainstorming. I create something like mental maps, but with less structure. This is where sketchbook writing becomes less of a genre, because there are no set rules within the sketchbook. This has to go there, that needs standard grammar, etc. Nope, none of that. The pictures show messy handwriting, lists, and writing on weird angles. There is no way to determine how this would be a specific genre, therefore we shall file sketchbook writing under "part of the process."[2]

[2]I realize some people will disagree with this statement. In fact, some of my editors for this article tried to convince me the sketchbook was, in fact, a genre. But after talking with my English 101 teacher and working on this article, I decided that not every type of writing is necessarily a genre. I'm not suggesting that fewer rules make something less of a genre. My suggestion is, rather, that because there are *no* rules or expectations for what a personal sketchbook will look like, it cannot be a genre. There is no way to define it! Instead, the sketchbook is part of the work that leads to the final product.

CHAT helps us to understand the different components that go into creation and use of a genre. One of these components is representation—the process the creator of a genre undergoes in working toward the final product. Brainstorming is one part of that process. Throughout my own brainstorming process and the multiple sketchbook lists I created, like the one shown in Figure 2, I finally came to a decision that I would use book pages as one of my materials for the Materials Exploration project. (I cheated a little, because a book page might be considered only one small component of an actual book, but Lotz worked with me on this one.)

Blurring the Line of Genre

I began this project for Art 109 at nearly the same time that I began to learn about CHAT in English 101. Whenever I made connections between CHAT and the real world, I always thought of my art class and *Fly Trap*. *Fly Trap* by Francis Hardinge is a book that I bought for ninety-nine cents and cut apart to create my sculpture for the Materials Exploration project. I'm almost positive the author of that book never intended for the book to be taken apart and viewed as a visual artifact rather than actually read. Soon after I started folding thousands of book pages (two copies of *Fly Trap*), I ran out of pages. I bought another book that was similar size and color from a girl on my floor for five dollars: *Liar* by Justine Larbalestier. Now the line of genre is blurred once again, and not even books are black and white.

The genre of books seems simple, right? What about now that this book is folded and rolled up into a cube? The whole book is still there. The viewer is still looking at the book. The viewer is responding to the artwork; which happens to be the book. Right?

The authors of those books probably did not intend their books to be used as art, but that does not change the fact that it happened. CHAT helps us to recognize what happens to a genre once it is out in the world. CHAT can help us see that we have no control over what happens to a genre once we have produced and distributed it. As I created this sculpture for my art class, I realized that my English class gave me words to describe the new **trajectory**[3] these books were embarking on because of my art project.

[3]Looking at the trajectory of a genre allows you to examine its "life." Even if the writers of the books I used for my art project didn't intend for their books to become sculpture, the "life" of their books continued far past when they were printed and read, and their trajectory (or the path they took once they were out in the world) now includes the fact that I produced something new, a sculpture, from their pages.

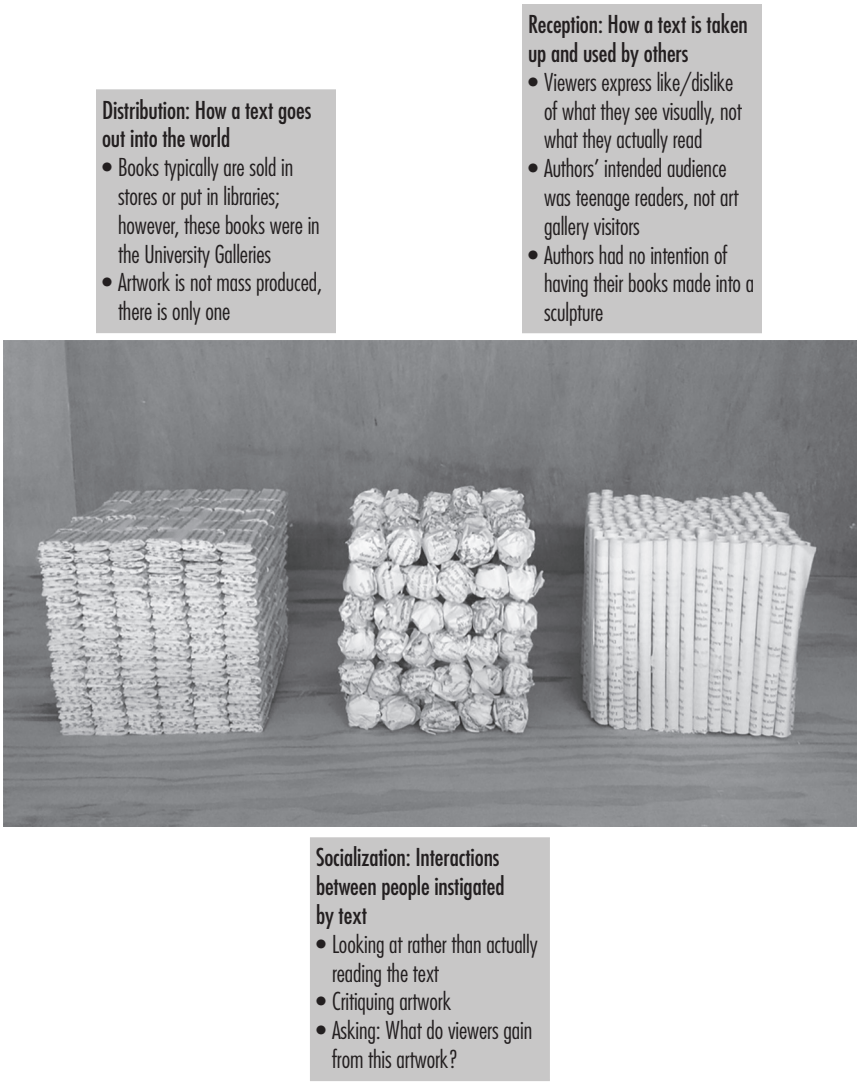


Figure 3: Sculpture formed from book pages, with an example of some components of a CHAT analysis of the sculpture.

Once I finished my sculpture from the books, I started to realize that those book pages experienced an entirely new reception once I created something new from them. With books, I generally think that people would simply react with like, dislike, boredom, or something of that matter. Now that those book pages are part of a sculpture, people react to my artwork made from text, but viewers are now reacting and interpreting the book pages as part of a larger visual project, rather than reading the words.

Why are there three? What is the artist trying to express? How do the book pages relate to the form? These are similar questions to those that arose on the day this sculpture was due in class.

Style of Critique

The day of critiques arrived and I was faced with an entirely new genre. Our teacher asked the class to pick one of our peer's sculptures and write about it. I was supposed to describe the piece (easy) and then write about what we interpret the piece as (what?).

Although at first I was not sure about what to do with the critique assignment in my art class, as I thought back to my English 101, class I realized that maybe this genre wasn't completely new after all. All semester long in English 101 we were assigned articles to read out of the *Grassroots Writing Research Journal* and instructed to write about them. I wrote about whether I liked the article, how it applied to our class, what I took away from it, and sometimes, I criticized them. Maybe this kind of writing in art class was like that, in which case the reading responses I did in English 101 could serve as an **antecedent genre** I could use to help me figure out what to do with my critique in art class.

I had written about art before, but not about art created by someone I knew, and it wasn't something I would have to read directly to the artist. I was forced to think about what the audience, including the artist, would think before I even began to write. Encourage, but not glorify. Be honest, but not harsh. I decided to write a critique of a sculpture created by a girl I knew, and I gave her a list of about five interpretations and a few suggestions (Figure 4).

Now, this sheet of paper is not necessarily the formal genre of critique (at least not quite yet). This sheet of paper is messy. There is no structure, and it is hard to pinpoint exactly what my stance on the piece is from these little blurbs. Here, I am taking notes that will help me write my critique.

These reflection-critique hybrids led to ten-minute conversations about everyone's artwork. What we liked, what we disliked, why we liked it, why we disliked it, what was done well, what could be done better. Talk about socialization . . .

Rubrics: When Grading is Not Right or Wrong

After the critiques were finished, our Materials Exploration project wasn't quite over. First we had to wait to receive our graded rubric back from our instructor. Rubrics are a complicated genre that must be well thought out because they help determine students' grades. Although they differ from assignment to assignment and subject to subject, the general structure is the same. A rubric features different categories and the students receive a numerical score for the categories, which add up to the total grade for the assignment.

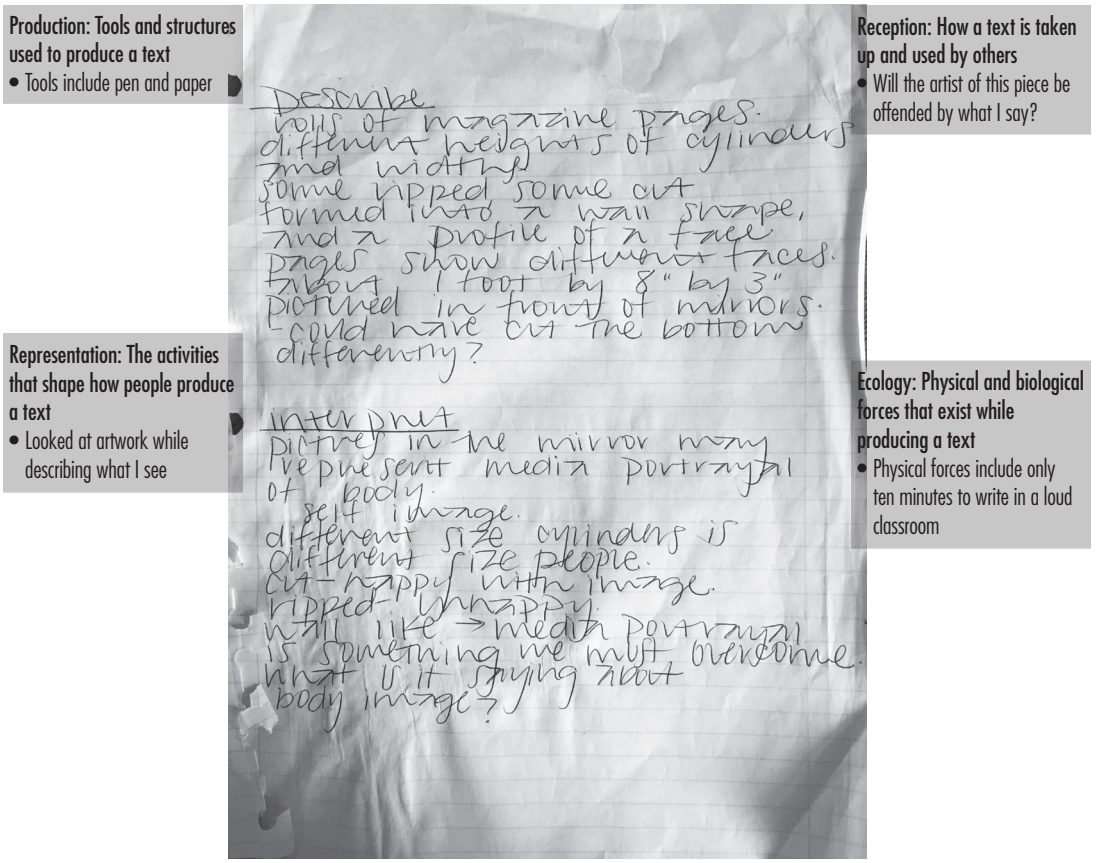


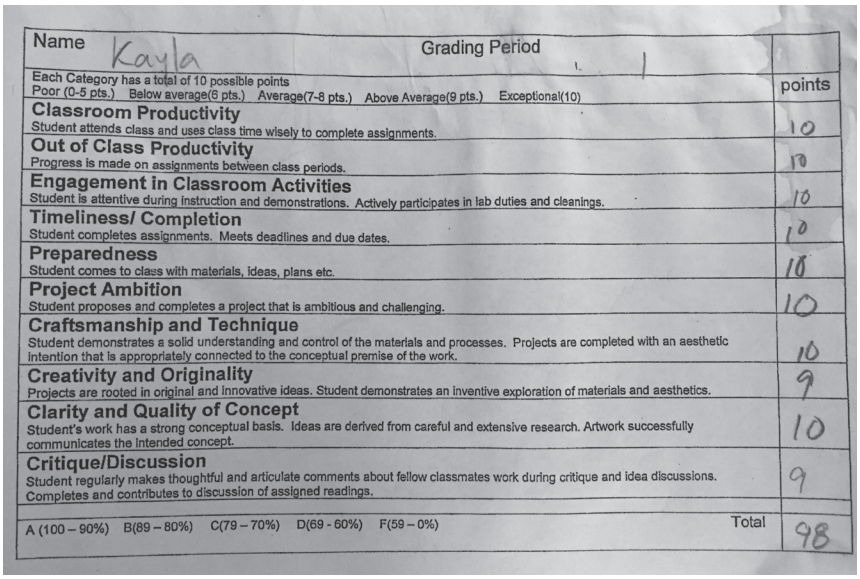
Figure 4: Handwritten critique for 3-D Fundamentals, with an example of a partial CHAT analysis of the critique genre.

Rubrics are sometimes used for grading projects that might not have a clear right or wrong answer, like English papers or art projects. Although rubrics are a common grading tool, they still pose problems or raise questions—for instance, what differentiates between a nine and a ten? What is good and what is very good? It is up to the teacher to determine what is good—or good enough.

This rubric not only grades the final product, but the entire process from start to finish. This means that coming to class, being prepared, and participating in critiques all factor into my grade. This seems fair considering all the time and effort it takes to create some of these projects. Lotz created this rubric to make it possible for students to receive a good grade even if the final product did not turn out as expected and to give credit to students who work hard the entire class and not just at the last minute. He wanted to take away the emphasis on the product and focus more on the process. This can seem unusual for those who feel the final product is all that matters. Lotz also added a category called "Project Ambition" in order to encourage people to create challenging art projects; even if a student does not finish the project, they can still get a ten in this section.

Production: Tools and structures used to produce a text
- Tools include computer and printer for initial production, pen or pencil for filling in points
- Specific format—common for scoring rubrics
- Grading scale is predetermined

Representation: Activities that shape the text
- Added categories as the rubric was improved or edited
- In grading, looked at the whole process, not just the final work



Name Kayla	Grading Period 1	
Each Category has a total of 10 possible points Poor (0-5 pts.) Below average(6 pts.) Average(7-8 pts.) Above Average(9 pts.) Exceptional(10)		points
Classroom Productivity Student attends class and uses class time wisely to complete assignments.		10
Out of Class Productivity Progress is made on assignments between class periods.		10
Engagement in Classroom Activities Student is attentive during instruction and demonstrations. Actively participates in lab duties and cleanings.		10
Timeliness/ Completion Student completes assignments. Meets deadlines and due dates.		10
Preparedness Student comes to class with materials, ideas, plans etc.		10
Project Ambition Student proposes and completes a project that is ambitious and challenging.		10
Craftsmanship and Technique Student demonstrates a solid understanding and control of the materials and processes. Projects are completed with an aesthetic intention that is appropriately connected to the conceptual premise of the work.		10
Creativity and Originality Projects are rooted in original and innovative ideas. Student demonstrates an inventive exploration of materials and aesthetics.		9
Clarity and Quality of Concept Student's work has a strong conceptual basis. Ideas are derived from careful and extensive research. Artwork successfully communicates the intended concept.		10
Critique/Discussion Student regularly makes thoughtful and articulate comments about fellow classmates work during critique and idea discussions. Completes and contributes to discussion of assigned readings.		9
A (100 – 90%) B(89 – 80%) C(79 – 70%) D(69 - 60%) F(59 – 0%)	Total	98

Distribution: How a text gets out into the world
- Used to give students their grades
- Handed out individually on paper

Reception: How the text is taken and used by others
- Students may think the teacher dislikes them because of a bad grade
- Students may wonder why they earned a 9 instead of a 10 in a particular category

Socialization: Interactions between people instigated by text
- Students ask others what their grades are
- Students talk to the teacher about why they got the grade they did

Figure 5: Rubric for 3-D Fundamentals, with an example of a CHAT analysis of the critique genre.

Since rubrics provide a grade, the reception of a rubric is especially important. Students may be happy with a grade, or they may be upset and feel they deserved a higher grade. This generally reflects on the teacher who created the rubric and whether they can justify their decision in giving a nine instead of a ten.

Developing My Own Definition

Grading is one of the aspects of teaching where I see connections between art and English. Unlike in math and science, there is no "right" or "wrong"

answer in art and English. Yes, there are skills to be taught in both subjects; like grammar and proportions. In college, grades are necessary to evaluate mastery of content, but ultimately, art and writing are a form of expression. They both create an outlet for one to express their thoughts or feelings. Art and writing may be used to inform, to persuade, or simply to enjoy. There is so much that can transfer from one subject to another.

In addition to expression, another similarity between art and English is the fact that I am not a professional in either. I cannot write the perfect critique or create the perfect sculpture. I am still learning and developing, just like my knowledge of genre is still developing. I am learning what a genre is and working toward creating my own definition. I am still not sure if I know exactly what "counts" as a genre. Not everything fits into a category easily. But maybe it's not supposed to.

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Kayla Scott is a junior at Illinois State University studying art teacher education and ceramics. After discovering her love of writing research, Kayla became a 2014–2015 Grassroots Writing Research Fellow. When she isn't writing or working in the studio, Kayla spends time creating set pieces for the Metcalf School musical, working out, and meeting with the University Scholars and SILICA executive boards.

"Anti-cedent Genre": The Television Edition

Laura Skokan

Laura Skokan has a complicated story to tell. Telling it begins with finding the right medium for it and ends with finding a new approach to a second draft of a graphic novel. In between, Skokan gets some perplexing criticism and attempts to use genre research—only to find the research method she uses is shortsighted. She ultimately has to re-examine her antecedent genre (television), consider production, and take apart the very thing she thought she knew so well.

The more I explain about the graphic novel I'm writing, the more insane I sound. I keep waiting for the moment when people mentally check out of the conversation and start seriously considering hospitalization. For this reason, I won't be describing the project very fully here. What I will say is that it intentionally plays with genres. Not only am I crossing genres (horror and romantic comedy) and combining mediums (a graphic novel and a website), but I am also purposefully thwarting some genre conventions.

At best, I hope it will turn out to be something like Frankenstein's monster. (That guy got around, right? Even with all those different body parts, he learned to speak, smelled a flower, had the motor skills to run with a bunch of people holding torches. That's a pretty good goal.) At worst, it might be a piece of poop with a bunch of jelly beans sprinkled on it, wearing a ball gown . . . it remains to be seen.

Back when I finished the first draft of my graphic novel, I sent it off to two trusted friends and anxiously awaited their feedback.

What I Suspected; or, My First Round of Research

I suspected I'd get a lot of criticism on all the genres I was using, but I was prepared for this. At first, I didn't know what medium would be best to tell my story in—I kind of defaulted to writing it as a screenplay. So I did a lot of genre research and found that screenplays were actually more constricting than what I needed. This happens because movies cost so much to make (a $2 million film budget is considered laughably small) that they have to do extremely well commercially. The result of this **production** element (the tools needed to create a genre) is that movies are formulaic: they are very similarly structured regardless of their genre.[1] When I was looking for other mediums, I found that graphic novels do not cost as much to make or advertise, so even the independent ones can still bring in a profit. As such, there is no profit-driven industry standard for them yet.

The result of this is something like the graphic novel *Scott Pilgrim*. Scott deals with some pretty complicated psychological issues, like realizing he wasn't the wronged party in his past relationships but was actually the wrongdoer and navigating his current girlfriend's trauma from a mentally abusive ex. Normally in a psychological piece, the humor (if there is any) is dark or sarcastic. But in *Pilgrim*, a lot of the humor comes from Scott's airheadedness; a source of humor usually found in sillier genres (think Peter Griffin from *Family Guy*). And the genre mixing doesn't end there. *Pilgrim* uses video game grammar while borrowing from Manga. The pacing is slow, even though it's modeled after Kung Fu action films; it devotes several scenes to characters just hanging out and decidedly not to advancing the plot. It's really kind of all over the place, but it still works.

As for my own genre-crossing, I borrowed a lot from TV. There is a danger, I think, in combining techniques from different genres and, in this case, different mediums (TV and graphic novels). Nevertheless, graphic novels tend to borrow a lot of techniques from film and television already, and as long as one consciously translates between the mediums, there is a lot of rich material that can be mined from this kind of crossover. In my case, television shows tell stories similarly to how I wanted to approach my piece.

The "Golden Age of Television" we're in right now has come about from the breaking of conventions. Episodic shows (shows that don't advance the plot from week to week, wrapping things up by the end of the episode) have started to become unfashionable, whereas serialized shows are rising in popularity.[2]

[1]If you're at all interested in this (and I personally find it fascinating), look up a film Beat Sheet, which is a basic breakdown for each major change over a film's three acts. Some Beat Sheets even state on what page each change needs to happen: the "Inciting Incident," for example, should occur around page ten. It's kind of like the five-paragraph essay can be on any topic, but its structure is predetermined in that three paragraphs are supposed to be used to back up the main point.

Because serialized shows develop the plot over a season, they don't have a standard structure to fall back on for each episode. So you can get characters that have the freedom to evolve because the structure isn't dependent on them always returning to their comfort zone. This was taken to an extreme in *Breaking Bad*, where according to creator Vince Gilligan, the main character, Walter White, "transforms himself from Mr. Chips[3] to Scarface" (MacInnes). Walter's journey from teacher to drug kingpin happened not over a season, but over the entire series, a timeframe that hadn't been executed on television before. What's more, the pathetic teacher figure isn't conventionally the lead in a crime genre; it's such an absurd idea that it would be more likely in a parody of the crime genre. And *Breaking Bad*, while occasionally funny, is anything but a parody. The show thwarted conventions just by using a character that doesn't belong in this genre.

With all this writing research under my belt, I felt pretty secure in how I was working with genre. Unconventional, sure, but not unprecedented. And, most importantly, not genre-inappropriate. But all that work didn't get me very far. When I got the feedback, I found that both of my friends were confused. Basically, my graphic novel *was* an elegantly dressed jelly bean turd.

What Their Feedback Actually Was; or, Quick and Dirty Genre Research

I was so ready to talk about genre-mixing, but that wasn't my friends' problem. Instead, they both said they felt overwhelmed by the number of characters. This kind of stopped me in my tracks.

Finally, though, I put on my big kid pants and my writing researcher hat and got down to investigating. In my graphic novel, there were twenty-five characters. By the end of *Scott Pilgrim, Vol. 1*, there are twenty-six characters. I looked at more mainstream graphic novels, and in most of the examples I found, there were between fifteen to thirty characters. As such, I must be correct. Graphic novels have a lot of characters, so I am upholding a convention of the genre!

Not So Fast, Tiger

You know how in statistics, you can skew data to make it seem like whatever outcome you want? Like, how do *all* toothpaste brands have 4 out of 5 dentists recommending them? That can't be true for all of them, and yet, each has . . . not exactly the facts, but a mathematical manipulation of the facts that implies

[2]A result of production elements like DVDs and streaming—viewers can watch episodes back-to-back and so can follow more complicated stories.

[3]Yeah. I don't know who Mr. Chips is either. From what I just found on Wikipedia, he's a pathetic schoolteacher, obsessed with rules and Latin, which are no longer valued by the students or the administration. He's becoming obsolete.

such a statement. What if the question they're asking dentists is, "Would you recommend our brand over using no toothpaste?" Then the answer would have to be, "Unless yours is made of candy, consider it recommended."

This is to say, I asked the wrong question. My data on the number of characters was factual, but my investigation was shortsighted. What I was missing when my friends said they felt there were too many characters wasn't the number of characters exactly. It was that it *felt* like there were too many. A rather subtle distinction.

I returned to *Scott Pilgrim*, since it had more characters than mine. As I started to look through the whole series, I realized that almost every scene has Scott in it, and the things that drive the plot are either his actions or his response to others' actions. In the first volume, he is in every scene.

What this does is set up a situation where everything is oriented around Scott. When there is a note that says his girlfriend's age is "unknown," we don't take that to mean no one (including her) knows, but rather, that it is unknown *to Scott* (O'Malley, Vol. 4, i). Because this dynamic is set up in the first volume, when we get to scenes later on without Scott, we know A) who these people are, B) how Scott knows them, and C) how their actions affect Scott.

I had a very different structure for my graphic novel. I alternated the scenes of my main character, Haley, with scenes of other characters (Figure 1). Because I had a bunch of people to introduce, I used the non-Haley scenes to bring the new characters in. This alternating structure felt very familiar to me. I was especially resistant to having Haley in every scene, like *Scott Pilgrim* does, even though that is obviously one of my influences. My style of storytelling was a given from the outset—I didn't even consider doing otherwise.

SCENE	CHARACTERS
1	Haley
2	The Priests
3	Haley
4	L. Boes and The Halt
5	Haley
6	Willie
7	Haley, L. Boes, and The Halt
8	Brenda

Figure 1: Character breakdown for the first eight scenes of the author's graphic novel.

Since I didn't learn this from *Scott Pilgrim*, I wanted to figure out if I was being influenced by an **antecedent genre**. Antecedent genres are the things we are so used to that we default to them even in new situations (writing or otherwise). In many ways, antecedent genre puts the "historical" in **cultural-historical activity theory** (CHAT)[4]. It's how the past influences our understanding of the new—what's good vs. what's bad, what's necessary vs. what's incomprehensible. These aren't hard-and-fast rules, but markers of evolution as a genre is developing. Think about all the weird things your parents did when they first started to text or use Facebook, like ending a comment on your wall with "Love, Mom." Or you know that really nagging feeling when you're finishing a paper and you want to do your "wrap up" move, like restating everything that you've said before or describing how much you learned? How it just doesn't feel finished until you do that thing, even if somewhere in your head you know that this kind of paper shouldn't end like that? That's an antecedent genre at work. I've learned enough from genre studies to know that when I feel that way, I need to take note. It might be a huge breakthrough.

So I took note of this. I wanted to figure out where my default story structure came from. And if it worked in a different medium, maybe there was a way to make it work in this one. After all, my piece *does* cross genres. Maybe this was another convention I could play around with.

Back to the Books . . . and By "Books," I Mean Television

There's an episode of *The Simpsons* where Lisa, Bart, and Maggie hug the television. Lovingly. Instead of their parents. I, too, suckled at the teat of TV (much easier to do when the sets had knobs). It was my babysitter, my companion, my dearest confidant. As I grew older, it became my textbook. I want to write TV shows. So I study. I watch episodes repeatedly. I listen to audio commentaries and podcasts to hear writers explain their process. At this point I have a deep familiarity with television's conventions, both as a viewer and as something almost like an apprentice. This would be the most likely source for any antecedent genre that crops up.

Here's what I know about TV's story structure. (There are several exceptions to how I'm presenting this, but let me use a fairly straightforward, episodic example.) Most shows are divided up into at least an A and a B story. The A story usually follows the main character, the one who is really the heart of the show. On *30 Rock*, Liz Lemon is the main character, and Jack Donaghy

[4]"Activity Theory is an exploration of how people, objects, and ideas work together to carry out objectives . . . [T]he 'Cultural' and 'Historical' part talks about how the objects, ideas, and genres we use reflect certain cultural values at a certain point in history" (Sheets 135).

is not exactly a secondary character, but his plot tends to support Liz's. Where Liz is the heart of the show, Jack is the brain (and, he'd be sure to point out, the hair).

The way the structure works is this. The episodes typically begin with Liz, the head writer of *TGS* (a *Saturday Night Live*-like show), coming to Jack (the Vice President of the network and her mentor) with her problems. Jack offers advice, usually something ruthless and business-minded, but because Jack is also pretty important to the show, his own storyline is introduced here—it will be the B story. Liz points out an ethical or emotional problem with what Jack is planning to do. Both ignore what the other says and they separate, going on different adventures. About two-thirds of the way through the episode, they reverse positions, realizing the wisdom in the other's advice—Liz becomes more business-savvy; Jack more compassionate—but they do this separately. Their stories only intersect again at the end. Because they go on separate adventures (and so need to have two distinctly lettered storylines), one scene will be with Liz and then the next will be with Jack. The other characters (who *are* secondary) get sprinkled in there with C and D storylines[5], but most of the back and forth is on Liz and Jack (Figure 2).

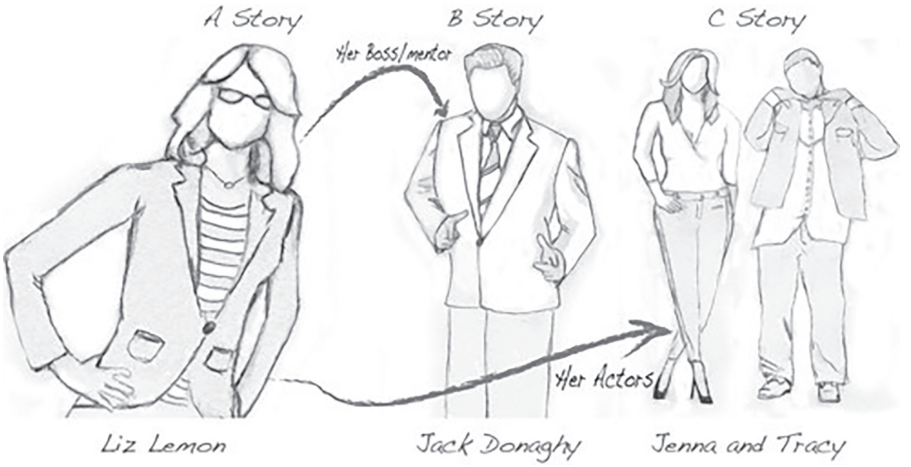

Figure 2: Author illustration of *30 Rock* characters and their place in the lettered storytelling as it relates to Liz Lemon.

So I must have picked up on this technique of separated storylines, and the reason it felt weird to me to stay with Haley for every scene is because I'm used to TV's story structure. That doesn't mean it's out of place in graphic

[5]*Arrested Development* goes all the way to a G story. Famously, the show ties all the stories up when the characters come together in the final scene—a reflection on its creator's antecedent genre. He used to write for *The Golden Girls*, and the "Cheesecake Scene" toward the end of the episode was a moment where all the girls' stories came together.

novels—they often use A and B plots. So that means, again, that I am genre-appropriate, and my friends' confusion must be their own.

. . . Here's the thing, though. One of these friends is even more obsessed with TV than I am. If it felt strange to him, then what gives?

What Gave

Mad Men is an ensemble show with a clear main character, Don Draper. It's pretty similar to my graphic novel, where Haley is the protagonist but the other characters have their own plotlines. What I needed to know was how *Mad Men* balanced scenes between Don and the other characters. Because if my structure was pretty much like this ensemble show, then maybe this particular aspect of my antecedent genre just doesn't work in a graphic novel.

So I dove into the first episode of *Mad Men*. Much to my surprise, it unfolded very differently than how I remembered (Figure 3). The first three scenes did not, in fact, alternate between characters. Kind of like *Scott Pilgrim*, Don is in all three and he is driving the action. We only leave Don in the fourth scene, where we find a group of characters on an elevator, none of whom we know. We've been cued that Don works at an ad agency and this elevator seems to be in an agency. As the audience, we're expected to make the connection that this must be where Don works. So while we don't know these characters, we do know they're connected to Don.

SCENE	CHARACTERS	LOCATIONS
1	Don	Bar
2	Don and Midge	Midge's Apartment
3	Don and Midge	Midge's Bed, the next morning
4	Peggy, Paul, Ken, and Harry	Elevator, Ad Agency
5	Pete, Paul, Ken, and Harry	Pete's Office, Ad Agency
6	Peggy and Joan	Around the Ad Agency
7	Don, Peggy, and Joan	Don's Secretary's Desk, Ad Agency
8	Don and Roger	Don's Office, Ad Agency

Figure 3: Character breakdown of the first eight scenes of the *Mad Men* pilot.

The group on the elevator branches off into two camps—the men and the women. In the men's scenes, we learn more about their characters and their social hierarchy. With the women, we learn how the agency works (and loads of terrifying gender politicky things). Both of these are relevant to Don, as they're filling out his world, even in his absence.

Finally, Don enters the office. We discover from the women that Don (unlike the men from the elevator) is to be treated with respect. So we piece together that Don must be a pretty big deal there and the people we've just met are his subordinates—whatever the hierarchy is between the men, Don is at the top.

What I started to see from this analysis is that the information we're getting, even when Don isn't in the scene, can be applied to Don. So even if we don't know who these people are immediately, we collect clues as to how they're connected to the main character.

This is remarkably different from the way I set up my graphic novel. The intermittent characters did not have any clear connection to Haley for several scenes. Their locations didn't even help (like the agency does in *Mad Men*), as they were in their own homes or at work—places Haley doesn't have anything to do with. The connection is only revealed once we've gotten involved in their storyline, and so, farther away from Haley's.

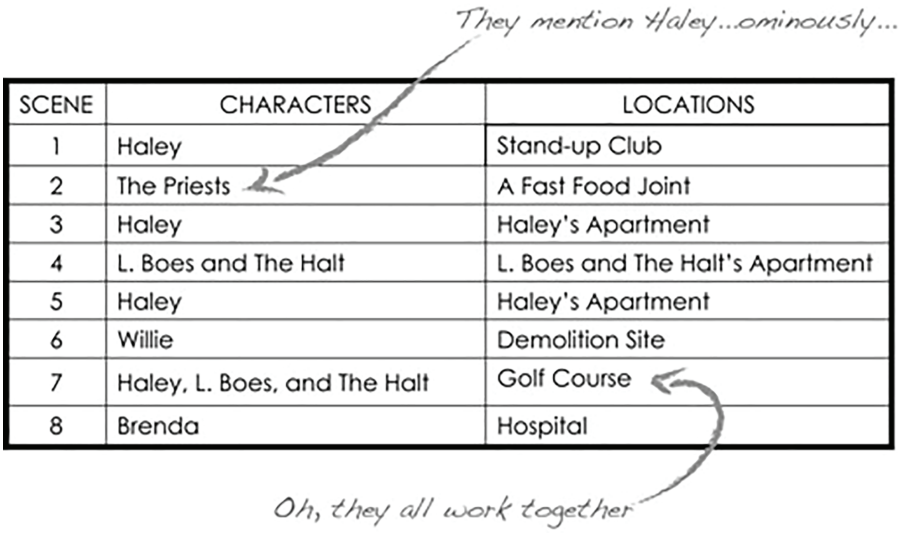

Figure 4: First eight scenes of the author's graphic novel, with locations and connections to Haley.

People want to make connections. That's what our brains are designed to do. It's how our species first made tools, and it's how we remember someone's name better once we associate it with something special about them. When we see a story, we're trained to want to know who to follow and then we try to see how everyone else fits into that character's story. So when I structured my story around Haley only to introduce gobs of new people with no apparent connection to her, it created tension and confusion. That can be an effective tool (it's used in movies where we follow a cop and a killer but don't realize that one's the killer until halfway through), but that wasn't what I was going for. What I did was create a situation where the audience had to reset every

time a new character came in, only to get pulled back in, inexplicably, to Haley's world. There was no push forward. The reason my friends felt like there were too many characters was because it was hard to keep track of so many people who didn't have an obvious connection to Haley. It felt aimless because we, as readers/viewers, expect to keep learning more about our main character, even if it's indirect. That's a byproduct of *our* antecedent genres.

. . . So if I expect that as a viewer/reader, where did I come up with my graphic novel's structure?

Not Exactly Antecedent Genre

The structure I came up with felt so natural to me. In fact, doing otherwise felt like a mistake. However, from the writing research I've done on the matter, I've come to realize my structure is an anomaly. It's not the way most narratives are set up.

I think what happened is this: I saw the switching between characters in television (going from the A to the other lettered stories) and took that to be a healthy structure. What I missed, though, was *how* that got set up. How much context the audience needs to be given in order to feel like they can follow along, so they aren't just restarting every time a new character is introduced. I'd internalized the wrong message. Or, at least, internalized a partial message.

I am coining a term here to address this phenomenon: *anti-cedent genre*. It happens when we know a genre really well, have studied it enough to distinguish it from other closely-related genres, but have missed some fundamentals of how it works, such that, when we try to create our own version of the genre, aspects of it are way off. Our knowledge works against us because it is incomplete.

But What Does It *Do*

Identifying an anti-cedent genre is similar to other acts of writing research. The way I discovered mine was to research how an ensemble story was structured. However, because I was so familiar with the genre, I almost didn't see the differences. That's the trick about an anti-cedent genre—I needed to deconstruct what I thought I knew.

I sometimes find CHAT frustrating. It's a list of things, sure; I generally get what each means, like Production = tools. But how does that little equation

impact writing? It's not until I can actually *do* something with the components of CHAT that they become remotely useful. So if I'm in a Word document, I can create any genre I want, right? Well . . . no. It actually limits what I can do and even how I think about my creation. If I'm taking notes in a math class, I can't do equations very well in Word. Or if I want to include a freehand drawing, like I did for this article, I have to involve all sorts of additional tools (paper, pencil, scanner, and Photoshop). Then it has to fit onto my Word document, which might make it bigger or smaller than I intended. That changes my creation.

Recognizing this does two things for me. First, it changes how I look at others' writing. If I'm watching a show from the '70s and the super hammy acting bugs me, I can realize that they've been influenced by the tools they're using. Cameras weren't as portable, so a lot of the shots had to be done from far away, which meant the writers had to have the characters explicitly state their emotions, rather than wordlessly use a close-up of a subtle facial reaction, as we're more used to now. The second thing this recognition does is to help me when I'm analyzing my own work. There are a lot of choices I consciously made when I did my drawing (Figure 2) because of the medium. For instance, I could have done it in color, but I know the *Grassroots Writing Research Journal* prints in black and white. But maybe there were other, better choices I could have made, like putting the characters on the side of the text and having arrows connecting the relevant words. This could have made my point clear and would have looked cooler, but Word doesn't make violating its margins easy. The result is that I didn't think of it until just now. So the tools I used changed even how I subconsciously thought about my creation.

What a writing research approach has given me is a way to investigate those subconscious spaces, because even understanding is a tool. Despite my conscious, active study of TV, I was still left with partial knowledge. Without writing research, I might have just cut a bunch of characters because that's what the feedback indicated I should do. However, because I did genre research on graphic novels, I realized that the number wasn't really the problem. The next writing research tool was to study a genre that dealt with multiple characters. Rather than trying to take the genre of a television show and identify all of its conventions, I focused on a specific one: how it *introduced* characters in multiple storylines.

By looking to my antecedent genre, I could then compare it to my own work. What I found was a glaring difference between my storytelling (my impression of how to do narrative structure) and the way stories are actually told on television. Not only did I do genre research on how *Mad Men* introduced characters, what I'd effectively done was research my own writing as well.

That's what this tool can do.

As a final note, I've completed a second draft of my graphic novel since doing this research. There are thirty-seven characters now (twelve *more* than before). I gave this draft to the original two friends and also to a new group who'd never seen it before. The number of characters did not come up as an issue for anyone . . . there may have been other issues, but those will have to wait for the next episode.

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Laura Skokan maintains that having a life is for chumps and would prefer to rot her brain out watching TV.

Cultural-Historical Activity Theory: Because S*#t is Complicated

Joyce R. Walker

Why use a complicated model for understanding people and their literate activities? Because literate activity (all the things people do when they produce and use different kinds of writing in the world) is messy and complicated, especially for writers who are writing in new situations. In this article, Doc Walker argues that the traditional model of the Rhetorical Triangle doesn't work as well as a more modern construct, cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT), to help us see where we are and what we're doing when we write.

> *. . . since every piece of matter in the Universe is in some way affected by every other piece of matter in the Universe, it is in theory possible to extrapolate the whole of creation - every Galaxy, every sun, every planet, their orbits, their composition, and their economic and social history from, say, one small piece of fairy cake.*
>
> *From* The Restaurant at the End of the Universe *(61).*

A good friend of mine likes to randomly text message me match-ups and get my response. He's a musician, and he's often up really late, so a 3:00 AM message might read, "Pete Townsend vs. Mick Jagger?" I don't always know too much about the people he'll send, so I mostly have to depend on quick Google searches to find anything out about the match-up before I send something back. Since he knows I love reading, he might send me something like this (Figure 1).

Seth: Samuel Beckett or George Bernard Shaw?

Joyce: While you have to give Beckett props for his explorations of the limits of stupidity and boredom, Shaw was both a socialist and a kick-ass gardener and cook. He probably could have rocked his own HGTV cooking show. So Shaw gets the win.

Figure 1: A 2013 text message communication between Joyce Walker and Samuel Seth Bernard.

With the aid of my smart phone (which is way smarter than me), I can almost always find some quick facts to help me respond, even for musicians or writers I don't actually know anything about. I mention this activity here, because, in a way, it's a kind of *research* that I'm doing. Why one thing over another? What are the differences, and why do they matter?

This article, at its core is also about "why one thing over another?" And so I want to begin it with a match-up question for my readers (Figure 2).

Joyce: CHAT vs. Rhetorical Triangle?

Reader: What? Not Fun! And I don't even know what these things are!

Figure 2: Fictional text conversation between Joyce and someone reading this article.

Even if you are immediately interested in this match-up (I admit, that's highly unlikely), there isn't any way to quickly research this on your smart phone and come up with a pithy response.

But, believe it or not, this is a match-up worth exploring.

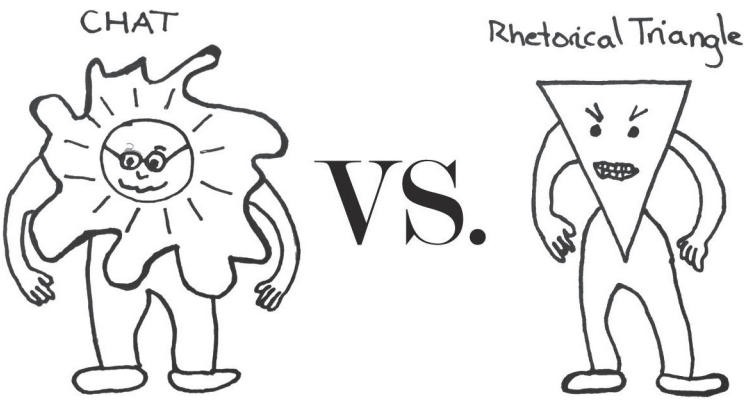

Figure 3: A CHAT figure and a Rhetorical Triangle figure.

[OK, so not a musician or an English Literature expert or an artist. Sigh.]

CHAT (which stands for cultural-historical activity theory) and the Rhetorical Triangle (sometimes also called a Rhetorical Situation Model) are two different ways of looking at how people go about producing texts in the world. The Rhetorical Triangle or Rhetorical Situation Model has roots in ancient Greco-Roman rhetorical tradition. It has a ton of different expansions and modifications, but at its core there is a triad: *Speaker*, *Audience*, and *Purpose*.

CHAT, on the other hand, is much messier. It has seven components: *Production, Representation, Distribution, Reception, Socialization, Activity*, and *Ecology*. That's why my CHAT figure (Figure 3) is a blobby, ill-defined shape. (Yes, I know it looks like a fried egg—it's supposed to represent a complex ecosystem—go figure.) It moves and re-forms and re-shapes as it adapts to all the different activities, thinking, and tools that can go into the production of something as simple as a text message, a grocery list, a stage plot, a football play . . . well, you get the picture.

My point in this article is that CHAT—although it doesn't have a 2,000+ year-old pedigree like the Rhetorical Triangle, and it lacks a cool and visually simple triad structure—is actually a much better tool for looking at literate activity. Yeah, it's complicated, but it can also be more responsive to our twenty-first-century literacy needs. The ways in which people write, inside of school and outside, have changed, and the ways in which we talk about and learn about writing should adapt to meet these changes. The CHAT nebula can help us map our actions in complicated systems, and it can move with us across digital and physical environments. It's a tool that can help us to tease out all kinds of people, objects, spaces, tools, institutions, traditions, and texts and attend to the always-shifting interactions between them. Can a rhetorical model like the Rhetorical Triangle, which focuses primarily on Author/Audience/Text (with context kind of thrown in there to stand in for all the possibly complicating factors), do this job? Well, kinda. Can it do it as well? This article tries to show why the answer to that question is no.

A Small Digression: The Rhetorical Canon

But before I can really get to the Smackdown, I have to digress for just a paragraph or two (sorry!). Consider it a commercial break. Get yourself some chips and a soda.

The original scholarly article that I use to think about CHAT is called "Re-Situating and Remediating the Canons: A Cultural-Historical Remapping of

Rhetorical Activity." But this article didn't organize CHAT in opposition to the Rhetorical Triangle model. Instead, it built up CHAT from a discussion of the Classical "Canons of Rhetoric," which are as follows:

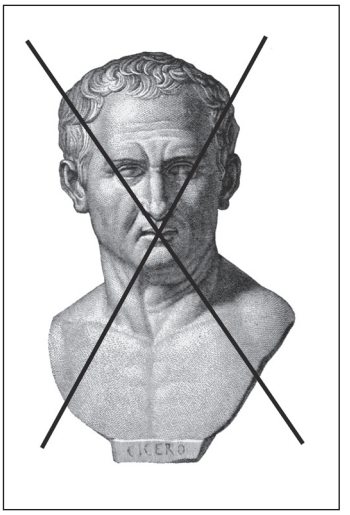

Figure 4: Marcus Tullius Cicero. Doesn't get to be in this article.[2]

- Invention
- Arrangement
- Style
- Memory
- Delivery

These terms were originally developed by a guy named Cicero (Figure 4), around 50 B.C.[1] But in most writing courses these days, the Rhetorical Triangle Model is a much more popular way to introduce writers to models for thinking about how literate activity works than the Rhetorical Canon. So in this article, I decided to abandon the canons altogether (sorry, Cicero) and match up CHAT with the Big-R Triangle and see how it comes out.

Considering the Match-Up: The Power of Three

If you're interested in checking out all of the links included here but don't want to type in all of those long URLs yourself, visit **http://isuwriting.com/2015/11/05/walker_chat/** for live links to all of the websites listed in the article.

At first glance (once you get beyond the weirdness of my Fried-Egg CHAT figure) a reader might pick the triangle figure as the more obvious winner. I mean, my triangle is very pointy and looks kinda fierce, but it's also true that as a model for thinking about literate activity,[3] a triangle can provide a really easy and useful way to break up ideas in manageable parts, because groups of three have a special place in human thinking and language. Grouping things into threes is an important part of visual design. (For example, see this link for the rule of three in graphic design and home decorating, *http://www.ceciliawalkerdesign.com/2011/01/21/rule-of-three-and-odd-numbers/*, and this link describing the "rule-of-three" in rhetoric,

[1]The best scholarly source for learning about Classical Rhetoric terms and history is George Kennedy's three-volume set, *A New History of Classical Rhetoric* (Princeton University Press, 1994). But a website called "The Art of Manliness" has a pretty good short explanation of the canons, which you can read here: *http://www.artofmanliness.com/2011/01/26/classical-rhetoric-101-the-five-canons-of-rhetoric-invention/*.

[2]This is a Creative Commons License image of Marcus Tullius Cicero. Roman Orator. 106-43 B.C. *https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cicero.PNG*.

[3]*Literate activity* is just a term you can use to describe ALL the stuff that goes into people producing texts in the world. I know that people might say, "Why can't you just say WRITING?" But literate activity is a much broader (and I think better) way to think about how literate humans move around in the world.

especially oral skills like speechmaking, *http://www.presentationmagazine.com/presentation-skills-3-the-rule-of-three-7283.htm*.) We like things grouped into threes. They feel interesting because they're asymmetrical, but three is also an easy number of things to remember.

This "rule-of-three" is probably why Aristotle, champion of the three-part everything, liked to put things into threes (Figure 5). But Aristotle was mostly focusing on situations involving more speaking than writing, which means that putting ideas into sets of three kept them interesting and easier to remember and process for listeners.[4]

Figure 5: From a Google search for "Aristotle and groups of three." Check it out. This guy REALLY liked to group things in three.

The Rhetorical Triangle

So, back to our two contenders. A little bit of background. If you Google search "Rhetorical Triangle" or "Rhetorical Situation Triangle," you'll find a ton of different images. But here is one that I have permission to reprint (Figure 6). (I've modified it slightly to include the concept of "context," which is a common part of rhetorical triangle models.)

You can see that the model is based on the three parts I mentioned before, the Speaker, the Audience, and the Purpose. Most explanations of this model stress that (1) all of the parts are equally important in any act of communication, and (2) that understanding all three components of the triangle can help an author (or speaker) to consider all the important elements in a particular situation; however, the concept of "context" is also important and complex. *Context* is an important part of the model because it implies that a rhetorical act (meaning any act of communication that could potentially have an impact on someone else) can't be understood without reference to

[4]One of the most common Aristotelian three-part structures is used a lot in writing classes. Ethos, logos, and pathos were Aristotle's three types of persuasive appeals. Confusingly, this triad is sometimes ALSO called the rhetorical triangle. If you're interested, you can watch a pretty good video about ethos/logos/pathos here: *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gf81d0YS58E*.

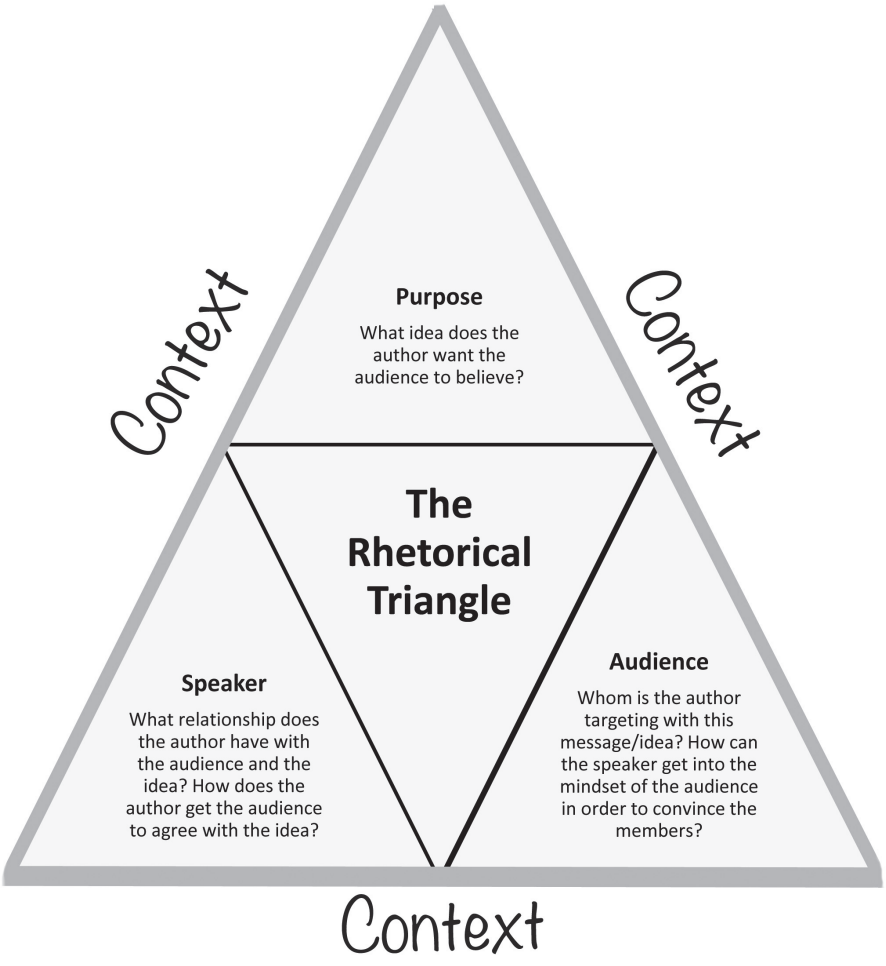

Figure 6: The Rhetorical Triangle. Downloaded from *Teachers Pay Teachers* website[5].

the situation where it's occurring. There are even some scholars who have claimed that understanding what contexts can be considered "rhetorical" is a key aspect of understanding communication models. For example, Lloyd Bitzer, a twentieth-century rhetorician who is pretty well known for his work on the concept of "the rhetorical situation," wrote this in 1967:

> In short, rhetoric is a mode of altering reality, not by the direct application of energy to objects, but by the creation of discourse which changes reality through the mediation of thought and action. The rhetor alters reality by bringing into existence a discourse of such a character that the audience, in thought and action, is so engaged that it becomes mediator of change. In this sense rhetoric is always persuasive. (4)

[5]Created by Angie Kratzer, United States, North Carolina. *https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/Product/Rhetorical-Triangle-Graphic-294886.*

There are lots of different arguments regarding this view, but basically what it means for our purposes is that the most important moment of any rhetorical situation is when that situation is acknowledged (by the rhetor/speaker/writer) to be a potential moment of change or alteration.

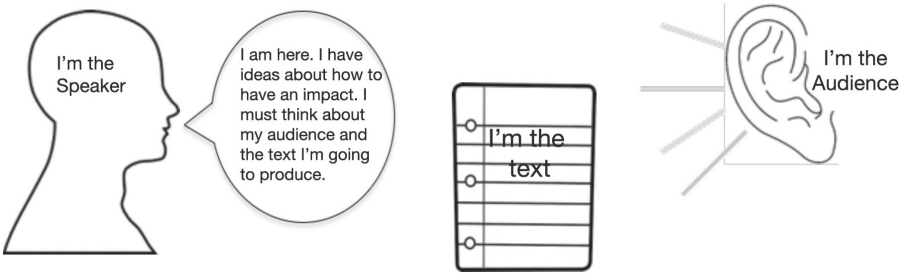

Figure 7: An alternative graphic of Rhetorical Situation.

The Speaker/Writer finds him/her/itself in a situation where something needs to happen (or could happen). Then, in order to address this Purpose, some sort of text (spoken, written, visual) is produced that moves between the text producer and the text receiver (the Audience), and (at least potentially) alters the situation (Figure 7).

Pretty abstract, right? But really, we don't even need a specific example here because ALL the examples of texts in the world are examples of the Rhetorical Situation. School papers, posters, whispered secrets. Whatever. You pick. Just plug them into the triangle and color in the context. Ask yourself, how does this text respond to a particular situation or need? Who produces it? Who uses it? *Voilá.* You are using the Rhetorical Triangle.

So what the Rhetorical Triangle has going for it, in part, is that the three parts are always findable—there's a speaker/writer and some kind of audience (although you should see the rhetors get worked up about whether a story you tell yourself could be rhetorical . . . think about it), and there is a purpose, some situation that requires some kind of text (spoken, written, visual).

Teachers and scholars make all kinds of models using the rhetorical situation as a base. They spin it out, add categories, and do some fantastic analysis using the trusty triangle as a starting point. But in my view, there is one particular shortcoming of models built on the Rhetorical Triangle, and that is that these models tend to focus on the rhetorical situation as a kind of potential-filled backdrop that comes to life in the moment the rhetor (speaker/writer) gets involved in some way—makes a decision to act or at least acknowledges that action is possible. Now, I've got to admit that a lot of rhetoric scholar-types who use the Rhetorical Triangle as a starting point also move beyond that kind of thinking in their analyses. But to me, there is an inherent problem in always

starting one's analysis at a static moment in time, especially one that places the author/writer/thinker at the center. It's not that this view isn't useful, because as we approach any kind of writing/communication task, it's often our own point of view and our own possible actions that are most important to us. The problem is that this kind of model has a tendency to obscure and even distort our possible understanding of the larger systems we find ourselves working within.

To drop another ancient Greek on you, we could compare this kind of thinking about rhetoric to Ptolemy's Earth-centric celestial model (basically, the Earth as the center of the universe) of celestial movement (Figure 8).[6] Ptolemy's model made a lot of sense to folks at the time, and it did help to explain the movement of the planets in our solar systems to people looking at them from Earth, but in the end it was missing critical information about how the system really worked. Eventually, the Ptolemaic model was replaced with a Heliocentric (the sun as the center of the solar system) and more accurate model, but not before more than 1300 years and some excommunications and inquisitions and stuff.[7]

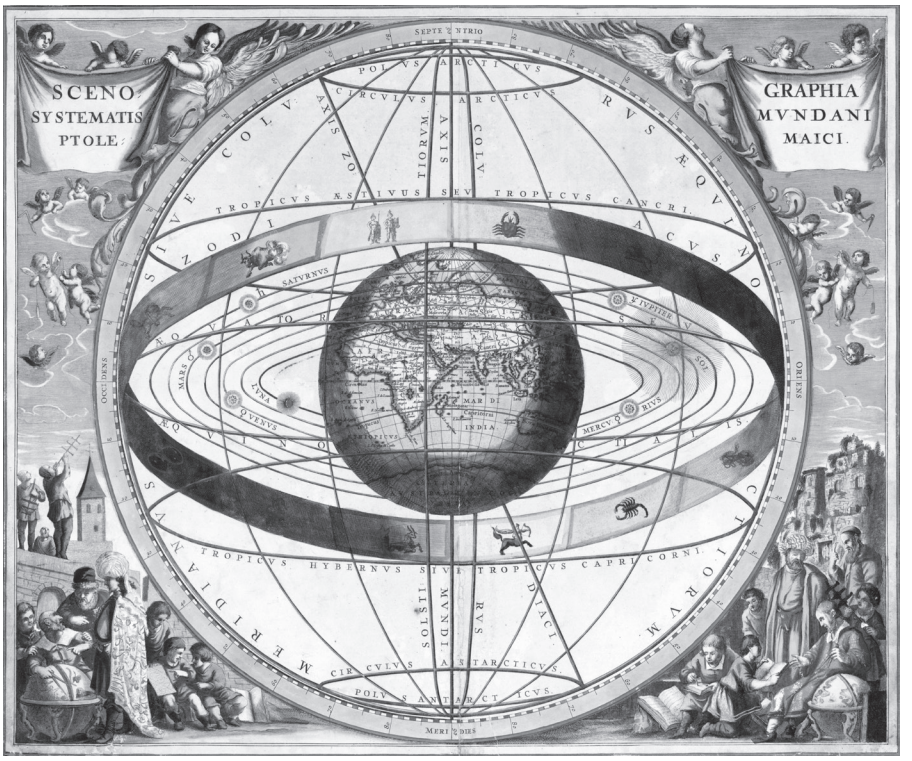

Figure 8: The Cellarius Ptolemaic System.[8]

[6]This was the site that I found most useful for understanding the Ptolemy's earth-centric model, and subsequently Copernicus's more accurate, sun-centered (heliocentric) solar model: *http://www.polaris.iastate.edu/EveningStar/Unit2/unit2_sub1.htm*.

[7]Ptolemy was a Greek astronomer (A.D. 100–A.D. 170). Much later on, an Italian astronomer, Galileo (1564–1642), re-thought Ptolemy's model, and subsequently got in some pretty hot water with the Catholic Church. You can read more on Wikipedia (of course) and many other excellent reference sources.

[8]By Loon, J. van (Johannes), ca. 1611-1686. [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons *https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cellarius_ptolemaic_system.jpg*.

We've Always Done It This Way

Like the geocentric model, the Rhetorical Triangle has been around for a long time—and it's still a model that is used today in many school settings. It's important to remember that the weight of this history can make it tough for people to think about new models. (This is also true of Cicero's Canons of Rhetoric, which CHAT was originally developed to remediate.) People don't just like the Rhetorical Triangle because it has a nice grouping of three, but because it "feels" right—it feels like a smart way to think when we're trying to figure out how different types of communications and texts work in the world, and it especially feels right as a way to understand our own power within a particular situation. Moreover, it feels right to teachers as a way to get their students to think about writing in a more complex way. *"No, no. Don't just write the paper and get a grade, think about real writing situations and how you get the right kind of information and make the right kinds of decisions to create an effective text. For GOODNESS SAKE! Think about your audience!"*

Hearing echoes of that last call ringing in your ears from some English or communication teacher somewhere in your murky, distant (or not-so-distant) past? That's because thinking about audience really is important—maybe centrally important in many writing situations.

And let me say, CHAT doesn't really argue with the elements of the Rhetorical Triangle Model, so much as with its "speaker-centered" perspective. Here is what my CHAT figure might say about the Big-R Triangle:

> "Well, yeah, it makes sense that we, in our need to make choices and actually DO writing, tend to *center* ourselves in the middle of the rhetorical act. But in actuality, we're not so much the one at the center as we are a member of a large group of actors (some are human and some might not be). And all of us are moving around and inside and through multiple settings where certain kinds of texts are produced. Of course, we make moves and take actions and have thoughts and directions. We're individuals. But we do so within a shifting network of things and tools and people and institutions and relationships. And all this stuff works to control and shape the texts we produce, either through us (because we've learned certain ways of doing things) or in spite of us (because the demands of the situation make choices impossible—like learning to write five-paragraph essays in response to timed writing situations)."

As I write my CHAT-person's dialogue, I can definitely see how it might be a turn-off for you. (Again, it's too complicated!). But if you'll just hang with me for a few more pages, I think I can show you how CHAT can work practically—and better than a Rhetorical Triangle model. And it can do it because it IS a complex model for looking at complicated activities.

Learning to CHAT

So, what is it that CHAT *actually* lets us do? What's *different*? (Maybe you are still wondering what CHAT even is.) Well, to start that discussion I'm going to excerpt a section from the *iswriting.com* Key Concepts page, which gives a brief explanation of CHAT and outlines its components:

> Cultural-Historical Activity Theory is developed from the work of Paul Prior and a group of other scholars ("Re-situating and re-mediating the canons: A cultural-historical remapping of rhetorical activity," *Kairos* 11.3, 2007). CHAT is a useful tool for thinking about and studying the complex genres that we encounter in the world. In traditional rhetorical models, one might describe the author, the audience and perhaps some of the features of the genre. CHAT allows us to focus on any aspect of the myriad elements of textual production, so it's more robust than these other methods for investigating texts. The key terms in CHAT are:
>
> - **Production:** Production deals with the means through which a text is produced. This includes both tools (say, using a computer to produce a text vs. using a cell phone to produce a text) and practices (for example, the physical practices for using a computer vs. using a cell phone have some similarities, but also many differences). Production also considers the genres and structures that can contribute to and even "pre-shape" our ability to produce text (think of filling out a job application form—the form directly controls the kind of information we can produce, and consequently, the kind of image of ourselves we can project to potential employers). If we were allowed to make a video instead of filling out the paper form, it would be a very different kind of document.
>
> - **Representation:** The term "representation" highlights issues related to the way that the people who produce a text conceptualize and plan it (how they think about it, how they talk about it), as well as all the activities and materials that help to shape how people think about texts.
>
> - **Distribution:** Distribution involves the consideration of where texts go and who might take them up. It also considers the tools and methods that can be used to distribute text, and how distribution can sometimes move beyond the original purposes intended by the author(s).
>
> - **Reception:** Reception deals with how a text is taken up and used by others. Reception is not just who will read a text, but takes into account the ways people might use or re-purpose a text (sometimes in ways the author may not have anticipated or intended).

- **Socialization:** Socialization describes the interactions of people and institutions as they produce, distribute and use texts. When people engage with texts, they are also (consciously and unconsciously) engaged in the practice of representing and transforming different kinds of social and cultural practices.

- **Activity:** Activity is a term that encompasses the actual practices that people engage in as they create text (writing, drawing, walking across the hall to ask someone else what they think, getting peer review, etc.).

- **Ecology:** Ecology points to what we usually think of as a mere backdrop for our purposeful activities in creating texts—the physical, biological forces that exist beyond the boundaries of any text we are producing. However, these environmental factors can become very active in some situations in shaping or interacting with our textual productions (think of putting on a play outdoors when it's raining, or think of the people of New Orleans using the Internet to find family members after Hurricane Katrina).

So, yeah, CHAT is way more complicated than author/audience/purpose, that's for sure. But to connect it back to my discussion about the Rhetorical Triangle model, let's look at how CHAT situates an individual actor (a writer or producer of a text) within the system. The way these seven categories are organized doesn't allow us to begin at the moment when the author sees a chance to make something change (like in the Rhetorical Triangle Model). Instead, CHAT focuses on the moment when individuals begin (even really tentatively) to see themselves as working inside situations where texts are produced and distributed and taken up (production, reception, distribution). From this perspective, we can see some new and different things:

- We can see that *many* different kinds of activities may need to take place (sharpening pencils, taking pictures, drinking coffee) beyond just the action of "making a rhetorical move (that's **Activity**).

- We're made aware that all the people involved in the life of a text can have different understandings about what the text is supposed to be and do (that's **Representation**).

- We're sometimes forced to acknowledge the larger physical and conceptual systems that might be in place and the actual material stuff that goes into producing texts (that's **Ecologies**).

- And we can observe how interactions and understandings between people and institutions can have incredibly strong shaping effects on what can actually be produced in a given moment in time (that's **Socialization**).

- Finally, instead of an author/speaker and an audience, we can see a whole mob of people whose hands and brains and intentions and tools shape texts as they come into being and are used (that's **Production, Distribution,** and **Reception**).

What this model shows us is that the writing world is, in fact, bigger and messier and more complicated than we have been taught to see and observe. It's also more controlled by forces that extend beyond our fingertips, our intentions, and our will to act. It's bigger than our keyboards and pens or our understanding of a particular audience. And it's a much, much bigger space than we can imagine if we're only looking through the lens of the Big-R Triangle.

CHAT vs. R-Triangle in Action

There isn't really much room left in this article (just one of the ways that I'm constrained by the activity system that also contains this article) for me to offer a bunch of examples of the power of CHAT in action, although I do have to admit that I'm pretty sure it can't stop bullets or leap tall buildings. But let's take these last pages to consider an example and see what these two figures (CHAT and the Rhetorical Triangle) can respectively do.

Here is where I find my way back to my friend Seth. He has, in the past, asked me to become a contributor to the blog on the website for the music collective that he belongs to (Figure 9). (You can find it at *https://www.earthworkmusic.com/blog*.)

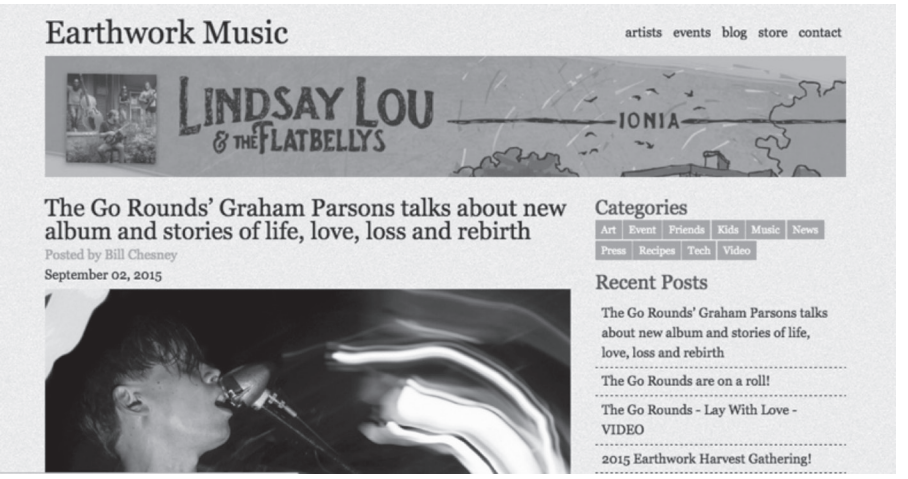

Figure 9: Screenshot of the blog on the Earthworks Music Site. Sept. 7, 2015.

Earthwork Music is a collective organized to help Michigan musicians and to promote music as an important tool for community organization and communication. It's a non-profit organization without a big budget, so if I were to contribute entries to the blog, I wouldn't get paid. But on the other hand I know and respect a lot of these musicians, and I care about many of the same things they do, so I'd want to do a good job and contribute entries that were effective (whatever that might mean). To be honest, my response to Seth has always been, "Who, me? I couldn't possibly do that." I write a lot of things, but since I'm not a blog writer and not a musician, I feel like I wouldn't have much to offer. Secretly, though, I'd love to feel like I was a more of contributing member of this community, because I love the music and the people and believe in a lot of issues they also care about. So let's experiment with what our two models could do for me as I explore the possibility of producing this kind of text.

Using a Rhetorical Triangle model (Figure 10), I might begin thinking about my task in this way:

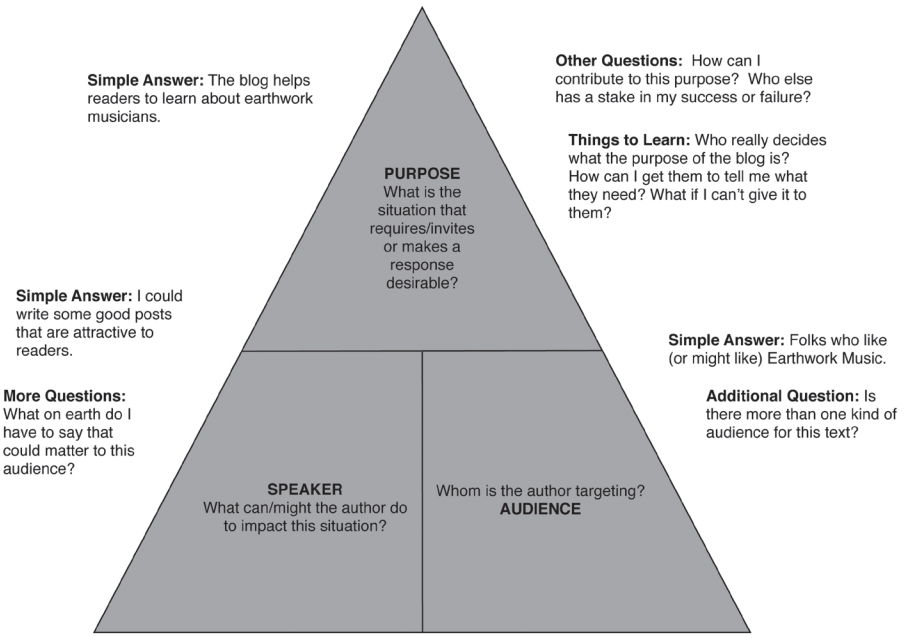

Figure 10: Rhetorical Triangle Model of me thinking about blog posts for the Earthwork Music site.

As you can see, it's not that this model doesn't let me think carefully about this situation. It's more that it doesn't really help me to think specifically about what I might need to do or might need to learn about in order to make any kind of decisions here. I can move beyond this model if I want to—I can expand it and think more carefully about things like the exigencies of the situation (what

makes these posts matter to readers) or the specifics of my text, like what kind of style or tone might reach this audience. But the model isn't really designed for this kind of thinking. It starts at a place that feels "static," as if there is only one situation: a blog post for a particular situation, for a particular audience, with a particular writer (me). But in reality, what scares me when I think about writing blog posts for Seth (or contributing to their newsletter) is that I feel like I'm looking at just a big mass of all the ongoing texts, over time, that make up a thing called "Earthwork Music." All of these texts help to connect the organization and the people in it and the people outside of it. All of these texts, together (including even the live shows the musicians might play) help to represent the organization and share important information with people who both need the information and want to be connected to the group. Most importantly for me, all of this text-making began before I ever entered the picture. The same is true for the genre of blogs—this kind of text has a whole history and evolution and it's not even a stable kind of text. I mean, there are lots of texts on the web called "blogs," and many are actually incredibly different from each other. What scares me is that all this "text-making" is already action (already in existence and doing things in the world), so I have a hard time imagining jumping in, as if it's a static situation with a single trajectory, one that begins as I start to think about the text and ends when I produce my first post. And although I write lots of things, I've never written anything like this—and I'm scared to, really. I mean, these people are musicians, with passions and interests and knowledge that I just don't have. So what I want is some kind of tool that helps to alleviate this anxiety, something that helps me to get practical, while also knowing that I'm thinking through the text in a way that's intelligent and sophisticated, a way that will hopefully help get to success more quickly (if that's not too much to ask).

So let's take a look at what CHAT could help me do in this situation. First, I'd need to ask myself, "What's the activity that I'm hoping to join and participate in?" I might even want to start asking a larger question, like what is the **Activity System** I'm trying to join?[9] This basically means the larger, interconnected situation in which the activity I want to engage in is embedded. To illustrate, I've drawn a map that considers the activity I want to engage in and the larger system that activity is part of (Figure 11).

Do you notice how in this activity map I'm thinking about the bigger system or network of texts and people that my blogs are embedded in, and also about the specific activities I'm going to have to engage in to actually get the posts

[9]There is a great article in the *GWRJ* (Issue 5.1) called "Angela Rides the Bus" that has an excellent explanation of how to understand "activity system."

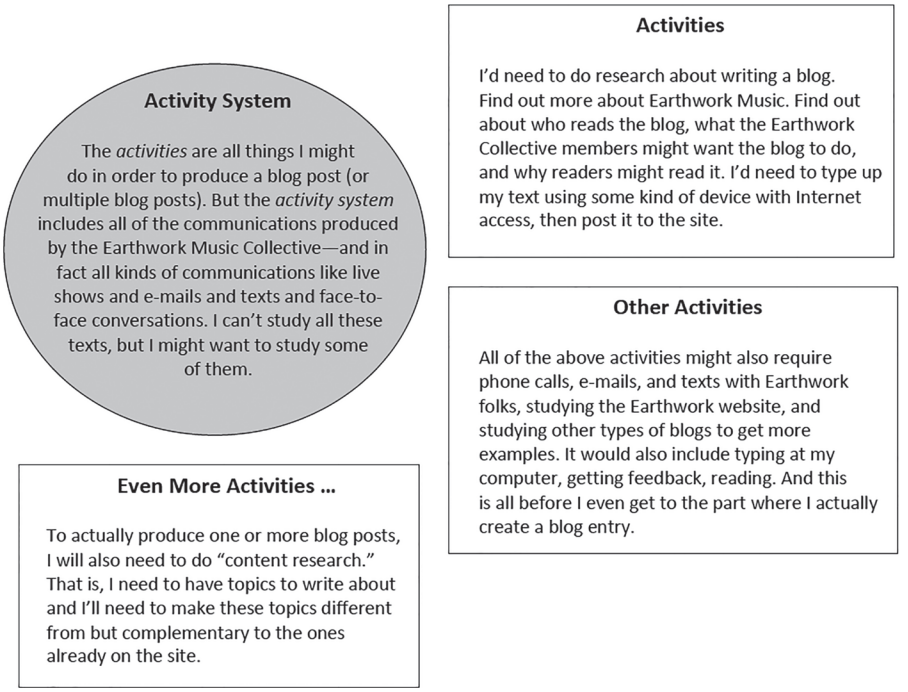

Figure 11: An Activity System of blog posting.

created? Another thing you might notice in the next image (Figure 12) is that while some aspects of CHAT generate a lot of questions, or tasks to complete, other aspects seems less important to me, either because I'm not in charge of that part of the activity or I already know what I need to know to accomplish the task.

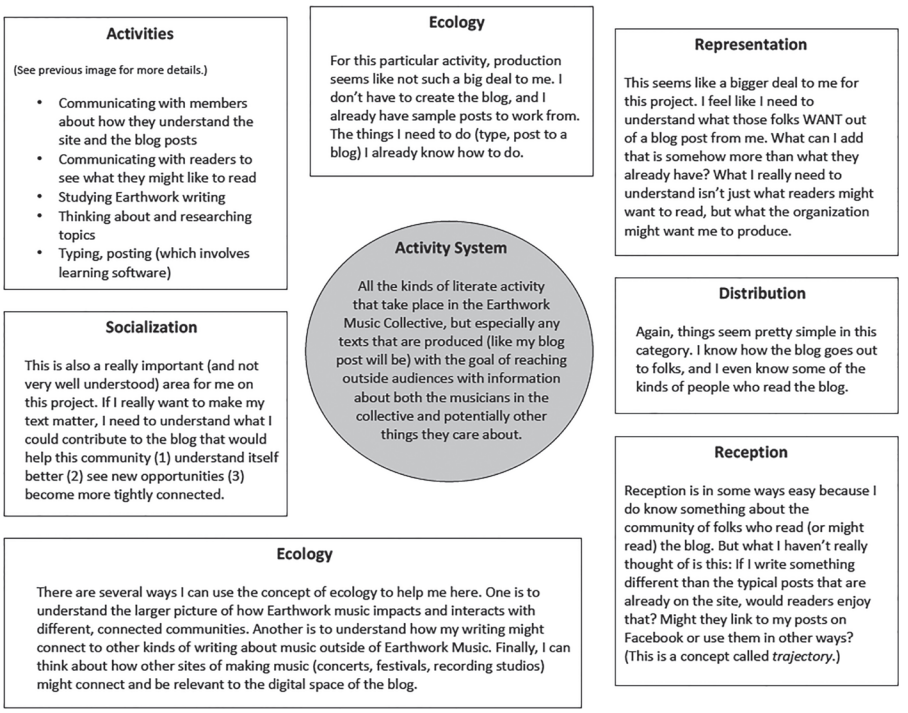

Figure 12: CHAT map of blog posting for the Earthwork Site.

For this project, the areas of production and distribution don't seem too complicated. I feel like I already have the basic skills sets I need for actually physically producing the blog (typing, sending e-mails, etc.), and I'm not in charge of distribution, so the tech involved there isn't really important to me (although Bill Chesney, the Earthworks web designer, needs to know about that stuff). However, other areas (like *Activities*, *Representation*, *Socialization*, and *Ecology*) are places where I need to do both thinking and research before even coming up with a concept of what my posts might be about. One of the things that came to me as I created this map was that, in order to feel like I was really participating, I'd want to find topics that aren't already being covered and that somehow represent my insider/outside status in the group. In that way, I'd be bringing something new and hopefully adding some value to the site and the collective.

But CHAT could also help me if I was in a different situation. Consider: What if I actually had to create the website for these posts? Or what if I was being put in charge of all the content on the Earthwork site? What if I were asked to be a contributor to MLive (*http://www.mlive.com/#/0*), which is a news website (part of a marketing group, actually) that covers news for all of Michigan, and make posts for them about the Michigan music scene? In the situation I've outlined here, I think my main fear is about connecting to the group in an important way, but what if my main fear was just creating a blog post that would make sense and not make me look like a "bad writer?" How would this change my maps?

All of these changes in my intentions and identity would make big changes in the boxes of my CHAT diagram. Some items would fade away, becoming unimportant, while others would become more important. Because of this flexibility, CHAT works better than the Rhetorical Triangle model to help me to see what I need to see, but also to see places where I might need to see differently.

An Ending (Of Sorts)

People who know me personally (and even some of you who've stayed with me through this article) might argue that I'm not really giving a fair shake to the Rhetorical Triangle Model. And it's true that a skilled rhetorician can do a lot with this model to branch out and make analyses and examinations. But I'll stand my ground that CHAT allows for an analysis of writing situations that can be both directly practical but can also allow me to see a bigger picture. It's like a "you are here" map in which I am both "infinitesimal dot"[10] and an

[10]See Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy Total Perspective Vortex. Douglas Adams (1981). "9". *The Restaurant at the End of the Universe*. Ballantine Books. p. 70.

active agent of change. As I map it, I learn what I want to do, what I might need to do, and how I might fit into this larger picture (the activity system) in a meaningful way.

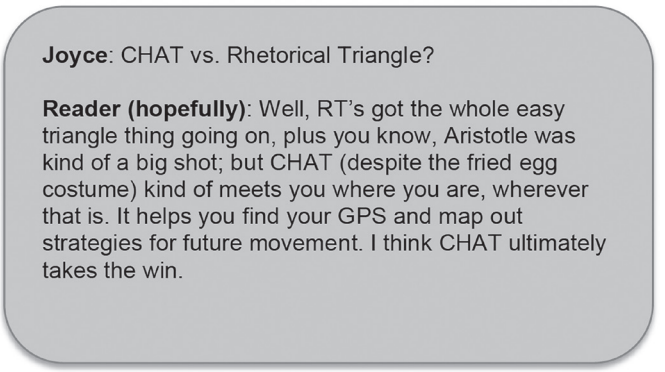

Figure 13: A final fictional text conversation between Joyce and someone reading this article.

For Dr. **Joyce R. Walker**, an interest in writing research has always acknowledged the differences between situations of "writing instruction," which so often seems to involve something being done to us (or given to us) to help us be better writers, and *writing-in-context learning*, which often seems to be much more a practice of subtle, instinctive, even sub-conscious or unconscious choices that writers make as they work to make meaning, make connections, be successful in particular literate settings. Her research has often involved interviews and follow-along narratives, where participants examine and describe their literate practices. Through this work she has come to see the significant gaps that can exist between the kinds of writing and thinking that happen in the classroom and the much more complex and complicated writing and thinking that happens *in situ*, where writers, tools, texts, humans, and non-humans are all tangled together. Her goal as a researcher is to investigate the ways people remember and retell (to themselves and others) the stories of their literate practice. Her goal as a teacher is make these practices a more regular, more understood and accepted part of literacy learning in the academy.

Publishing with the *Grassroots Writing Research Journal*

GWRJ Editors

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The *GWRJ* is dedicated to publishing articles by writers and scholars whose work investigates the practices of people writing (and acting) in different writing situations and in a variety of different genres. We encourage both individuals and groups to submit work that studies and explores the different ways that writers learn how to write in different genres and settings—not just within the boundaries of academia, but in all kinds of settings where writing happens.

Because we identify "writing research" as any type of composition that endeavors to uncover new information about how people work with writing or how writing works, a wide range of techniques and styles of writing might be applicable. For example, a first person narrative, an informal conversation about writing, a formal study of writing, or even an artistic production could all be useful techniques for developing a *GWRJ* article. However, accepted articles will be informed by either primary research into writing behaviors and activities and/or by scholarship in the field of writing studies that addresses theories of how people learn to compose in different situations.

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Articles can be submitted to the *GWRJ* at any time. However, we do have deadlines for upcoming issues. For issue 8.1, which will come out at the beginning of the Fall 2017 semester, articles must be submitted by May 16, 2016. The deadline for consideration in our 8.2 (Spring 2018) issue is January 20, 2017. Please contact the Associate Editor at grassrootswriting@gmail.com with queries about possible submissions and to submit your work.

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The *GWRJ* has a strong commitment to working with interested authors to help them prepare for publication. So if you think you have a good idea but

are not sure how to proceed, please contact us. One of our editorial staff will be happy to work with you one-on-one to develop your idea and/or article.

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Because we encourage so many different kinds of textual production and research in the *GWRJ*, issues of appropriate style and tone can be complicated. However, we can offer the following basic style criteria for authors to consider:

1. The readership of the *GWRJ* is writers. It is not "students," even though the journal is used by writing instructors and students. (The *GWRJ* remains the primary text for Writing Program courses at Illinois State University, and it's also used by teachers and students in other programs as well.) *GWRJ* articles should attempt to provide valuable content to writers who are engaged in the activity of "learning how to learn about" genres.

2. "Teacher narratives" are not acceptable as *GWRJ* articles. We are interested in material that looks at literate activities from the position of a "writer" or a "researcher," but articles that discuss ways to "teach" people about writing are not appropriate for this journal.

3. Language and style that is overly formal or "academic" may be unappealing to our readers.

4. A tone that situates the author as a "master" writer is often problematic. (We call these "success narratives," which are often how-to type articles in which the focus is on the author's learned expertise.) Authors should remember that no one "learns" a genre completely or in a completely simple way. So while writers (especially of first-person narratives) may write about successes, they need to complicate the genres with which they are working.

5. Tone or content that situates the reader as a certain kind of writer (whether as a master or novice) with certain kinds of shared experiences can be problematic because the readership of the journal constitutes a wide variety of writers with different writing abilities and experiences.

6. Whenever possible, articles should make use of published research about writing practices, but the research should be incorporated into the text in

a relevant and accessible way so that readers who are not used to reading scholarly research can still benefit from the references.

7. Articles should be as specific as possible about the genre or set of writing activities they are studying. Generalized studies or discussions of "writing" are not encouraged. Additionally, examples of "writing-in-progress" are always encouraged and are often necessary for articles to be useful to our readers.

Media, Mode, and Copyright Issues

The *GWRJ* can publish both visual and digital texts. We encourage multimodal texts, including still images, audio, video, and hypertexts. However, authors working with these technologies need to be careful about copyright issues as we cannot publish any kinds of materials that may result in copyright infringement. We can sometimes seek copyright permissions, but in the case of materials such as works of art or graphics/images owned by large companies, this is often not possible. This is true for print-based articles that use images as well. We can, however, include materials that are covered by Fair Use; see *http://www.copyright.gov/fls/fl102.html* for Fair Use guidelines.

Also, video/audio of research subjects can require special kinds of permission processes, so you should contact the *GWRJ* editors before beginning this kind of work. Research using subjects who are considered "protected" populations (people under eighteen and medical patients covered by HIPPA, among others) are not acceptable for *GWRJ* articles unless the author has received approval from Illinois State University or another institution to conduct research with human subjects.

Researching for *Grassroots*

What does it mean to "do writing research?" For the *GWRJ*, it means people observing, investigating, critiquing, and even participating in the activities that humans engage in that involve literate practice.

But what does it really mean? In more practical language, it means finding some situation where humans are doing things that involve language (which can mean composing in genres that are oral, aural, visual, etc., not just writing on paper) and thinking, "Hey, that looks interesting," and then taking the time to investigate that practice in some detail.

But this kind of research isn't just about people. It's really about what we call "activity systems," which just means that we want to learn about all kinds of complicated interactions, not just what a particular kind of text looks like or what a particular person does when they produce a text (although we're interested in those things, too). We also want to know about the interactions between people as they produce texts and the interactions between humans and their tools, practices, and different kinds of textual productions. And we're interested in how certain kinds of texts work to shape our interactions, for example, the ways the genre of resumes might shape how people interact when they engage in the activities of finding and offering work.

To help researchers who might be thinking about or engaging in literate practices that they'd like to investigate, we've created this list of the types of research projects that might be interesting or appropriate for the *GWRJ*:

Investigating Genres

These kinds of research projects usually investigate the nuances of particular genres: how they are made and who makes them, the distinctive features they have, who uses them, how and where they are used, and how they do particular kinds of communicative work in the world. This research is often straightforward, and, as some of the articles in our early issues reveal, this kind of genre investigation might have a "how-to" feel, because many of the authors creating these pieces are also trying to learn how to produce that genre. However, genre investigations can move far beyond these "how-to" pieces. There are countless ways that genres can be examined in relation to how they do work in the world, including investigating technological and social implications that our readers would be interested in. Following genres to see where they go and the kinds of work they are made to do can take an author well beyond simply describing the features of a particular kind of text. One issue that is of concern to the *GWRJ* editors is that genre investigations can problematically "fix" genres, that is, situate them as stable productions that are always the same. So we encourage researchers to consider the ways that genres constantly move and shift over time and in different situations.

Personal Explorations of Literate Practice

This kind of research is often closely connected to genre investigations. Authors examine their own practices to discover how they have learned to produce certain kinds of writing in certain situations, or they investigate particular kinds of composing practices, such as different practices for engaging in research or revision. Like genre investigations, these kinds of projects sometimes have a "how-to" focus, as authors learn to think about and explain to others the things they know (or are coming to know) about different literate practices.

Composing Practices

This kind of research looks at particular kinds of composing practices, including invention (coming up with ideas), research, revision, etc. It often overlaps with personal exploration research because authors are often investigating their own practices. However, this research could certainly involve interviews or observations of how other individuals or groups engage in these practices. One issue that concerns the *GWRJ* editors is that this kind of research can lead to assumptions that these composing practices are "universal"—that is, that they work in similar ways across all kinds of genres and writing situations. While it is possible to trace similar kinds of literate practices across different situations (and, in fact, it can be really interesting—see, for example, Kevin Roozen's writing research, "Tracing Trajectories of Practice: Repurposing in One Student's Developing Disciplinary Writing Processes"), it is important to remember that we really can't talk about an activity like "revising," for example, as if it's something that a person does the same way in every kind of situation.

Literate Activity in the Wild

While writing in classrooms or for school settings can often seem very cut-and-dried, these practices are really more complicated than they seem. Part of the reason we don't see the complications of many kinds of literate practices is that once we become "embedded" in the activity, it no longer seems complicated to us! We know how to do it, but we don't really remember how we learned to do it. Another reason that we sometimes miss the complications of writing is that there are "tropes" or particular ways of defining/understanding these practices that make them look simple and straightforward. An example of this is the activity of "writing a paper," which can bring up very stylized and simplistic images of how a person just sits down, does some research, and then writes a paper for a particular class. But in fact, not only are the acts of researching and composing much more complicated than this limited view might offer, but also, this kind of literate practice is actually much more interactive than we might generally think. The *GWRJ* is interested in investigations that look at specific situations/locations where all kinds of literate acts are happening. We want to see researchers "unpacking" what is actually happening when people try to compose particular kinds of texts in particular situations. We are also interested in research that looks at the ways that textual production is interactive—how it involves all kinds of interactions between different people and different objects, tools, and other entities over time. This kind of research can involve the interactions of people and genres and different cultural norms and practices.

Case Studies of Individual Literate Practices

This type of research focuses very closely on particular individuals and the kinds of literate practices they engage in in their daily lives. Some of our previously published articles that take this approach include research into the ways an individual learns to interact with a particular genre or particular literate situation. But we are also very interested in research that looks at literate practice more broadly and deeply. So, for example, how does an individual take composing practices from one situation and apply them to another? How does an individual learn to interact within a particular setting in which different types of genres are being produced (so, say, a new kind of work environment)? This kind of research can be constructed as a collaborative process in which one researcher acts as an observer while the other engages in an exploration of his/her personal practices.

Linguistics Writing Research

The work that currently exists in the journal in this area tends to focus specifically on grammar conventions or on the usage of particular kinds of stylistic or punctuation devices. However, we want to encourage linguistic writing research that is more robust and complicated, including projects that explore corpus linguistics (using a collection of data to look at particular kinds of textual practice) or sociolinguistics (investigating the particular ways that humans use language within social systems).

Global or Intercultural Literate Practices

It is only within a few issues of the journal that the *GWRJ* has been able to publish research on literate practices as they move across cultural and/or geographical spaces. For examples, see Adriana Gradea's article in issue 4.1 ("The Little Genre that Could: CHAT Mapping the Slogan of the Big Communist Propaganda") and Summer Qabazard's article in issue 3.2 ("From Religion to Chicken Cannibalism: American Fast Food Ads in Kuwait"). We would like to encourage more of this kind of research in future issues as we are highly interested in research that studies the ways that people and textual practices move across these kinds of boundaries.

The Researcher's Process

According to one of our *GWRJ* authors, Lisa Phillips, it can be useful for authors to investigate and articulate a personal process that will be meaningful for them when developing ideas for research projects. She offered us her notes on the process that she followed to create her article for the journal, "Writing

with Tattoo Ink: Composing that Gets Under the Skin." Her process is presented below in ten "steps" that *GWRJ* authors might find useful:

Step One

Come up with a general "topic" description. So the first question to answer is: "What is it about writing in the world that interests me?"

Step Two

As the process continues, think more specifically about the genre, setting, and/or specific practices under investigation. (Using the types of research we've listed above can be useful for focusing a topic.) So the second question an author might want to answer is: "How will I go about finding what I want to know?"

Step Three

Next, think about both the research practices that will be needed to gather data as well as the style of article that will be most appropriate. One excellent way to do this is to read existing articles and examine the different ways that authors have approached different topics and different kinds of research.

Step Four

Because *Grassroots* articles are a fairly unique kind of writing, authors may find it useful to consider past writing experiences that they might be able to draw on as they write. We call these "antecedent genres," and they can be important to think about because these prior experiences always shape how an author writes, especially when he or she is writing in a new and unfamiliar genre. While these antecedent genres will certainly be useful, they can also cause problems because aspects of an author's past writing may not exactly fit with the style, tone, or content that is appropriate for *GWRJ* articles. Some questions to ask here are: "What kinds of writing do I already know how to do that I can use to help me? How are they similar and how are they different?"

Step Five

It can also be important to think about "target genres," or types of writing that might be used as examples during the research and writing process. Obviously previously published *GWRJ* articles can be useful in this way, but it can also be interesting to think of other kinds of writing that might serve as examples. Writing research in the field of rhetoric and composition can be useful (for example, books and articles found on the

WAC Clearinghouse Website at http://wac.colostate.edu), but other kinds of research into social practices or even different kinds of journalism can be used as interesting models.

Step Six

Consider what kinds of visuals a text might need. Visual examples of different kinds of writing can be crucial to add interest and information to a text, but copyright issues will need to be considered. Charts, graphs, or other illustrations that highlight important aspects of the data you've collected can also be important.

Step Seven

Thinking carefully about what information (data) is needed to make the article credible and useful for readers is a critical step. Thus, once an author has made decisions about the type of research he or she wants to do, it will also be important for him or her to make a plan for how to do that research. Will it be necessary to visit sites where writing is happening? Interview people about how they produce or use different kinds of writing? Find historical examples of types of writing?

Step Eight

If the article is going to include observations of people's writing activities or interviews or surveys, you'll need to obtain the proper permission. The interview/image consent form for *GWRJ* articles can be found on our website: *http://isuwriting.com/*.

Step Nine

Although the *GWRJ* doesn't require any particular style of citation, we do require that authors cite all of their information. The editors will help authors think about what needs to be cited and how it can be done, but authors will want to think about the best way to cite. This includes considering the different ways that citation works in different kinds of writing; for example, scholarly journal articles cite very differently than newspaper or magazine articles or blog posts. Sometimes the style of citation can really affect how a reader thinks about the information in an article, so it's important to think not only about what to cite, but also how to cite it.

Step Ten

As the text is being produced, it is critical to keep in mind the needs and interests of *GWRJ* readers. They are interested in reading about a wide range

of topics, and they enjoy articles written in a wide range of styles. But since our readers have such a wide range of interests, it is important not to take them for granted. Writing that is interesting, lively, and accessible is important, but perhaps the most important thing to remember is that your research, no matter how it's presented, represents your knowledge and thinking about a topic related to writing that is important to you. And since we're all writers, and all of us are learning all the time about how to "do writing" in the world, sharing your knowledge is, ultimately, an act of community.

Questions?

If you have any questions about the journal or any of the articles, you can send queries to grassrootswriting@gmail.com. Part of our mission is to welcome and encourage all kinds of writing research, so if you have an idea that you want to develop, please don't hesitate to share it with us.

Works Cited

Roozen, Kevin. "Tracing Trajectories of Practice: Repurposing in One Student's Developing Disciplinary Writing Processes." *Written Communication* 27.3 (2010): 318–54. Print.