GRASSROOTS WRITING RESEARCH JOURNAL

Issue 9.2 – Spring 2019

Printed in the United States of America.

ISBN: 978-1-60904-837-2

The Illinois State University Writing Program
Stevenson Hall 133
Illinois State University
Campus Box 4240
Normal, IL 61790-4240

Produced in consultation with the English Department's Publications Unit

Interior layout by Stipes Publishing L.L.C.

Printed by Stipes Publishing L.L.C., Champaign, Illinois.

Guest Reviewers

Jenn Coletta

Katy Lewis

Deborah Riggert-Kieffer

Courtney Cox

Shelby Ragan

Table of Contents

From the Editors

Shannon Harman

With this issue, the *Grassroots Writing Research Journal* has wrapped up its ninth year of publication, and we, the editors, have taken a long look at the writing-research the journal has published over its near decade-long existence. While we always work to bring our readers new and exciting writing-research, certain genres tend to pop up many times throughout our previous issues given the pervasiveness of those genres in our culture. For this issue, though, we have focused primarily on genres that have not previously been explored in the journal, genres such as Little Free Libraries and heavy metal music. The research methods employed by our authors are not only unique, but also creative, and exemplify the sort of pioneering genre exploration that we hope both students reading this journal and future authors will undertake. As always, we have also tried to collect together articles that explore genres across different media and modes in order to highlight the complexity of writing and of the forms that writing takes in our increasingly globalized world. The *GWRJ* is dedicated to exploring writing and research wherever they occur and in whatever form they may take in order to help our readers expand their understanding and knowledge of literate activity. As we look forward to the ten-year anniversary of the launch of the *GWRJ*, we hope that readers continue to enjoy the research that we publish and appreciate the time and effort our editors and authors put into bringing readers cutting-edge yet accessible research into the nature of human communication.

To begin issue 9.2, **Abigail Palmisano** explains the concept of absurdism and absurdist genres, analyzing her own experiences with absurdist performances and discovering that the audience helps to construct this genre by adding their own expectations and antecedent knowledge to the performance. **Bryanna Tidmarsh** similarly focuses on the nature of performance in the next article, and she traces the remediations of Pharrell's song "Happy" from its inception to Pharrell's 2015 Grammy performance of the song, showing how the performance remediation enacts social justice.

Our next three articles are all about genre. **Zach Freed** takes readers on a journey through the history of the science fiction genre and points out the difficulty in defining science fiction as a genre given its incredible diversity. **Tim Wyland** then conducts a genre analysis of the space of The Coffeehouse in Uptown

Normal in order to complicate what readers traditionally think of as texts and genres. **Ann Borow** also conducts a genre analysis as she researches Tinder and demonstrates how Tinder users have subverted the original purpose and, therefore, conventions of the genre over time, illustrating the power that audience members and users have in shaping genres.

Then we have four articles that analyze genres never before discussed in the *GWRJ*: social media image captions, smart pens, Little Free Libraries, and heavy metal music. **Jessi Batterman** analyzes the genre conventions associated with posting images to Facebook, Instagram, and VSCO in order to see how the conventions of each platform distinctly shape the image captions that users on those platforms write. Next, **Maddi Kartcheske** walks us through her experience taking notes with a traditional pen and paper versus her experience taking notes with her new SmartPen, and she demonstrates how socialization significantly impacts the ways in which we create, interact with, and use texts. **Courtney Cox** then describes the relationship among CHAT, literary citizenship, and Little Free Libraries by narrating her experience working to establish a Little Free Library at her last university. Finally, **Matt Schering** considers how heavy metal music, through the genre conventions of its lyrics and performances, is a far more complex genre than it is normally given credit for, and he analyzes different heavy metal lyrics to demonstrate how these lyrics deal with complex social issues.

Our next two articles focus on translingualism and its impact on the texts we produce. **Pouya Vakili** narrates his own experience learning English as a second language and offers tips on thinking translingually in order to find similarities between languages, similarities that can potentially help people learn new languages. **Claudia Sánchez** then looks at the app Duolingo to see if multimodality really helps users learn a new language.

Lastly, in this issue we have pieces from our Writing Program's *Spreading the Roots* initiative and *Professional Literacies Project.* For *Spreading the Roots*, **Anya Gregg** draws on her past experience writing a "failed" *GWRJ* article to explore mutt genres and illustrate the importance of knowing the genre conventions of a text. Then, for the *Professional Literacies Project*, **David Giovagnoli** interviews **Jordan Kuhns** about the types of writing he produces while working for a local agricultural cooperation.

As with our past issues, at the end of this issue we have included our "Publishing with the *Grassroots Writing Research Journal*" in hopes that interested readers will become future writers for the *GWRJ*. As head into our tenth year of publication, we hope that potential authors will continue to send us their writing-research and continue to explore new media and platforms.

We hope to work with these writers to further our collective understanding of how genres work in the world, particularly as those genres emerge from new technology, for, as we at the *GWRJ* well know, writing and research are always evolving in conjunction with the tools and practices we use to write. As we have noted in previous issues, we deeply enjoy working with writers, and we are constantly learning from them and their research and being inspired by their creativity and dedication to providing the readers of the *GWRJ* with new perspectives on writing and research in action. We look forward to continuing to share these perspectives.

The Musician Dropped Dead, Is the Show Over?: Exploring Audience and Text Interaction

Abby Palmisano

When thinking about composition, we often think about the way in which an author creates their text, but rarely consider the audience as co-creator. Can an audience create a text? Can a text create an audience? Abby Palmisano's article explores the complex relationship between text and audience through the exaggerated lens of Theatre of the Absurd.

We've all had instances where some writing has changed us. It may have been a poem, or a play, or a song, or a novel. Maybe it changed the course of your career; maybe it changed your outlook on life in a particular hour on a particular day. Some instances will stand out strong in our minds—I remember watching a play that ended up changing my major—and others will be minute, so much so, that they almost fade into the background. Most of the time, we remain unaware of the way that writing rewrites us, but the fact that such a thing does occur is undeniable. It is an interesting phenomenon and somewhat difficult to examine considering its subtly in our lives. But, there *are* ways to examine it. If you are a scientist, and you want to examine something very, very small, so small that it cannot be seen by the naked eye, you place it under a microscope. In other words, you add something that will expand it in your vision. So, in order to examine this minute phenomenon, we, the writing-researchers, must place it under a textual microscope that will enlarge it. We must view it through the lens of a genre that will exaggerate this interaction. Let me describe to you a clarinet recital that I attended a few years ago—now, I know that to many this may not sound so exciting, or relevant, but just hold on, you might be surprised.

I was sitting in an auditorium amidst community members and fellow students. We had just witnessed a very typical, run of the mill clarinet recital given by one of the music professors. The music and performance had all been very good, and we were down to the last song. After the penultimate song had ended, I took a quick glance down at my program, which was a bit hard to see in the dark, and saw that the next song was titled "Fidelio." I assumed that it must be an excerpt from Beethoven's opera by the same name and turned my attention back to the stage.

Now before I go on, I want to take a minute to examine the genre of a clarinet recital. One definition of **genre,** according to ISU's writing program website, can refer to "kinds of texts that can be produced." When we're studying genres in this way, there are typically conventions that accompany each type of text. So, in the case of a clarinet recital, the genre would include:

- a musician playing upon a clarinet while sitting or standing upon a stage, possibly accompanied by another musician
- clarinet music played on a clarinet
- the musician is well-practiced and well-trained, and thus will play the clarinet in its traditional, downward position
- an audience who sits quietly and listens
- a clear end to the piece followed by a bow from the musician
- applause from the audience.

These all probably seem so obvious that they are not worth mentioning. Those of us who've been to (or participated in) recitals have seen it so many times that we take each of these conventions of the recital genre for granted. How could it be a clarinet recital if it consisted of anything else? We also take our own participation in the event for granted. How could the audience be anything other than the silent observer? I'll just leave these questions for the moment. Now back to the recital.

The music professor came back out on the stage, bowed, and then took his seat in the middle of the stage and began to play, as he had done for every song thus far. But then something rather unusual happened. In the middle of the song, a man dressed all in black entered from the wing carrying a small, black suitcase and a clipboard.

What?

The man made the musician sign for the suitcase, set it down next to the chair, and exited back into the wings. The musician continued to play.

All around, people began to mutter—"What was that about?" "Is this man a part of the performance?" "What does it mean?" The musician just continued to play his piece as if nothing had happened, and soon enough the muttering ceased and all attention was back on the recital. And then the suitcase began to play everything the musician played back at him.

At this point, we were thoroughly confused, as, it seemed, was the musician. He would play a few bars, and then the suitcase would echo the exact line of music. But the whole affair was interrupted by a second entrance of the man in black, who had yet another suitcase. Again, the musician signed for the suitcase, the man left, and he resumed his song. This time, both suitcases echoed the tune. The playing and echoing continued as the man in black returned time and time again, with more and more suitcases, until there was large barricade of black suitcases all playing against the musician. The musician had to angle his clarinet upwards in order to be seen and heard over the mountain of suitcases. Now, the musician was no longer confused, he was angry. Clearly these suitcases were ruining his performance. Livid, he thrust the clarinet back onto its stand, walked around the suitcase mountain so that he was facing its front, and began to scream at it. The suitcase mountain screamed back. Mountain and man screamed at each other for a whole minute.

And then the musician dropped dead.

The man in black entered again, this time with a large wooden coffin. He dragged the musician into the coffin, closed him in, and pushed it through the central isle out through the back of the auditorium. The lights went up. For a few moments, the entire audience sat in silent shock. Then one by one, the buzz of concerned muttering began. "What just happened?" "Is it over?" "Are we supposed to leave now?" "Okay, that was NOT Beethoven."

Audience members debated about whether or not the piece was over for about three minutes. Finally, some began to grab their coats and were ready to leave. Just then, the man in black reentered through the wings, pushing the coffin in front of him. There was an audible gasp from the audience. He stopped right in front the suitcase mountain and stood facing the audience with his arms crossed. Then, the musician, from inside the coffin, began to kick and scream and the suitcases played cacophonously over him while the man in black just stood there. The lights went down. In a moment, the musician stood next to the man in back, and both took a bow. After exchanging glances, the audience began to clap.

Now the recital was over. Of course, nobody was any less confused. We had expected to see a clarinet recital where the musician simply played music,

simply bowed, and the audience simply clapped. Instead, we got whatever this thing was. And what was it? While my friends and I discussed the issue after the concert, I was finally able to put a name to this thing—*absurdism*. This was an absurdist clarinet piece. It is not often that you see an absurdist musical piece—it's really not often that you see an absurdist anything, but when you do, it will certainly leave you stunned and confused. But why?

It undermines our definitions of the genres that we expect to be met with. Absurdism characteristically disrupts the confines of the genres they are found in. In this case, the characteristic elements of the clarinet recital genre were each disrupted: a man who was not a musician came on stage with items that were not clarinets that played clarinet music. The audience did not sit in silence, but talked and got up and almost left. The musician did not even stay onstage the whole piece; he dropped dead and was dragged off in a coffin. Every one of the genre conventions that we accept without question was undermined, and, yet, it was somehow still a clarinet recital. At the same time, since there are numerous examples of absurdism that disrupt the conventions of the genres they are found in, absurdism has become a genre of its own.

Texts and Audiences

Now let us return to our microscopic area of interest: how the text changes the audience. When we placed the clarinet recital under the microscope of absurdism, we saw that the way in which we consumed the recital had changed. The audience was not silent, but felt that they must talk. Some even felt that they must *leave*. We did so because the recital forced us to react in some way, as all recitals do. Since it was absurdist, and the recital genre was disrupted, so were our typical reactions. In absurdism, the audience enters a phase of meta-reaction. They become hyper-aware of what it is that the performer is doing and how they, the audience, fit into the performance. If the player is continuously playing, the continuous music elicits silence from the audience. They must be silent in order to hear, and in this way audience creates the recital as much as the musician. It is the goal of the recital for music to be heard. The silence of the audience allows this to happen. In the same way, disruption in the music produces audible confusion and disorder, which is the goal of absurdism. The audience is a necessary component in the attainment of that goal. They must participate in the disorder, thus co-creating the text.

I had first encountered the absurdist genre about year before the occurrence of the clarinet player episode. My friend was preparing to start

her senior project—directing a play. She was directing a set of one act, *The Chairs* and *The Lesson*, both by playwright Eugene Ionesco. My friend asked me if I would act the part of the Old Woman in *The Chairs* and gave me the script to read before the read through. Now, I consider myself to be a pretty good reader, and until that point I had never really come across a text that managed to stump me, but this one did. The whole play consisted of this Old Man and Old Woman who kept on welcoming invisible guests into their home. It made no sense. At all. "Am I stupid?" I thought. But soon enough, I was given a word for the show that explained why I couldn't make heads or tails of it. It was Theatre of the Absurd. It directly and purposefully undermines the key characteristics of the theatrical genre. There are certain things that we expect from a play, and it may be helpful to list some of the traditional characteristics of a play as we did for a recital:

- There is a clear and definite plot with a beginning middle and end. There is a clear point of conflict which the play centers around.
- There are physical actors on stage, playing the roles of the characters of the play and audibly speaking their dialogue.
- The play captures some moments in time; there is a reality existing before, after, and during the course of the play that interacts with the actual matter of the play.
- The dialogue and physical actions made by the characters and their surroundings of the play work together to construct a reality. That reality is self-consistent.
- An audience is present and are silent observers of the play.

Ok, so we began with these characteristics that can be found in many, if not most plays, but let's move on to the play itself, *The Chairs*. Here's how it goes. The curtain comes up on an Old Man and Old Woman each looking out of a pair of windows. The Old Woman asks the Old Man to step away from the window. He is worried because he has message to communicate (apparently of the upmost importance), and an Orator will be arriving along with an audience. They begin to list the various people—and objects—that will be invited to hear the message. The couple begin to reflect on their life, which may or may not have included visiting Paris, which may or may not have burned down hundreds of years ago. The Old Man gets upset and the Old Woman comforts him by rocking him back and forth on her lap, saying that since she is his wife, she is also his mother. Yes, this play is very, very strange. The couple hear boats and start to retrieve chairs for the guests who are about to arrive. They open the door to greet the first guest—but there is no one there. Still, they greet the guest and begin to converse with

her, as they do for each and every invisible guest that arrives. Throughout, they continue to bring out more and more chairs for the guests. The Old Couple keep interacting with the copious amounts of invisible guests and discussing the importance of the message that is to be relayed. Finally, the room is so filled with immaterial guests that the Old Man and Old Woman must stand on stools and shout over the crowd in order to hear and see one another. Standing on these stools, they see that the Grand Monarch himself has entered. Now they must await the arrival of the Orator. In the high excitement and anticipation of the event, the Old Man and Woman jump out of their windows, never to be seen again. All is quiet for a few moments—and then someone arrives—the Orator (who is, by the way, *not* invisible). The Orator goes to the front and begins to speak in gibberish, and then leaves. The show is now over.

Playing with the Genre

So, how does *The Chairs* disrupt the traditional theatrical genre? For one, there is not exactly a clear plotline. There is no rising and falling action. If anything, the action just rises. There is also no real point of conflict for The Old Couple. There is, however, a conflict for the audience. What is going on with these invisible guests? Are they real or just imagined by The Old Couple? But these questions are never answered. This connects to the next disrupted genre convention—not all parts are played by physical actors with audible speech. If they are played by anything, it is your own imagination. Furthermore, the reality presented in the play is not self-consistent. It is full of contradictions—both verbal and physical in nature. And finally, the audience is not a silent observer. Besides laughter (which is an accepted type of audience reaction) the audience gasps, audibly cringes, and groans. The most interesting (and I must say, entertaining) of the audience reactions were the comments. At various points during the performance, people would exclaim "What is happening!?!" or "Is any of this real?" or "What a minute, are they DEAD?"

Now we've examined two different examples of absurdism, both of which are called absurd because they undermine the conventions of the genres that they are working within. And since we now know that there are multiple texts out there that push back against genre, we can see a new genre forming. An absurdist genre, a genre defined by its subversive traits. Let's look under our microscope of the absurdist genre to see how the text creates the audience—and the actor.

Initially, I didn't mind that I couldn't make sense of the show. As you may have noticed, I tend to like weird things. What did prove to be a particular

challenge, however, was discovering how I, as the actor, worked within an absurdist play. When we began the rehearsal process, I tried to treat my character as you would with any other play. Typically, an actor will try and figure out exactly who their character is, what they have been doing thus far in life, what they were doing before the curtain goes up, how they relate to all of the other characters in the show, what they desire, etc. And, typically, those answers are readily found within in the text of the play, and if they are not, the actor can make reasonable guesses as to what those answers might be. Not so with Theatre of the Absurd. I could not construct any one definite fact about this character. I, as the actor, was forced to accept disorder and contradiction in place of reality, just as the audience of the Absurd must do.

For example, in conversing with the invisible Offset lithographer, the Old Woman states, "We had a son … very much alive, yes … he left us … a common enough story … well, actually quite strange … he deserted his parents" (27). Meanwhile, the Old Man tells the Fabled Beauty, "I'm afraid we never had any children … I would've liked a son … So would Sémiramis" (27). No concrete answer as to whether or not the Couple had a son is ever provided. The audience is simply left with a contradiction of speech, preventing them from creating a coherent history for the Couple. The same sort of contradiction is found in regard to the Old Man's mother. The Old Woman claims that her husband was "a man who so dearly loved his parents. Who never left their sides" and goes on to say that "They died in his arms saying: You've been the perfect son. May God reward you" (28). This statement stands in direct opposition to the tale related by the Old Man, in which he states: "I can still see her lying in the ditch, with lilies in her hand, crying out: Don't forget me, don't forget me…When I returned she was already long buried" (28). The contradictory language of their dialogue forces an acceptance of the absurd upon the audience, leaving them no option but to take what is given to them—the present situation of the Man and Woman—and nothing more. The play itself, by providing nothing but contradiction, changes the way that the audience and actor consume the play as a genre.

And it goes further. Not only must the audience accept the disorder presented to them—they must help to create it. The Absurd genre is in a sense truly created by the audience. The audience is a necessary ingredient in absurdity and disorder of the play. The Old Man and Old Woman will not recognize that the people who they are speaking to are not visible—that is the job of audience. The Old Man and Old Woman will not find impossible contradiction in their own speech. They audience must recognize that as well. It is the audience's duty to recognize and label this impossible reality as absurdity.

In such a state of contradiction, the audience is asked to participate in the active creation of the text. By placing a fair amount of the dialogue between the Old couple and the unseen, unheard guests, the audience must fill in the gaps of the inaudible dialogue based on the surrounding context of the discussion. One situation where this invitation to participate in the absurd appears is in invisible interaction between the Field Marshal and the Lady. The only clues as to what this interaction might entail are provided by the reactions of the Old Man and the Old Woman, who in shock cries, "(*to Field Marshal*) In all the long years I've known you, I would never have believed he could stoop so low. (*to Lady as more boats are heard*) I would never have believed he could stoop so low. There is such a thing as dignity—and self-respect" (21). The speech provided by the Old Woman implies that something terribly inappropriate is taking place between the invisible couple. However, it is left to the imagination of the audience to determine just what this inappropriate action might entail. And, of course, when the situation is presented, we don't tend to imagine that the Field Marshal has merely insulted the Lady's hat or cheated while playing Go Fish. We imagine that he has done something a little more PG-13 in nature. We supply the most disordered and absurd thing that we can think of. The invitation to imagine makes the audience active participants in the absurdity of the Old Couple. We don't expect this kind of participation when we enter the show, and yet the genre has changed the audience.

Let's return to idea of the genre microscope. We've seen through the lens of absurdism how the audience of a text co-creates the text and how the text rewrites their own roles as audience members. We know that it happens and is necessary in absurdism, but does it happen in a more traditional form of text?

YES.

Just as these absurdist performances wrote a particular kind of audience, a non-absurdist text writes or rewrites their audience. Our expectations for audience interaction with a text are determined and shaped by the genres we typically encounter. Take, for example, the fact that we tend to trust the characters we that we are met with on the stage. The characters may lie to one another, but they cannot lie to us. Even a scoundrel like Richard III is forthright with his audience, admitting at the beginning of the play that he is evil and a murderer. An audience trusts that they have been given the best view of reality that the characters can present, and that they have not been fooled. That is what makes the contradiction of Absurdism so confusing: the characters are saying different things, and we have no reason to believe that either one is a liar. Furthermore, our role as audience members has

been shaped by our past encounters with the genre (of a traditional play) to make us believe that we will be presented with truth and cannot be readily deceived. Absurdism, as a genre, relies on a pre-shaped audience that can be rewritten.

Here's another example. Take the play *Romeo and Juliet*. Most audience members come into the show knowing exactly what happens. From the time that we sit down in our seats we know that in about three hours, three of the characters are going to kill themselves. So, while we watch, we color the entire show with the sad irony realized within our own minds. We see the increasing desperation (and heightened hormones) of the young lovers and wish that we could stop them because we know just where it's headed. The audience helps to make the show what it is. Sophocles knew that his audience was very familiar with this story; he knew that their knowing would only add to the tragedy. With the knowledge that his audience could help create the show, Sophocles chose to dramatize a story that his audience already knew. The play itself creates an audience that possesses a retrospective awareness of the play. We call it dramatic irony.

Each and every encounter with a text shapes us as text consumers. We consume a novel, and we expect that the next one that we pick up will have chapters. We consume a murder mystery movie or TV show and expect that the next will use red-herrings and withhold information to create suspense. We consume an improvisational sketch and assume that the next one we see will make us laugh. We prepare ourselves for our own text consumption, and if our expectations are unmet, we are met with cognitive dissonance—the old genre must either be amended to contain the new text or else a new genre must be created for it. As genre composes its own audience; we, the audience compose genre.

Works Cited

"Key Concepts." *Grassroots Writing Research: Illinois State University*, 12 Oct. 2017. http://isuwriting.com/glossary/

Ionesco, Eugene. *The Chairs.* Translated by Martin Crimp, Faber Plays, 1998.

Abby Palmisano is a second-year Master's student in literature at Illinois State University. She loves musical theatre, tea, and cats. Abby has also watched "The Office" in its entirety at least 7,056.9 times and considers that quite an accomplishment.

Clap Along if You Feel Like a Genre without a Roof: Genre Remediation and Social Justice in Pharrell Williams's "Happy"

Bryanna Tidmarsh

How can one song be popular and widely praised in one genre but controversial in another? How does a song's meaning change between its music video and a live performance? Looking at Pharrell Williams's song "Happy," Bryanna Tidmarsh uses trajectory, distribution, and reception to explore how music and remediation can be powerful tools for delivering messages of social justice.

I'm not one to tune into award shows, but after the 2015 Grammys, the internet was abuzz with talk of Pharrell Williams's controversial performance of his song "Happy." The official music video won a Grammy for Best Music Video at the 2015 awards, and it was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Original Song. Yet, previous performances and music videos of the song were not considered controversial, so why had the audience's reception changed? In order to understand this, we need to situate ourselves in the context of "Happy" and trace its trajectory across remediations. But first, a warning: if you don't want this song in your head for the rest of the day, you may want to stop reading here. If you are interested in how a popular song can shift in meaning, though, stay with me.

The Song

Using **CHAT** (**cultural-historical activity theory**) to analyze the song, we see that it has a very complex history. CHAT is a theory that we can use "to help us think about and study the complex genres that we encounter in

the world," and, in this case, the genre is music and musical performances (isuwriting.com). Now, the complexity of this genre and of the song "Happy" in particular is due in part to **remediation**, which is the process in which a text is altered for a new purpose, allowing it a new trajectory or situating it within a different activity system (isuwriting.com). "Happy" is remediated several times in song, film, music videos, fan videos, advertisements, and live performances. Each remediation reshapes the song's meaning based on the musical arrangement, lighting, costumes, and so much more. Initially, before all of the remediations, Pharrell Williams was tasked with writing a song for Universal Studios' *Despicable Me 2* after having worked on the first film's score with Heitor Pareira and Hans Zimmer. It took him ten tries to write a song that the film folks would accept (SwaysUniverse)—which I suppose makes me feel better about how many revisions I made to this *Grassroots* article. Finally, Williams arrived at the version of "Happy" that we know today, which was a #1 single in 24 countries, selling and streaming 13.9 million times in 2014 (SongFacts).

It will come as no surprise to you that this catchy song is designed to make us feel joy (even if you're still sick of constantly hearing it on the radio). Part of this comes from the lyrics, but it's also in the construction of the song: the F-major key, Williams's falsetto voice, and the tempo (156 beats per minute) are rhetorically designed to lift our spirits and get our bodies moving. Plus, the imperative statement "clap along" asks us to become participants in the musical artifact. This almost feels like a forced kind of joy, though; the way you try to stay positive the morning of a big test or shrug off a bad breakup by saying you're too good for your ex. After all, doesn't the mere act of saying "Can't nothing… bring me down" imply there is something in the speaker's life *trying* to bring him down? And it could be any number of things of various degrees, from a job he hates to a lived experience of oppression. This is reinforced further in the same verse when he says, "Well, give me all you got, don't hold it back (Yeah!) / Well, I should probably warn ya, I'll be just fine." The speaker seems to be facing unspecified adversity, and the song might be his way of trying to overcome it with a positive attitude. It's worth noting that the phrase "I'm Happy" recurs 56 times (I counted!)—as if the speaker is trying to convince both his audience and himself of his positive disposition. To what subject is he asserting his happiness, though? Who or what is he telling not to hold back? These details are purposely left ambiguous.

This is because the more general the lyrics, the more flexible they are for variety in their meaning-making and the easier they are to later remediate. When Williams sings, "Here comes bad news talking this and that," the lyrics could represent a variety of negative experiences. For me, the song

could apply to the anxiety I feel writing my academic essays, my struggles being a mother and a young professional, the seemingly impossible monthly task of paying the rent, or the adversity I've faced as a queer woman in a new professional space. For Williams, the lyrics might apply to his lived experience as a person of color. The vague "bad news" and "this and that" keep it relatable to a wide audience, allowing both the artist and the audience listening to interpret it in a way that fits their own life. So, while this is a positive, uplifting song, part of the **representation** (or planning) of the song involved coming up with lyrics that fit a variety of life experiences. This results in the potential for diverse **uptake** by different audiences and audience members. One of the ways that the idea of uptake is used by the ISU Writing Program is to refer to how audiences interpret, make sense of, and use new information. In the case of "Happy," the ambiguous lyrics allow audiences to take up the song in many different ways, which helps the audience to be receptive to the song. It also makes the song malleable for remediation, opening up the possibility for the song to deliver messages of social justice.

Happy, Takes One and Two: The Film

When considering how musical texts can be remediated to deliver different messages, it helps to consider the trajectory of the song. **Trajectory** helps us "understand what texts do and how they move around in the world," and it also helps us think about how a text moves in the process of production, "but even more importantly, how texts move through institutions and spaces and in relationships among different people" (isuwriting.com).

The song "Happy" was constructed with a specific purpose: Williams was solicited to write a song for the film *Despicable Me 2,* which was released

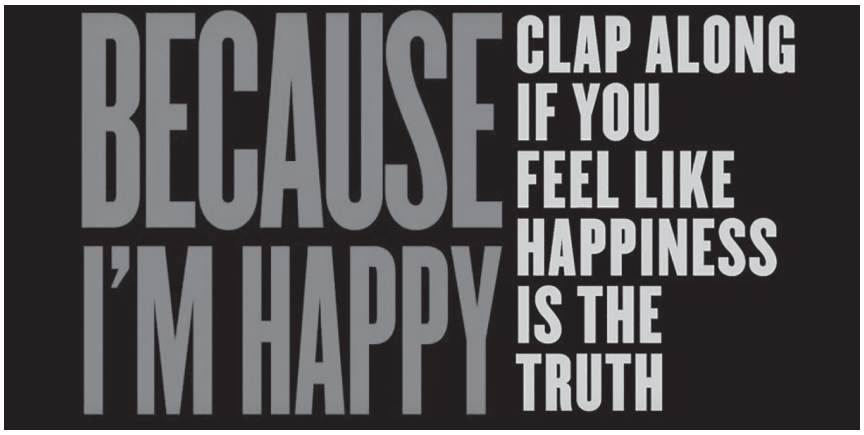

Image 1: Some of the lyrics to "Happy."

July 3, 2013. In the film, the song "Happy" appears twice. In each film occurrence, the song seems innocuous; there are no direct political messages that I've found—just a cute song that conveys a message of playfulness and affirmation to a wide variety of ages, but especially to children. On YouTube, the minion music video has 38 million views. There are no negative comments immediately visible on the YouTube pages for these videos, just variations of "Because I'm happy!" and "This is my new workout song." The audience seems receptive to its message of self-love and positivity. Maybe this is because their political ideology isn't being challenged as it is in later remediations, or perhaps it's because, as noted above, the lyrics can be taken up in various ways.

Happy, Takes Three and Four: The Official Music Video

While the film itself was a box office hit, Pharrell Williams claims that no one wanted to play "Happy" on the Radio because it wasn't what people expected of radio songs. Then, four months after the release of the film, Williams released a 24-hour music video, "Happy: The World's First 24 Hour Music Video" (*http://24hoursofhappy.com*). The version posted to YouTube has over 100 million views, and the website itself likely has more. This video greatly challenges the convention of a music video in its length, as well as in its lack of any definitive ending.

A condensed version of the 24-hour video was of course released as well. At just under four minutes, this seems to be the most well-known video remediation of the song. Both versions of the video feature people dancing to the song "Happy" with each dancer bringing something of their own flare to the role. The videos are made up of a diverse cast of all ages, races, ethnicities, religions, abilities, genders, body types, and economic classes—even different neighborhoods and times of day. Most, if not all, of the people are regular folks, not actors or professional dancers (though there are also some famous people who make cameos, including Steve Carell, Jamie Foxx, and Jimmy Kimmel). When the song is remediated into these videos, the message of the lyrics seems to transform. The many faces of dancers in the videos makes me wonder: what does happiness mean for each of these people?

Image 2: The album cover for "Happy."

How might the meaning of this song shift between dancers? And what kind of obstacles are each of them working to overcome in order to feel the joy they are expressing?

Suddenly, a message about happiness is complicated, and it's clear it means something different to different people. The song is also bringing people together; even when someone dances alone in their clip of the video, they are part of a collective here. This itself seems to be creating an argument that we are all trying to find our own happiness (indeed, that we all deserve it), and that we share in a collective human experience. This itself is an act of social justice—a departure from the film version, but still shy of the overt message of the 2015 Grammy performance.

Happy, Take Five: Music Fanfiction

This collective explodes with the influx of fan videos that follow (think fanfiction for music videos!). The website "We Are Happy From …" (*http://wearehappyfrom.com)* is formed as a database to keep track of fan videos from all over the world. In these videos, people from various countries, identities, and languages dance to the song, much like the people in Williams's music video. When you create a text and put it out in the world, you often can't control how others are going to take it up or redistribute it. Suddenly, anyone with a camera can participate in the meaning-making of this song based on their own cultural and historical experience. The fans are remediating the song in order to represent their own diverse identities and to feel part of a collective experience, and the website also sells t-shirts to raise money for a charity (though what charity is not specified). In this way, the website and the fan remediations themselves are shaping Williams's text and furthering its social justice messages.

Happy, Takes Six and Seven: Live Performances and the 2015 Grammy Awards

Watching Williams's multiple performances of "Happy," I noticed he has several trends: the stage usually has bright, multi-colored props. He and his dancers are high-energy, and he usually opens with a statement like "Who wants to get happy?"—met with much applause. Overall, the tone matches that of the original music videos.

The previous remediations, plus his usual live performances of "Happy," make Williams's departure from his usual performance in the 2015 Grammy performance noteworthy. The event came at a time when the Black Lives

Matter movement—an international activist movement campaigning against systemic racism—was starting to gain more widespread recognition from celebrities. Formed after the acquittal of George Zimmerman for the murder of Trayvon Martin in July 2013, Black Lives Matter grew significantly following the August 2014 shooting of Michael Brown and the subsequent turbulence in Ferguson, Missouri. Interestingly, the 2015 Grammys took place a day before the six-month anniversary of Michael Brown's death. The award show also pulled in 24.8 million viewers, which makes it an ideal place for delivering social justice messages, as there is a potential to reach a wide, diverse audience.

At the Grammys, the legendary Prince set the mood for our viewing experience, saying, "Like books and Black lives, albums still matter." Later, three performances paid tribute to Black Lives Matter and Michael Brown: Beyoncé's backup dancers put their hands up in reference to the "Hands Up, Don't Shoot" slogan (which was adopted by protestors against police violence); John Legend and Common performed their song "Glory" from *Selma,* with Common raising his hands up like Beyoncé's dancers; and Pharrell Williams made significant changes to "Happy," remediating the song into a protest against police brutality. In these moments, artists who hold a great deal of wealth and power used their positions of privilege to highlight a movement and criticize a deep-rooted problem in American culture. Williams's remediation, then, is part of a larger conversation happening in music at this time. These performances received a mix of criticism and praise. For "Happy," though, Williams goes beyond just the raising of hands. His message is further developed through the musical arrangement, the lighting, the costuming, the dancers, the instruments, and more.

A Shift in Tone

He begins his performance quietly—a sharp contrast to his usual energy on stage—and opens with what seems to be a prayer. When he delivers the first occurrence of "because I'm happy," he doesn't look it; his face is serious, and the mood feels somber—even ominous. In the first music videos, we could debate whether the speaker believes these words. Here, though, there's no doubt that Williams is complicating the original meaning of the song. Grammy show executive producer Ken Ehrlich, who invited Williams to perform at the awards, told the LA Times, "The idea here is that life is not happy for a lot of people. So when [Pharrell] sings this song now, he feels differently about it than he did for the two years he sang it and thought he was bringing joy to people. . . . Now we're into social commentary."

Gesture

Like Common and the background dancers for Beyoncé, Williams's dancers perform the "hands up, don't shoot" gesture. They do so while wearing black hoodies in memory of Trayvon Martin, a 17-year-old African American boy who was shot by neighborhood watch coordinator George Zimmerman in February 2012. Shortly before the shooting, Zimmerman had called 911 upon spotting Trayvon in the neighborhood, claiming he looked like "a real suspicious guy" (Reuters). Wearing hoodies during this performance calls out the ways in which black people are stereotyped as criminals based on clothing and skin color.

The "hands up, don't shoot" gesture is the choice most contested in these Grammy performances. This references the shooting of 18-year-old Michael Brown by Officer Darren Wilson. Some eye witnesses claimed Michael had his hands up in the air in an effort to surrender when Officer Wilson shot him. Commonly used in protest today, the gesture is controversial, as there is much debate over whether or not Michael Brown did, in fact, have his hands up when he was shot by Officer Wilson (Santhanam). It's important to remember that the exact events of the shooting are irrelevant to acts of protest; the gesture has become bigger than the historical moment from which it originated, and its meaning shifts from being about Michael Brown specifically to being about the systemic oppression of all black people in the United States.

Color and Costuming

Williams himself dressed in a bellhop's outfit with white gloves—likely a reference to Wes Anderson's *Grand Budapest Hotel.* Anderson has been criticized in the past for rarely casting people of color, which is part of a larger critique of Hollywood films. But this is also a comment on how people of color have been historically relegated to the role of a servant in Hollywood films (and in real life). The choice to wear white gloves is significant; black servants have historically worn gloves in servant roles so they don't dirty the belongings of white people. In Merriam-Webster, "white-glove" means service that is "marked by special care or attention." Therefore, white gloves might also symbolize the careful way people of color must navigate American institutions, including relationships with police.

Besides the white of Williams's gloves, the only pops of color are the yellow in his shoes and in the clothing of the gospel choir that comes on stage. This contrast between light and dark carries meaning. Perhaps in the

darkness of police brutality and oppression that people of color feel in the United States, the speaker is hoping his faith will get him through it. More than this, coming together to lift the voices of marginalized people and to dismantle these systems of oppression can create light in the darkness. Williams's performance feels quieter and darker, but it also feels like a prayer for all of us.

Distribution and Reception

Now let's consider the distribution of this performance. **Distribution** is focused on where texts go and who might take them up (isuwriting.com). The intended audience is the people sitting at the venue, as well as viewers watching the performance live. An author can't always control how their text is distributed, though. Some at-home viewers are using televisions while others are streaming via the Internet. Some have watched all of the Grammys that night while others either saw bits and pieces or just tuned in. Then, there are people (like me) who read about the event on news sites or social networking feeds days later. All viewers have different ways of taking up this performance based on their own **antecedent knowledge** of the song. Antecedent knowledge refers to what a person already knows about a particular genre or text before they actually sit down to write a text (or receive it, in this case). Because I read an article about the performance first, I took that antecedent knowledge into my viewing experience, expecting to feel a positive reaction to the performance. I'm sure others went in with a very different predisposition. The **reception**, which refers to how an audience gets a text, of Williams's performance was divergent, which is evident from some of the comments on Pharrell Williams's own Facebook status about the event. Some of those comments are shown in Image 3.

Image 3: The comments on Pharrell Williams's public Facebook status about his 2015 Grammy performance.

So, we have everything from "Love it!" to "Stop bringing politics into award shows." From these comments, it seems like viewers who disagree with the messages of Black Lives Matter dismiss the performance and indeed the performer himself. The performance becomes a way of continuing debate about the shooting of Michael Brown. The reception of this performance even affects certain viewers' reception of another genre; many claim they will no longer purchase Pharrell Williams's music or even watch *The Voice* because Williams is a judge. In terms of trajectory, a song that was once beloved for its versatility became polarizing once meaning was placed on it via tone, costuming, and choreography.

What are the effects of these comments, though? The controversy itself was newsworthy, widening the distribution of Williams's message. It also participates in a dialogue with the other artists who made similar statements at the event. Further, Williams has firmly rooted himself in the music industry; his sales are unlikely to see much of a dip following a controversy over one performance. Indeed, his net worth was at an estimated $80 million in 2015, and it has skyrocketed to $150 million for 2017. Certainly Beyoncé, John Legend, and Common didn't need to sweat over their careers. We could say that artists in positions of power have little to lose in lending their voice to a cause such as Black Lives Matter, and yet their voices are powerful. They have access to a wide distribution, and they have loyal fan bases to support and further disseminate their messages. Further, when our cultural icons are talking about issues of social justice, these concerns become part of a mainstream dialogue, and values of social justice and equality can become normalized in our cultural consciousness.

Conclusion

True, previous remediations of "Happy" prior to the 2015 Grammy performance don't seem to carry any political messages, and they were positively received. Still, I'm going to say something controversial and assert that all art is, in fact, political. People have taken up this song, applied it to their own lives, and shaped it to reflect some part of their experience. Black Lives Matter tribute or not, the act of promoting the happiness of all people is itself a daring thing. When a text codes political messages rather than making them explicit, those messages become dog whistles, meaning only those who want those messages are going to hear it. That can be powerful, as it allows the song and the text's meaning to be taken up in different ways. But that also allows those who don't want to hear a message to just ignore it. Williams's performance demands the attention of all kinds of viewers,

challenging our beliefs and giving voice to so many people of color who don't have such a powerful platform. Personally, when talking about my reading of these texts or my construction of my own *Grassroots* essay, I've learned to recognize that I can't separate my writing from my own beliefs. And neither could Pharrell Williams. But CHAT helps us to think critically about the texts we read and construct, a skill that stays with us beyond the classroom. The breakdown of "Happy" proves the importance of applying CHAT to our consumption of texts in the world around us, and it also highlights the potential for social justice through remediation.

APPENDIX A: Social Justice in the *Grassroots Writing Research Journal*

Below are some additional articles you can find in the *Grassroots* archives that deal, at least in some part, with social justice issues. My hope is that more people will consider centering social justice and activism in their CHAT and genre analyses for future *GWRJ* issues.

- *GWRJ* 7.2, Spring 2017, Multilingual Notes as a Tool to Understand Super Dense Readings – *Su Yin Khor*
- *GWRJ* 7.2, Spring 2017, Translating the Untranslatable: Making Meaning of Idiomatic Expressions Across Languages – *Sanam Shahmiri*
- *GWRJ* 7.2, Spring 2017, Let the Dance Speak to You: How Dance Is a Cultural Artifact of Communication and Connection that Endures – *LaToya Carter*
- *GWRJ* Issue 7.1—Fall 2016, Language Variation Across Genres: Translingualism Here and There – *Cristina Sánchez-Martín*
- *GWRJ* Issue 7.1—Fall 2016, CHATting with Humans of New York – *Brigid Ackerman*
- *GWRJ* Issue 6.2—Spring 2016, Tracing the Trajectories of (The) Humans of New York – *Tharini Viswanath*
- *GWRJ* Issue 6.1—Fall 2015, I Spy with My Little i … The Manifestation of Power Dynamics – *Mac Scott*
- *GWRJ* Issue 4.2—Spring 2014, I'm Doing it Wrong: Political Posts on Facebook – *David J. Marshall*
- *GWRJ* Issue 4.1—Fall 2013, The Art of Sexting: Queer Theory and Identity Politics – *Eric Longfellow*

APPENDIX B: "Happy" Lyrics

It might seem crazy what I am about to say
Sunshine she's here, you can take a break
I'm a hot air balloon that could go to space
With the air, like I don't care, baby, by the way

(Because I'm happy)
Clap along if you feel like a room without a roof
(Because I'm happy)
Clap along if you feel like happiness is the truth
(Because I'm happy)
Clap along if you know what happiness is to you
(Because I'm happy)
Clap along if you feel like that's what you wanna do

Here come bad news, talking this and that (Yeah!)
Well, give me all you got, don't hold it back (Yeah!)
Well, I should probably warn ya, I'll be just fine (Yeah!)
No offense to you, don't waste your time
Here's why …

(Because I'm happy)
Clap along if you feel like a room without a roof
(Because I'm happy)
Clap along if you feel like happiness is the truth
(Because I'm happy)
Clap along if you know what happiness is to you
(Because I'm happy)
Clap along if you feel like that's what you wanna do

(Happy)
Bring me down … can't nothing …
(Happy)
Bring me down … my love is too high …
(Happy)
Bring me down … can't nothing …
(Happy)
Bring me down, I said

(Happy, happy, happy, happy)
Bring me down … can't nothing …
(Happy, happy, happy, happy)
Bring me down … my love is too high …

(Happy, happy, happy, happy)
Bring me down … can't nothing …
(Happy, happy, happy, happy)

Bring me down, I said
(Because I'm happy)
Clap along if you feel like a room without a roof
(Because I'm happy)
Clap along if you feel like happiness is the truth
(Because I'm happy)
Clap along if you know what happiness is to you
(Because I'm happy)
Clap along if you feel like that's what you wanna do
[x2]

(Happy, happy, happy, happy)
Bring me down … can't nothing …
(Happy, happy, happy, happy)
Bring me down … my love is too high …
(Happy, happy, happy, happy)
Bring me down … can't nothing …
(Happy, happy, happy, happy)

Bring me down, I said
(Because I'm happy)
Clap along if you feel like a room without a roof
(Because I'm happy)
Clap along if you feel like happiness is the truth
(Because I'm happy)
Clap along if you know what happiness is to you
(Because I'm happy)
Clap along if you feel like that's what you wanna do
[x2]

Come on!

References

@Pharrell. "Thank you Hans Zimmer, Lang Lang and everyone who participated in the «Happy» performance at The GRAMMYs http://smarturl.it/PharrellGRAMMYs." *Facebook*, 9 Feb. 2015, https://www.facebook.com/search/str/grammys+2015+pharrell+williams/keywords_blended_posts.

Gibsone, Harriet. "How Pharrell Williams captured the essence of happiness." *The Guardian,* 8 Apr. 2014, https://www.theguardian.com/music/musicblog/2014/apr/08/pharrell-williams-happy-single.

"HAPPY—Pharrell Williams (feat. Minions)." *Youtube,* uploaded by KinoCheck, 28 Jun. 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MOWDb2TBYDg.

"Happy (From 'Despicable Me 2')." *Google Play,* https://play.google.com/music/preview/Tj7ujtq7hqfqvo4fwuppfj7wt5y?lyrics=1&utm_source=google&utm_medium=search&utm_campaign=lyrics&pcampaignid=kp-songlyrics&u=0#.

"Happy by Pharrell Williams." *Song Facts,* http://www.songfacts.com/detail.php?id=31535.

Interactive, Iconoclast. "Pharrell Williams—Happy." *Pharrell Williams—Happy*, http://24hoursofhappy.com.

ISU Writing Program. "Key Terms and Concepts." *Isuwriting.com*, http://isuwriting.com/glossary/.

Lockett, Dee. "Whoopi Goldberg Wants to Bring Some Racial Diversity to Wes Anderson's White World." *Vulture,* 19 Jun. 2015, http://www.vulture.com/2015/06/whoopi-goldberg-wants-to-be-in-a-wes-anderson-movie.html.

"Pharrell Explains How 'Happy' Happened, Meeting Oprah & Working With Teddy Riley, & Tribe." *YouTube.* 29 Apr. 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dErzPaB6Ztc.

"Pharrell Williams—Happy." *YouTube,* uploaded by PharrellWilliamsVEVO, 8 Jan. 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZbZSe6N_BXs.

"Pharrell Williams Performs 'Happy' Live Apollo Theater." *YouTube,* uploaded by Nico Nicker, 4 Jun. 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bx3CSwg-Jmc.

Reuters, "George Zimmerman: Prelude to a Shooting." Thomson Reuters, 25 Apr. 2012, www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-florida-shooting-zimmerman/george-zimmerman-prelude-to-a-shooting-idUSBRE83O18H20120425.

Santhanam, Laura, and Vanessa Dennis. "What Do the Newly Released Witness Statements Tell Us about the Michael Brown Shooting?" PBS, Public Broadcasting Service, 26 Nov. 2014, www.pbs.org/newshour/nation/newly-released-witness-testimony-tell-us-michael-brown-shooting.

Bryanna Tidmarsh is a PhD student in English studies at Illinois State University. Her research interests include YA literature, queer theory, fairy tales, and Gothic literature. Currently, she lives in Normal with her partner and adventurous 5-year-old daughter. In this mythical thing called "spare time," she writes poems.

Rogue Genre: A Science Fiction Study

Zach Freed

A long time ago in a country far, far away, a group of friends were stuck inside on a rainy vacation. After reading several boring German ghost stories, they decided to try their hand at creating their own. This lead to a writing that would later morph into Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein: or, The Modern Prometheus.* As Frankenstein's monster came to life, so did the "science fiction" genre. Or did it? Science fiction as a genre is problematic in that it exists and can easily be recognized, but fully defining it is a daunting task. Examining science fiction brings about questions pertaining to other genres, as well as the idea of "genre" in general.

Science fiction (sf) has grown to a point that its influence on our culture can no longer be denied. Some may write it off as nothing more than mere entertainment; its books may be shoved to the dark corners of books stores; but the genre goes much deeper than what lies on the surface. In a world where social change is becoming a priority, the sf genre provides literature we can look to in order to start the uncomfortable conversations. Just as classic science fiction works questioned the power of science and struggled with the growing understanding of our world, modern sf continues the tradition of "turning the mirror inward" on the reader.

The current popularity of science fiction is really not up for debate. You may think: *I don't like Star Trek or Star Wars; Sci-fi just isn't for me*. Chances are you would be wrong. In fact, it is very hard these days not to watch something that would fall into the sf genre. Four of the top five highest grossing movies of all-time (*Avatar*, *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*, *Jurassic World*, and *Avengers: Age of Ultron*) are sf.[1] At the time I was working on this article, there had been a minimum of three, and often more, sf movies cracking the top ten in each year dating back to 2010. Fittingly for sf fans, that percent comes out to roughly 42.[2] That may not seem like much, but that totals thirty-four films

over the last seven years. Needless to say, the genre is not going away anytime soon.

With an ever-growing genre, some are starting to wonder where the line is being drawn. How can we "draw a circle" around everything that is sf? This is where the problem lies. Like the idea of "genre" itself, the "sf genre" really doesn't exist. How can that be when you and I can name multiple novels, movies, television shows, even video games that would fall into the sf genre? The issue lies not with sf, but with the idea of a "genre." Through questioning sf, we can gain a greater understanding of the ideas behind genre and why the term exists.

Trying to Define the Sci-Fi Genre

When examining the sf genre and trying to make sense of it, it is important to note that the "rules" are nothing more than archetypes that are commonly used among the community. Whether it be settings, characters, or events, these archetypes have been established and have grown throughout the years. While some morphed from other concepts, others were created wholly from an author's original ideas, which then, over time, became an accepted component of what people understand as a "genre."

While many accept *Frankenstein* as the first sf novel, the genre can be traced back much further. Early sf goes all the way back to works of utopian fantasy by authors like Thomas More (*Utopia*) and Sir Francis Bacon (*New Atlantis*).[3] These stories, while not necessarily being "science" fiction, did deal with politics, religions, and social reform in foreign lands. As more of the map was discovered, the available locations for utopias started to disappear and authors were forced to look to the heavens and beyond for future settings. Thus, the idea of "far off worlds" shifted from Earth to space, and the first sf "rule" was established (although, as we'll see, rules seem to be made to be broken when it comes to genres).

With the rise of the novel came Shelley's *Frankenstein*, which established a baseline for what constituted "science fiction." The use of scientific knowledge to recreate human life, although limited at the time, brought in another of the first "rules" of the genre: Science fiction stories use science and technology to explain the impossible.

If Shelley is the "mother" of the sf genre, consider Jules Verne and H.G. Wells the godfathers of sf. They popularized the genre and made it something worth reading. With classic works like *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*, *The Time Machine*, and *War of the Worlds*, the two authors brought a relatively

new concept to a growing audience. These early works helped to establish a few other archetypes that were quick to become sf "rules": Science fiction stories have human characters interacting with aliens or something other than humans, involve travel through time or space, or contain robots or artificial intelligence.

This leaves us with five fairly simple rules. For something to fit into the sf genre it should include:

- Settings of far off worlds or planets
- The use of science or technology to explain the impossible
- Humans interacting with non-human characters
- Travel through time or space
- Robots or artificial intelligence

Now, these "rules" are my own creation, based on my reading about the evolution of this genre, but I think they are fairly accurate, and they seem simple enough. However, like the idea of "genre" itself, the sf genre is anything but simple.

"Certified" Examples of Science Fiction[4]

Using the "rules" of the sf genre you can analyze several pieces of literature to figure out whether or not it fits into the genre. The best example that comes to mind is *I, Robot*.[5] The novel easily fits into the genre at first glance because it has robots and artificial intelligence. Further reading of the stories will include: traveling through space in a ship fully loaded with milk and baked beans, riding large subservient robots across the surface of Mercury, and a cult-leading robot responsible for directing the sun's energy to Earth's colonies. All of these scenarios make use of different established rules of the genre.

These rules aren't specific to literature, though, as the sf genre, like every other genre, exists in other forms of media. Looking at a television series like *Stranger Things*, you see the same rules coming through.[6] In this series we see Eleven who, because of various experiments, is able to hone her psychokinetic energy into a weapon. Will Byers is taken to an alternate dimension where he waits for rescue. The demogorgon lurks throughout the series killing anyone who is at the wrong place at the wrong time. Even though this series has very little in common with the content of *I, Robot* they are both considered to be parts of the same sf genre.

Problematic Examples of Science Fiction

My "rules" for the genre hit a few snags when you start to get into more modern additions, the biggest issues being superheroes and horror monsters like zombies and vampires. The simple answer is "sometimes." Depending on the descriptions and origins of these characters, they can fall into the sf genre.

First, let's examine superheroes. More times than not there will be enough parts in the story to argue that it could fall into the genre. Simple examples like Superman (he's an alien), Spiderman (radioactive spider bite), Iron Man (technology), and The Hulk (super solider serum) aren't typically where the problems lie. Things that tend to cause problems are characters like Batman, Thor, or Doctor Strange. Batman doesn't really have super powers.[7] Instead he relies on inventions and fighting skills, most of which wouldn't be hard to come across with a little research. When we start to get introduced to some of the villains, though, their origins bring the stories closer to the sf genre. Thor is technically a god, so his powers aren't inherited from some crazy science experiment. This would make you think that Thor would traditionally fall into the fantasy genre, but then there are elements from his stories like portals through space that would push it more towards sf. Doctor Strange is an interesting case because he's basically a magician, which is not sf at all, but again the world he interacts with usually pulls from the genre, especially through the inclusion of humans using non-magical technologies.

Zombies and vampires are also interesting characters to look at because, depending on their origins, they can be considered sf. In early works, vampires would have fallen into a fantasy because they rely heavily on their mystical powers, while zombies would have also fallen into fantasy because they typically originated from voodoo ceremonies. In recent years, these two horror monsters have shifted from fantasy to sf.[8] Looking at something like *I Am Legend*[9] is where vampires started to go off the beaten path, so to speak. Seeing vampirism as a disease with symptoms definitely changes it from fantasy to sf. The inherent "powers" that a vampire has would then come from scientific origins. The same is true for zombies. When the creation of the monster goes from voodoo to a viral outbreak, the story shifts to sf from fantasy. Typically, with the rise of zombies comes the apocalypse, which then makes the piece work even more in the sf genre.

Problems Defining the Genre

The thing about sf, and most other literary genres, is that almost as soon as you've laid out the "rules" and accounted for author's personal definitions,

you can begin to find outliers. The genre is not a bucket that can or even will hold everything. The main reason behind this is that everything that is considered "science fiction" falls into other genres as well. The problem is that, although all genres are flexible and change over time, sf is perhaps one of the more flexible, and it often overlaps with other genres, so we can't really count on "rules" to stay consistent.[10] For example, in romances, it's pretty consistent that two characters will fall for one another, there will be some conflict, and they will either end up together or separate by the end of the piece. In productions that fit within the "horror" genre, there will be something to be afraid of that the character(s) must deal with, ultimately killing it or dying in the process. With mysteries, there is problem that needs to be solved, and the character(s) gains knowledge about the problem over the course of the piece and ultimately figures out the problem or faces the consequences. The sf genre is a lot harder to pin down. Yes, it can be understood through "rules," like the ones I've developed in this article, but we could also find examples of books or movies or manga that break some (or even all) of these rules.

The genre acts like a parasite at times, latching on to another genre and using its guidelines to construct a meaningful story. Yes, the sf parts are still there, but the story itself may be an adventure, suspense, or romance at its core. Does sf have its own narrative? That's the question that needs to be answered when we struggle with its ability to be a genre. If I were to argue that it did, I'd think I'd say that the narrative is centered around a "sense of wonder."[11] A sense of wonder isn't necessarily an objective thing that can be seen, and that's why the "rules" don't really give us the whole picture.

What Is Genre Anyway?

The easy definition of a **literary genre** is, according to Wikipedia, "a category of literary composition. Genres may be determined by literary technique, tone, content, or even (as in the case of fiction) length. The distinctions between genres and categories are flexible and loosely defined, often with subgroups" ("Literary Genre"). So, my discussion of sf definitely fits into this definition. But there are other ways to think about the concept of genre. According to genre studies scholar Carolyn Miller, genres are "typified rhetorical actions based in recurrent situations" (159). This means that genres are more than just texts that fit into some kind of category. Instead, they are based not only on shared knowledge of how people understand categories, but are also based in the situations where people find and use them. And we need this more fluid way of thinking about genres because genres help us

to understand and create our human worlds. As we've grown as a society, the idea of genre has shifted to a typical response to a repeating situation.[12] Humans are complex, so we need complex ways to understand the texts we produce and use.[13] Since this is the case, genre needs to be seen not as something that either is or isn't but as something that is flexible and changes over time and in different situations.

If genres aren't a simple yes/no checkbox, then why do we even have them? Why do things need to be complicated? People like order. The creators of M&Ms don't make the M&Ms different colors for any kind of reason, but every person has, at one time or another, sorted the candy by color.[14] It's just something we do. Humans like to group things together. Things get more complicated as we get deeper into topics, and that is why it's frustrating when it can't simply be either "true" or "false." Genres are often simply an attempt to group like things together. Genres change over time. This is because they don't exist as static objects. People interact with them. Sometimes people get creative with them, and depending on success or failure, the genre is tweaked a bit. Sometimes there is conflict, where different people want to use the genres differently or make them mean different things, so genres are really in a constant state of change. The ability for genres to remain fluid and ever-changing is important to their existence. If a genre stops changing, that can be because people have stopped using it. Sf is flexible and changes over time, and that's one of the reasons it is still so powerful in our culture. It started off as something that could easily be understood, but as the world, and the amount of literature, grew more complicated, so did the idea of the genre. While literary genres are simple to understand, the fluidity of written genres is a little more complicated because it is the writer, whether it be a high school student or a tenured university professor, that is responsible for those changes. Being responsible and accountable can be scary.

The Future Trajectory of Science Fiction: Where the Hell We're Going

The future of the sf genre is not something easily predicted.[15] The genre is currently in a boom period as far as I'm concerned. There are quality sf pieces being turned out in short spans of time. The genre is becoming more embedded into society, and it is becoming more widely accepted by new audiences. Since sf seems to be trending up, I don't see any reason to doubt its continued existence, as well as its continued change.

Based on recent successes in film and television. The sf genre seems to have recently made a connection to comedy. With series like *The Orville* and

films like *Guardians of the Galaxy*, the genre has seen positive receptions from audiences. I think that the genre will continue to seep into other areas as well. The blending of fantasy and sf is a relatively novel idea, so I predict that to be the next big thing. Be on the lookout for some sort of scientific explanation for magic.[16] Basically, I think the future of the sf genre is not unlike the future of most genres: it will continue to be fluid and crossover between other genres finding minor successes and failures along the way.

Conclusion

We made it! Maybe the result of this article is that you aren't sure what genre means at all anymore, and that's okay. The whole point is that none of us do because they're always shifting. The sf genre has been on a long strange trip, and today it is starting to absorb elements of fantasy and horror, which isn't making things any easier. It has so many subgenres that even to begin to name them is an undertaking. Once you think you have it nailed down, you start to wonder about the pieces that were written to take place in 2015 as if it was this far off futuristic year, and you're right back to questioning the existence of the genre itself. In a world where choosing the polarizing option is the one that gets the attention, it's important to remember that everything isn't so simple. Nothing is as simple as checking a box.

Bibliography

Asimov, Isaac. "How easy to See the Future!" *Natural History*, 1975.

"Box Office Mojo," *IMDb.com*, Inc., last modified 6 Oct. 2017, http://www.boxofficemojo.com/.

Bradbury, Ray. introduction to *Science Fact/Fiction*, ed. Edmund J. Farrell et al. Scott, Foresman and Company, 1974.

Card, Orson Scott. "Defining Science Fiction and Fantasy," *Writer's Digest*, 28 September 2010: http://www.writersdigest.com/writing-articles/by-writing-goal/get-published-sell-my-work/defining-science-fiction-and-fantasy. Accessed 9 Oct. 2017.

Clarke, Arthur C. *The Collected Stories of Arthur C. Clarke*, ed. Patrick Nielsen Hayden, New York: Orb Books, 2000.

"Genres part 1: Let's typify that response," YouTube video, 4:45, posted by "The Word Bird," 27 Aug. 2014.

"Literary Genre." *Wikipedia.* Accessed 18 Sept. 2018.

Mendlesohn, Farah. Introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction*, ed. Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

Miller, Carolyn. "Genre as Social Action." *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, vol. 70, 1984, pp. 151–67.

Stableford, Brian. "Science fiction before the genre," in *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction*, ed. Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

Endnotes

[1] "Box Office Mojo," *IMDb.com*, Inc., last modified 6 Oct. 2017, http://www.boxofficemojo.com/.

[2] It actually comes out to 42.5%, but the reference to *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* was too good to pass up. (In the novel, when a computer is asked the "Ultimate Question" of human life, it returns 42 as the answer.) Sometimes literature is weird.

[3] Brian Stableford, "Science fiction before the genre," in *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction*, ed. Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 15.

[4] Certified by me. Basically, it's a classic "because I said so" situation.

[5] Not the Will Smith movie; the book by Isaac Asimov. The film has very little connection to the novel outside of character names.

[6] I could have talked about a Star Trek series or The Orville, my new personal favorite series, here, but that felt like low-hanging fruit, and I like a challenge.

[7] Unless you count being super rich.

[8] Arguments can be made for other monsters as well, but these two seem to be the most popular currently.

[9] Again, not the Will Smith version; the novel. Man, that guy must be wild about science fiction.

[10] Mendlesohn 2.

[11] Mendlesohn 3.

[12] "Genres part 1: Let's typify that response," YouTube video, 4:45, posted by "The Word Bird," 27 Aug. 2014.

[13] Or at the very least a complicated system of checkboxes where your box checking options are based upon the checking of previous boxes.

[14] If you haven't, you're the weird one.

[15] But here we go!

[16] Midichlorians? Shit!

Zach Freed is a graduate student at Illinois State University in the English Studies program. He currently teaches English at Clinton High School in Clinton, Illinois and is in his eighth year as an instructor. Zach lives with his wife, Brittany, two daughters, Harper and Cora, and golden retriever, Albus Dumbledog (Alby for short) in Lexington, Illinois.

How Do You Take Your Genre? The Coffeehouse as Messenger

Tim Wyland

In this article, Wyland utilizes the concept of convention and the CHAT process of representation to explore the boundaries of what could be a genre in his genre analysis of The Coffeehouse in Uptown Normal, with the hopes of showcasing how we can understand the implicit meanings and messages of non-written genres.

One day in my Introduction to Teaching Composition course, my fellow graduate students and I were having a debate (much like debates I imagine students in ENG 101 have). The topic was **genre**. The argument: what is a genre and what *isn't?* This debate in particular was over whether a water bottle does or does not qualify as a genre. If this debate does not characterize the nature of what it means to be an academic, then I don't know what does. I mention this discussion because it highlights a particular interest of mine within the field of Genre Studies: how should we understand genre in terms of its definition if there continues to be, even amongst individuals who are trying to teach genre within the ISU Writing Program, dissenting opinion in regard to its boundaries? My answer: we don't.

Let me explain. I'm not saying that we shouldn't attempt to define genre. If we didn't give genre a definition at all, then we wouldn't be able to say that a particular genre has its own set of distinguishing characteristics. What I'm proposing is a move away from attempting to provide ourselves with hard and fast definitions of what a genre is and isn't. Instead, we should move towards a practice that gets us to think more in terms of what a genre *could*

be. To me, **genres** are texts that convey a message in a particular, meaningful way. In my opinion, one concept that I had the most difficulty with when first learning about genre, and a difficulty I believe a lot of newly exposed Genre Studies learners face, is understanding the potential of the concept of genre to convey these messages not in explicit, alphabetical ways, but in implicit, **contextual** ones. When I say contextual, I'm referring to a message that is not conveyed overtly with words (opposite the way a novel portrays a message with writing or the dialogue of a movie portrays a message through explicit statements of characters or of the film's narrator). A contextual message is one that is inferred through observation and that is only understood by connections we consciously make between non-alphabetic objects and the meaning we perceive these objects to hold.

In order to demonstrate this process of analyzing contextual genres, I set out to perform a **genre analysis** of a particular space a person most likely encounters without knowing they are interacting with a genre or existing within a genre. The genre that I am referring to in this case is coffee shops, and the specific text within that genre that I am analyzing is The Coffeehouse in Uptown Normal. I hope that through my genre analysis, both those reading this article and I will not only see the possibilities of genre, but also see how to go about conducting a close reading of texts in the world at large in order to understand their implicit messages.

A Quick Coffee Break: What's a Genre Analysis?

I believe the best place to start a genre analysis is by doing what I referred to above as a close reading of the features present in the text of a genre. A genre analysis is, as I understand it, an attempt to explore the **conventions** of a particular genre (or the unique aspects of that genre that allow us to distinguish it from another genre) and to then unearth the implicit messages those conventions convey. In this case, the "text" of The Coffeehouse is situated in the aesthetic within its walls and its placement/relationship with the community of ISU. What follows, then, is my genre analysis, a detailed observation of The Coffeehouse on a Friday afternoon in Uptown Normal and my thought process while working to form meaning from The Coffeehouse's aesthetic and connection with place.

Grabbing Lunch: I Mean, Doing Research

I sit in a black leather booth, the cracks in its upholstery mended with black duct tape. My notebook sits atop a wooden table, one of many types,

the finishes of their surfaces all different colors. The furniture[1] within the Coffeehouse is all eclectic in nature. The chairs have varying patterned backs. Some are a medley of wood and metal, some are merely wooden. Some are cushioned, some are not. Framed and unframed artwork[2] hangs upon the shop's walls, and beside them all are small white stickers conveying the artist of the piece, their contact info, the piece's name, and a price (I know, you've noticed the superscripted numbers and might be looking for footnotes, but that's not what the numbers are for … I'll get to that, though; keep reading!).

All of the art is for sale, and all of the art is done by local artists, student or not, and hangs on the walls due to the Coffeehouse's allowance (because it helps bring in business). On the door into the shop there is a small black sticker with the words "support local artists" on it.

Image 1: The interior of The Coffeehouse.

Image 2: The exterior of The Coffeehouse.

Image 3: Sign at The Coffeehouse stating, "Support local art."

One of these aforementioned local artists enters the shop with a cohort of fellow artists and interested buyers. I know this because upon entering, the artist in question came up to patrons of the shop individually and informed them and myself what was going on, not to feel out of place or disturbed, and that the catered finger foods for the event are available to the public, and we are welcome to help ourselves to some. I thank her, and she leaves to tend to some interested individuals who are scrutinizing one of her pieces on the wall, each of her works made with actual coffee grounds or beans. Then, my ears are met with the gentle vibrations of the strings belonging to an acoustic guitar[3]. The soft chords are being strummed in the back corner of the shop by a gentleman who is performing there atop a small carpeted stage. He is testing the sound and appears to be playing "Gold on the Ceiling" by the Black Keys.

I sit facing the front of the shop, which is all glass, lending a view of the tracks running through Uptown and the stores across the street, Babbitt's among them. To my left is the front counter of The Coffeehouse, where food or beverage orders are taken. There you will find The Coffeehouse's menu, which will tell you that all food options here are vegetarian, and that they serve breakfast all day[4]. Behind the bar is a small work area where the baristas pour coffee and fix the beverages. It is lined with a glass container which holds their pastries; amongst today's offerings are pumpkin bars topped with cream cheese icing, scones, and a variety of muffins. Hidden away past the work area is a kitchen where I can now see employees in white aprons checking meal tickets and plating food orders. Now, one of the employees working the counter brings me the vegetarian frisco burger and fries I ordered, takes my order number card off of the table, and asks me kindly if I would like some salt and pepper for my meal. I respectfully decline and thank her for her service, and she then proceeds to smile and go back to the work area to care for the plethora of customers they now have due to the art showcase.

As I chew on some fries (which are delicious by the way; if you haven't tried Coffeehouse's fries yet, you should definitely get some in the near future), I gaze around the rest of the interior. Behind the work station and the pastry containers are trash can holders that read "thank you," atop which sit bins for dirty dishes. The Coffeehouse does not use disposable dishware,

unless you order something to go[5].There is also an array of coffee beans in large dispensers and some accompanying bags where you may purchase their coffee in bulk. There is a grinder there as well, so you may take the coffee back home as grounds, if you please. The employees fixing the beverages also grind their coffee here and stock the coffee under the bar from these dispensers. You bring home the coffee served to customers in shop.

Understanding the Genre Conventions of The Coffeehouse

If you are an astute individual, you might have noticed the superscripted numbers (and my parenthetical discussing them) in my written observations of The Coffeehouse. If you didn't notice the numbers, then don't worry, because I'll be talking about them all in detail at this very moment. The purpose of the numbering of certain words in my observation of The Coffeehouse was to make evident the instances where I observed the coffee shop to be displaying clear genre conventions. As I noted above, the conventions of a genre are characteristic qualities a genre frequently displays. Below, I've made a list of all of the conventions that I noticed while observing The Coffeehouse.

1. Furniture
2. Wall Décor
3. Music
4. Food/Drink
5. Silverware/Dishware

The next step in a genre analysis is to get at what I think of as the **criteria** for a genre's conventions. I see criteria as the specific objects/words/people/things present within a genre that work to portray the genre's conventions. For example, furniture is one of the several conventions I found within The Coffeehouse, and the criteria that work together to form this convention of furniture are things like booths, chairs, tables, benches, etc. Because there are booths and chairs and tables in The Coffeehouse, I can say that the genre convention of furniture is represented. Worth noting is that criteria for genre conventions do not need to be present within the specific genre you're analyzing. Genre criteria are merely things which *could* be present in order to represent a particular convention. Here is a list of the things inside of The Coffeehouse that I was able to identify as criteria for the genre conventions I listed before.

1. Chairs, booths, tables, benches.
2. Paintings, pictures, clocks, frames, murals, etc.
3. Speakers, instruments, singing, performance.
4. Breakfast menu (including omelets, sandwiches, soups, etc.), pastries, coffee/espresso drinks, teas.
5. Plates, forks/spoons/knives.

Evidence: The Proof's in the Pudding, or the Pastries

Now that I've identified the different criteria that designate particular conventions in a genre, I'm going to list specific examples/instances where I see the conventions I outlined earlier being presented in the specific place/genre I'm analyzing. These examples could be labeled as **evidence:** the ideas/words/objects *specifically* and *actually* found within the genre one is analyzing that demonstrate a particular genre convention (as opposed to criteria, which simply *could* be found; so criteria are just possible, conceptual markers of particular genre conventions, whereas evidence consists of actual, existing markers of genre conventions within an actual text, like The Coffeehouse, in this case). Now presenting: a brief list of evidence I found within The Coffeehouse to back up my previous claims of existing genre conventions.

1. Cracked black leather booth, wooden tables with different finishes, variety of chairs.
2. Coffee paintings, other artwork done by local artists.
3. Gentleman playing guitar, singing "Gold on the Ceiling."
4. Vegetarian breakfast menu, vegan pastries/soups, fair-trade coffee/espresso drinks, organic teas.
5. Ceramic plates, silver forks/knives/spoons.

Wake Up and Smell the Representation: What's the Big Deal?

Now, in order to draw conclusions as to the nature of what The Coffeehouse is trying to convey to us, its audience, we need to take a closer look at the forms of evidence that I provided in my list, and we need to understand that, in any kind of genre analysis, it is often useful to consider how a specific instance of a "text" (in this case, The Coffeehouse) can be understood in

relation to other instances of texts within that genre (so, again in this case, other coffee shops). When performing a genre analysis, something to look out for in our observations are the ways in which the criteria we describe take shape in particular forms of evidence. *Why* do the forms of evidence appear the way they do within the genre we're analyzing? This question, why, is so important to the process of genre analysis because it recognizes that the authors of specific texts within the genre we are analyzing have made and are making conscious decisions about how the text presents itself and therefore are engaging in the purposeful act of conveying meaning to their audience.

Now I'm going to attempt to display how the particular forms of evidence I found in The Coffeehouse give meaning and how these meanings represent The Coffeehouse as a place that is attempting to give off a specific vibe to those who enter it, the act of which therefore characterizes The Coffeehouse as a unique text within a specific genre (the genre of coffee shops).

While wall art is a convention displayed in the genre of coffee shops from Starbucks to Dunkin, the wall art in The Coffeehouse is unique. The wall décor in The Coffeehouse is not a mass-produced print; instead, it is the work of local artists. This difference between The Coffeehouse and other coffee shops in Uptown Normal is significant. The connotations and meaning of the art displayed on the wall in The Coffeehouse deals heavily with the CHAT aspect of representation. **CHAT** (**cultural-historical activity theory**) is just a theory for analyzing texts, kind of like genre studies, and it actually works well in conjunction with genre analyses because it asks us to think about *how* and *why* authors use certain conventions in their texts and what evidence they use to represent those conventions. The CHAT aspect of **representation** is particularly useful for us since it refers to how an author conceives of his/her/their texts and then actually carries out the goal of creating that text and therefore also refers to how an author chooses the means by which a message is conveyed, the form which a message manifests itself in. Wall art is a **convention**, an idea or notion characteristically found in particular genres, of the coffee shop genre, and is seen in coffee shops from Starbucks to Dunkin to The Coffeehouse. What is unique about the means by which wall art is *represented* in The Coffeehouse is the way in which it is inextricably paired with both the artist of the work and said artist's relationship with geography. Let me explain. As noted in my observation of The Coffeehouse's interior, all art adorning the walls of The Coffeehouse is paired with a sticker that lists the name of the artist who created the piece and the sticker on the glass entryway stating: "support local art." Although a face may not be leant to one's association with the art on The Coffeehouse's walls, the idea that this art is not mass produced for the

sole purpose of lending the walls of the shop some décor, *is*. The art itself becomes synonymous with Uptown Normal and, also important, the product of an individual residing within Uptown Normal.

The furniture in The Coffeehouse isn't pristine and new like the furniture in other coffee shops in the Uptown Normal area. The leather booths have cracks in their upholstery and the tables and chairs all look different from one another. This variance in appearance has a purpose. This variance displays The Coffeehouse as eclectic and gives the shop a feeling of character and history. This feeling of history also works to make The Coffeehouse feel like it's a part of Uptown Normal, like it has been in the area for a long time and is therefore a local business.

The Coffeehouse also lends itself as a local business by recruiting local musicians to play there. Other shops will merely play music through speakers set up inside, but The Coffeehouse went to the lengths of providing its patrons with a live act. Also worth noting: the performer himself is from the Bloomington-Normal community. When I was happily indulging in my frisco veggie burger and fries, I overheard a couple sitting behind me informing an individual that the gentleman who was testing his sound on the stage in the back corner of the restaurant was actually their son. The gentleman's selection of music to perform was also quite interesting. He chose to play "Gold on the Ceiling," an alternative/indie rock song written and performed by The Black Keys, an indie rock band that has recently come into notoriety. By choosing to play a song that can be described as belonging to the genre of "indie" or "alternative" music, the gentleman portrayed his thoughts as to what he believed would *fit* the mood of The Coffeehouse and the audience who would be present there, conveying that The Coffeehouse is a space that caters to individuals who would be more prone to like indie or alternative music.

Also, The Coffeehouse serves solely vegetarian cuisine. The sausage is made of soy, the bacon as well. Most pastries are also vegan, a conscious choice by The Coffeehouse that portrays them as catering to the current culinary trends of our age. This move designates The Coffeehouse as a business that is in tune with the outside world, one that adapts to modern day trends and caters to all customers. (Sorry meat eaters!)

Speaking of current trends, The Coffeehouse also showcases its commitment to going green by re-using silverware/dishware that it serves to its customers and by providing customers with ceramic/glass mugs when dining in store in order to cut down on the amount of disposable silverware/dishware being used. Oftentimes in coffee shops, drinks are served in paper cups with plastic lids and food handed out in disposable containers, but The

Coffeehouse strives to set itself apart by cutting down on waste going to landfill.

What I Learned: The Coffeehouse Ain't No Average Joe

All in all, when you walk into The Coffeehouse, you know you are walking into a local business and not some coffee shop chain the likes of which you are likely to find pretty much anywhere else in the country. The art effectively communicates to its customers: The Coffeehouse cares about community. This message resonates strongly with those who belong to the Bloomington-Normal community. Who doesn't want proof that the establishment they visit cares about them? By looking closely at the genre conventions present within The Coffeehouse and the ways in which these conventions were displayed, I was able to come to the conclusion that The Coffeehouse attempts to purposefully convey itself as a local business that caters to its customers in menu selection and in service while also caring for the environment. This conclusion wasn't plastered as a manifesto anywhere within The Coffeehouse's walls, nor was it told to me by the manager or any one of the employees. Instead, I was able to come to an understanding of what The Coffeehouse stood for by simply analyzing it as a space.

The Coffeehouse is only one of many genres whose messages aren't stated explicitly for us to digest. The world is full of genres whose deeper meanings need to be uncovered by our keen observation and analysis. **Genre research**, the activity performed to understand the ways in which a genre works in the world, is so much more than online investigation. Whether it be through the perception of cracks in leather booths or noting of the type of food that a restaurant serves, genre research can be done by simply observing the world around us, by diving deeper into the places and spaces we inhabit with the understanding that genre is so much more than words on paper.

Tim Wyland is an English Studies Master's student at Illinois State University. If he isn't drinking a cup of coffee, reading a good book, in deep conversation with his lovely girlfriend, curled up with his cat, up late playing video games, or with a glass of wine, then he's most likely asleep.

Don't Swipe Left Just Yet: Analysis and Subversion of Tinder's Genre Conventions

Ann Borow

In this article, Borow takes a look at the literate activity of a Tinder profile and, through analysis of the genre and application of CHAT, observes and documents how users have subverted Tinder by establishing healthy and significant romantic relationships through the app.

"He's just a really amazing guy and I can't believe I met him … at the school cafeteria," my gorgeous friend says. I smirk and nod, agreeing with everyone, despite knowing that she met her new boyfriend on the most illicit of spaces, that place where no one ever admits to having met their boyfriend of almost three years: Tinder. Like the dark web of relationships, Tinder is an online space where the adventurous go to engage in an age-old practice that has become a staple in society: the one-night stand. We all know those people, the creative and innovative among us, who are willing to throw caution to the wind, post their best photos, and take the plunge … or should I say, make the swipe?

But I didn't start this article talking about my gorgeous friend and her one-night stand, did I? No, I did not. But we'll get to that.

Tinder's Genre Conventions

Tinder's main function, as defined by Wikipedia, is to operate as a location-based social search mobile app, facilitating communication between mutually

Image 1: Sample Tinder profile of a woman.

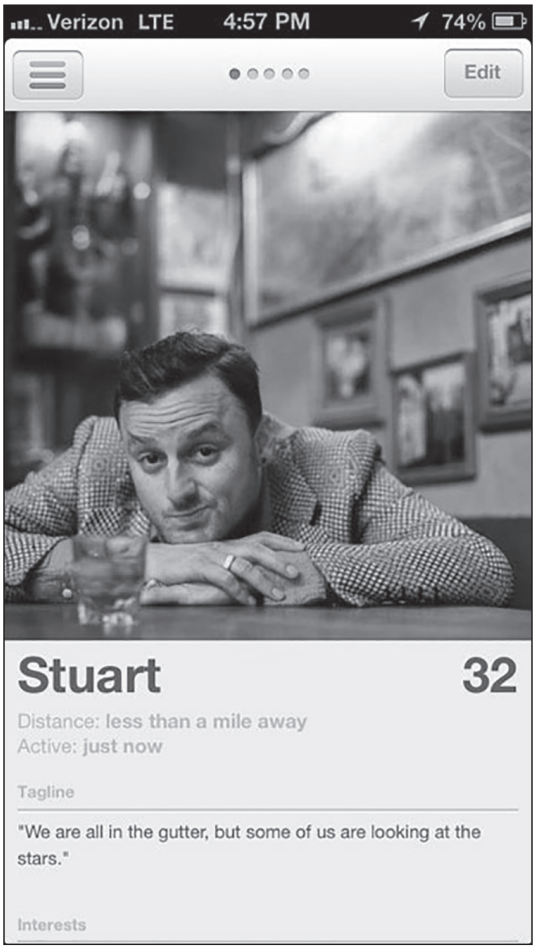

Image 2: Sample Tinder profile of a man.

interested users, allowing matched users to chat ("Tinder (app)"). While this was the intent in its initial creation, Tinder's genre conventions have been subverted by users, resulting in new conventions for the genre (which I'll explain in more depth later). Its common use has evolved into a dating or hookup app, an easy move for users because of Tinder's interface, which includes multiple different ways to communicate. In fact, if you take a look at Tinder, you'll see that it has a variety of genre conventions facilitating its matchmaking capabilities. I've included these images of Tinder profile examples to use while explaining the Tinder interface.

To create a Tinder account and profile, first, you log in with your Facebook profile and the same info is taken from there to create your main Tinder profile. Then, you choose a main picture. It is the first thing other users see when they are matched with you. Tinder uses your Facebook profile picture (and all your Facebook information that is public) as the main information for your profile, but you can change this depending on what you want others to see on your profile while they are swiping. You also have

a 500-character word count to describe what you're looking for on Tinder and who you are. You can add your current work, schooling, and gender as well. The app gives you a wide age range—anywhere between ages 18 to 55 plus—for you to determine the people you want to match with. In researching for this article, I pretended to create a Tinder profile, so for my profile I chose men as my preference. However, you can choose women or both men and women depending on your preferences.

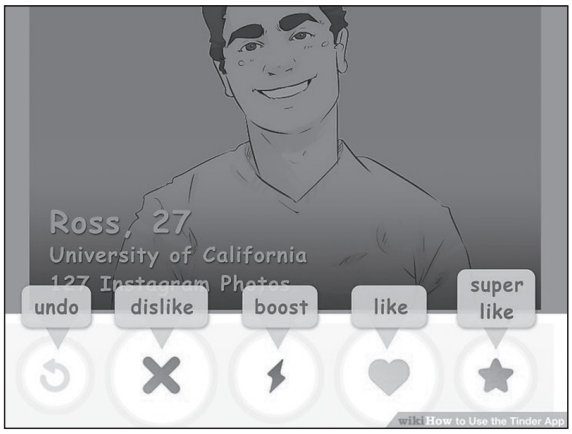

Image 3: Explanation of Tinder buttons. Image from Wikipedia.

You also have the option to turn the "Show me on Tinder" button on or off. This means your profile will be removed from the match options, or "card stack," as Tinder terms it, if turned off. When matched with other users, you can see their activity times, or how long ago someone was using their Tinder app. As you can see in the examples above, there is also a mile radius feature, which is defaulted to search for matches within 50 miles. However, you can change and adapt this depending on how close or far away you are willing to travel. This requires that you have location services on your phone as well. You can also determine what notifications you would like turned on or off, like most social media apps. As I delved further into my Tinder research on conventions, like the ones I've listed, I realized there is a whole key that tells you what to do when each matched profile is displayed. The buttons and their functions are explained in Image 3 on the right. Tapping the yellow arrow (or white as pictured here) will undo your last swipe. The red X is the dislike button, which users can tap to dislike a profile, or left swipe too. The purple lightning bolt is a boost button, allowing you to boost your profile's visibility for 30 minutes. You can only do this once a month, however. The green heart is the like button, but you can also swipe right to like a profile too. Lastly, there's the Super Like star button, which you can also do by swiping up in a person's profile. You need a Tinder Plus subscription to do this. You only get three free super likes per month, but you can pay anywhere from $2 to $20 for the Tinder Plus upgrade and get unlimited super likes, boost, and the added undo feature. Numerous other enhancements are available if you are willing to pay a small sum for them.

Terminology Rabbit Trail

Now that we've discussed how Tinder works, I want to introduce **CHAT**[1] (**cultural-historical activity theory**) here to help with my analysis. When

we look at how something is **produced**, CHAT can help us break down the method of what goes into creating that genre. The following are a few of the terms referenced in this article. I'm afraid you all might get a little bored with all the definitions in this section, but I appeal to you, as I plunge headlong down the rabbit hole, don't swipe left just yet. So, the following are some CHAT terms we will discuss:

- **Ecology**: Environmental factors (physical/spatial) that can affect the text at all points during its trajectory through the world. Ecology is the atmosphere produced by actions inside the Tinder app. Tinder profiles, their setup, and the way these profiles are utilized are all aspects that affect Tinder's ecology, because they affect the relationships or hookups created therein. In essence, Tinder's ecology impacts what people seeking a significant or fleeting relationship do, dependent upon the app's users, their profile-making decisions, and their responses to other profiles they interact with on Tinder.
- **Reception**: All the ways a text can move around in the world, once it's produced, including people's reactions to the text and what they might do when or after reading it. The members of Tinder produce profiles, which are viewed and responded to in a variety of ways. We want to focus on how a user's receptions are changed by what they see, or by what they do in response to their significant others' profiles. This reception is really what will determine the building of a significant relationship rather than a one-night stand, as we will see.
- **Representation**: All of the thinking (from various people) that goes into how and why the text gets produced. Each Tinder user decided to present themselves in a way that would attract attention for a specific purpose. While most Tinder profiles are rather blunt and risqué, users make specific decisions in their representation. They make these choices either consciously or unconsciously and therefore determine what kind of person is going to look at their profile.

Subverting the Conventions

Tinder's genre subversion blooms out of the soil in which it was planted: the hookup culture we currently live in. Tinder's users have taken this friendship-building mechanism and morphed it into a hookup app. I explained the conventions of Tinder's atmosphere above to show you how the app is truly an environment that creates networks of people, an ecological space in which people make decisions based on split-section actions. This ecology includes

the physical, biological forces that exist beyond the boundaries of any text we are producing (isuwriting.com). The elements that make up the app have also been taken and changed or subverted by those users we are focusing on: users seeking long-term relationships.

The Tinder world gives you unlimited power in deciding who you want to date. Take a minute to think about your own friends. We, the aged 18–30-year-olds, are Tinder's biggest user base, according to Nick Bilton's article, "Tinder, the Fast-Growing Dating App, Taps an Age-Old Truth," published in the *New York Times*. We seek out Tinder, post our best-looking pictures with a few sentences about our interests, and then we swipe. You don't even have to get out of your bed or those flannel pajamas you're wearing to do it. Thus, the basis of Tinder's appeal, and the source of its famous nickname "the hookup app." While the CEOs of Tinder have done their best to distance themselves from the label, hook ups and one-night stands have become an essential part of Tinder's genre **conventions:** the features and elements that make the genre recognizable (isuwriting.com). I guess my question here is … why? Though I'm not going to attempt to answer this or probe the human psyche, keep this question in mind as you continue reading my article.

In college, students are often looking for companionship. I like to think that this is where my interest in this **genre** (which is, according to the ISU Writing Program, "a kind of production that it is possible to identify by understanding the conventions or features that make that production recognizable") stemmed from. Upon my exodus from high school into the wasteland of the collegiate unknown, my friends were all about Tinder. All of them were looking for something more, a guy or girl who could make or break their future lives. And despite us all attending events and classes with hundreds of students, my peers and friends turned to the online world of dating in order to find those special people for themselves.

Why Such a Risqué Topic, Ann?

It was due to my friend that I became aware of the idea that Tinder had genre conventions and that these conventions were being subverted and changed every day. I learned about my friend's boyfriend very late into her freshman year, and, at first, she told me that cafeteria story. I knew that she had been dating this guy for a while (almost half a year), and it took a lot of personal probing to finally get the details. Back then I never questioned the elements of her story, but I started to wonder at the number of people I talked to and

knew who had built significant relationships from Tinder, despite its clear genre conventions perpetuating singular sexual nights between strangers. As I continued my research, I found a significant group of young people whose **reception** (how a text is taken up and used by others, as well as the ways people might use or re-purpose a text) of the Tinder app was different than most. They looked at the environment, and through the way they used the Tinder app itself, they were subverting the ecology of this environment to fit their needs. The relationships were being built, and I wanted to see how that was being accomplished, and to share those stories.

The Cute/Romantic/Juicy Part!!

The following interviews come from people of a variety of genders and sexual orientations. Their relationships are also all different in duration of time. Each question is answered by four Tinder users, and their basic information is in the key below. After each question section, I'm going to summarize how these relationships are broken down through some CHAT terms, so that you can see the breakage of Tinder's genre conventions by these relationships.

Key

Interviewee #1—Straight female, senior in college, dating her boyfriend E for 3 years. Live in close proximity, have had on and off again periods of time, but are mostly on.

Interviewee #2—Straight female, freshman in college, dated her ex G on Tinder for 5 months. Currently attending schools with a big enough distance proximity that dating long distance was not for them. Still very good friends and would pursue something if they lived closer.

Interviewee #3—Straight male, began his relationship of 3 years in undergrad, she is finishing her undergrad, so they are a short distance apart, but close enough to visit every so often, have dated straight through the 3 years.

Interviewee #4—Bisexual female, dated her girlfriend for about 10 months. Currently going to school with a distance proximity which makes long distance not work for them. They are still good friends and talk all the time.

The Interviews

Q: Why did you decide to join Tinder?

1: I guess I joined because all my friends were joining Tinder at the time, and they kind of pressured me into joining too? I only kept my profile for four days after meeting E, though.

2: I had just gotten out of a pretty toxic relationship and was looking to make new friends and meet people to forget him, so I was like, welp, Tinder. I wasn't really looking to meet anyone new romantically and just wanted to forget the other guy.

3: I guess I didn't have any set expectations, I was just trying to meet people. But also, I was in a frat in undergrad when I used Tinder, and so I was seeking a partner to whatever degree that might be.

4: I made a Tinder partially as a joke, but I was still interested in seeking one-night stands, and possibly a relationship if one ended up developing. I used it instead of meeting people in real life because finding other women who like women just … out in the wild is damn near impossible. A lot of times, we *need* to use apps.

So, these individuals decided to join Tinder because they knew that they could find relationships or friendships easily because building these is part of what makes up the genre of Tinder. Some went into it looking for something serious, others because they were bored and lonely. This is where breaking the conventions of Tinder's genre comes in; these people went out of the normal use of Tinder's genre and began to change it in order to fit their specific wants and needs. This subversion occurred once when Tinder changed from being a social media app and became a hook up app, and then changed again when, like my interview subjects, some members started using it to find more significant kinds of relationships. This change in the genre was built through the actions of individual users, who went on the website in order to achieve different ends. Some did use Tinder to hook up, but many people went on looking for something that was ordinarily out of the conventions of the genre.

Q: Did you have any specifications that you set on your profile?

1: I set mine for a distance of the nearest five miles, because I hoped to meet men from [our undergrad university]. When I was swiping, if it didn't look like they were from our school anymore, then I would stop swiping right.

2: I think just my photos attracted guys mainly; you can post up to five and one was a selfie of me wearing these clear glasses and I kept getting

comments from guys that my glasses were adorable. Also, the standard mile radius is set at 50, and you can change it, but I kept mine at 50 since I was a senior in high school when I started using Tinder.

3: Yeah. I didn't want to date someone way younger or way older than me and I didn't want to date anyone in high school. I also set my seeking gender to women.

4: Matches had to be my age, and up to 28-years-old. I also went back and forth between the "only women" and the "men and women" match settings.

From these responses, we see that ecology is directly affecting these four Tinder users. Interviewee 1 set her Tinder settings to limit the group of men she would be interested in, and that changed who could have matched with her and eliminated a big group of men. Ecology affected Interviewee 3 since he eliminated a big group of women, thus taking out lots of match possibilities. The radius feature affects ecology here as well, since the four users changed the settings to fit their needs. Thus, ecology was affected by limiting or expanding the match groups. Similarly, the ecology of some of these people's college friends encouraged them to try out Tinder, something they may never have done had they not been influenced by their college friends or environment.

Q: What made you swipe right on your significant other?

1: I really liked E's profile picture. It was black and white, he looked really good in it and smiled with teeth, which he doesn't often do. And also, he had this picture of him and his pug, and it said in his bio something about how they take on the world together. I thought that was super cute.

2: I saw he Super Liked me, which is a premium feature where you swipe up and it shows up as blue and a star, and this means if the receiver swipes right you automatically match. So, I saw that and thought he was cute from his profile pictures, so I swiped right since I knew we'd match. He had picture of his dog, and I thought he was an attractive and cute person. Plus, we were both Italian, so we related on our similarities with that.

3: What immediately caught my attention was that she was very beautiful. There was also a picture of her walking across a stream in the outdoors, and I liked the outdoors as well so that clicked with me. She was around my age (only a year younger). Her bio was sparse, but it said, "Give me your best cheesy pick up line." And I was like, "Oh, this is my forte, I got this." So, what I sent her was something about how if she were a cheese she would be cheddar, because she looked really sharp. And I said, if you think that's good, you haven't even seen the Gouda ones yet. She thought it was funny, but told

me later that she hadn't even written that as her bio, her friend had, but I definitely wouldn't have messaged her as immediately if she hadn't had that.

4: I swiped right because she looked like a pretty awesome person, and I knew from her bio that we would at least be able to have a conversation. She also had cute pictures, but mainly she described being into witchcraft and we liked a lot of the same TV shows, all of which were winning details in my book.

Both reception and representation come into play here and help us look at how Tinder's genre conventions are being broken by significant relationships. After seeing their significant others' pictures, the viewers' reception changed, because they thought these people were attractive or at least cute. Similarly, some of the women thought that their significant other's pictures with dogs made them more endearing, and this changed the perception from that of hook ups to relationship material. The four interviewees put up pictures of themselves that their partners found appealing. This changed how their respective partners viewed their Tinder profiles (the text). This reception made their partners either swipe right, or super like their profiles.

Representation bleeds into reception here as well. All the interviewees said they liked certain parts of their partner's bios, which represented them in an individual and relatable way based on shared interests or things the both of them enjoyed doing. By then looking at their Tinder bios beyond just physical attraction, the four people's receptions were changed, because of the way in which partners chose to represent themselves. It was different than the typical user who was looking for a one-night stand. Thus, they chose to then swipe right or match with these particular users.

Q: How did you get asked, or plan your first date after matching?

1: He was persistent and was always cracking hilarious jokes, so when we messaged each other, it was this along with his laid-back personality that made me try to make plans with him. Eventually, we were like okay do you want to meet for breakfast tomorrow? And that was the first time we went out officially. I was super nervous, but he was asking all these caring questions, and seemed like he really wanted to know about me. The other guys I had talked with were super pushy and aggressive. They were so extra, haha. I don't know how else to say it? But he wasn't, and that was kind of the clincher there. I liked that.

2: G texted me this long elaborate text that was really strange. It was so weird that I didn't message him until a month later when I was bored and sad about my ex. We started texting and didn't stop for three days straight. He

was super sweet. He acted very interested in what I had to say, and even though we had nothing in common (he was a jock and I, in theater), when I would talk about my interests, he would listen.

3: I first wanted to meet up somewhere public since going to the other person's place gave implications that I didn't want to give out yet. So, I asked her out for coffee cause we had been talking a couple days before going out, since I wanted to talk about things of substance instead of starting points. We met up at this really cool coffee shop on campus near her dorm and began talking. After finding out that we had many similar interests, we left the café together and went to her dorm. S is a big horror fan and, since I had just started it myself, she suggested we watch American Horror Story: Coven. So, we watched a couple episodes but didn't really like it. We turned it off and then went our separate ways.

4: We hung out a few times and were in that weird "talking" stage for a bit, and then kind of agreed that we were dating. Our first date wasn't technically a "date" in the traditional sense. We threw a birthday party for Stevie Nicks and played Jenga. Even though it was a "Tinder Date," the whole evening felt super comfortable.

Although Interviewee 4 said hers was a "Tinder Date," the actual dates were pretty normal and simple. Their comfortable nature appealed to the users, because the typical Tinder users are "so extra," as Interviewee 1 said. Also, the nature of each date was directly responsive to how each user's text was represented. Interviewee 3 and his girlfriend liked coffee, Interviewee 1 and her boyfriend were laid back, Interviewee 4 said her date was comfortable and fun, and Interviewee 2 appreciated her ex's interest. These examples show us how these couples subverted the genre as well because they could have just texted online and never met in real life as Tinder intended. They took the initiative, looked at how their partner talked about (represented) their interests through pictures and the bio, and then created a date that was interesting by doing something the other person also liked.

Q: How do you tell people you met?

1: Well I always felt super ashamed when I had to tell people we met on Tinder, so I told E not to say that when we were telling people. I also still haven't told my mom that we met on Tinder; she thinks we met at our school's cafeteria.

2: Our close friends knew we met on Tinder, and we were still embarrassed about it with them, and knew they wouldn't understand, so we told them that I met G at the animal shelter while I was looking for a kitten.

3: At first, I wasn't sure if we should tell people that we met on Tinder. So, we made up a story that she was in the English building and dropped one of her books, and it happened to be about poetry, so I picked the book up and said I loved poetry and then asked her to go out with me.

4: Our answers did change depending on the people we talked to. Most people knew we met on Tinder, but if we were talking with people who wouldn't really understand what the app was, we would just say we met through mutual friends (which was kind of half-true—we had matched on Tinder and had been talking for a while without meeting up, but our mutual friend ended up getting us to hang out).

I feel like this is one of the most important parts of these interviews. Because of the way users have used Tinder to hook up and changed the original genre of this text, these couples all individually told me that they were in one way or another ashamed of having met on Tinder. This is their reception of their own text, and so each couple interpreted how others' reception would be affected by the knowledge of where their relationship began. Most felt their parents or relatives wouldn't understand how a significant relationship could be built from a text whose genre conventions dictated it for one specific purpose. The couples told people whom they trusted the truth about where their relationship started, which changed how those people viewed Tinder as a text, myself included.

Exiting the App … Er, Article

It is my hope that, after reading this article, you are aware of the ways that genre conventions, especially for flexible tools like Tinder, can alter in significant ways over time. Additionally, I felt that these relationships, which represent very different uses of Tinder, needed to be talked about. In interviewing real-life people who have built significant relationships from Tinder, I got to see how they have broken the conventions of this genre, but I was able to use CHAT to analyze how their and outsiders' reception, representation, and ecology were affected by these unique relationships.

I found these four relationships and built my research off of Tinder's genre conventions, which should, if you understand Tinder's original purpose, be unable to facilitate such a thing. Also, I'm an optimistic and happy person by choice, and looking for the romances, and yes, even the one-night stands, was something that I thought you, my student audience, needed to hear and understand in a positive light. My own understanding of Tinder changed through this article. And I hope it might also have offered

you a chance to see how different platforms and apps can be altered to suit the needs of users.

Works Cited

Allison, 23. *Google Images,* accessed on 21 Nov. 2017. http://www.tinderseduction.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/N64-tagline.jpg.

Bilton, Nick. "Tinder, the Fast-Growing Dating App, Taps an Age-Old Truth." *The New York Times,* 29 Oct. 2014, https://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/30/fashion/tinder-the-fast-growing-dating-app-taps-an-age-old-truth.html. Accessed 9 Oct. 2017.

"Conventions." *ISUwriting.* Illinois State University Program, isuwriting.com/glossary/. Accessed 10 Oct. 2017.

Stuart, 32. *Google Images,* Accessed 21 Nov. 2017. https://cdn-images-1.medium.com/max/1600/0*28ZybI8DSdS7ut5D.png.

"Tinder (app)." *Wikipedia.* en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tinder_(app). Accessed 9 Oct. 2017.

Endnote

[1] *http://isuwriting.com/glossary/.* This link explains the CHAT terms in a more scientific way. My explanations are in reference to writing about Tinder.

Ann Borow graduated with her Bachelor of Science degree in English from the University of Mary in Bismarck, North Dakota in 2016. She is currently pursuing her Master's in English at Illinois State University. Growing up in a large family, reading was Ann's way of escaping the chaos around her. Thus, she threw herself into the different realms of fantasy literature and its diverse worlds. While being a little chaotic and crazy herself, Ann lives life unapologetically, and, in her spare time, loves watching action movies and tv shows with her amazing boyfriend. She lives life by the quote, "We're All Mad Here," and is secretly (or not so secretly) a wild and majestic unicorn.

Insert Caption That Will Make all Your Followers Like Your Picture Here

Jessi Batterman

There's a lot more thought that goes into creating captions on social media platforms than one might realize. In this article, Jessi Batterman explores the processes different people go through to create their captions on social media. The platforms she will be looking at are Facebook, Instagram, and VSCO, and she explores how the unique conventions of each platform affect their respective caption-writing processes.

You're scrolling through Instagram and see Jennifer's post from the bonfire last night. It has been perfectly edited; she definitely used filters from VSCO (which stands for Visual Supply Company, a photo editing application that allows you to easily apply filters to an iPhone photo), not the lame and overused filters provided directly from Instagram. Just when you think her post couldn't be any more perfect, you look to the caption and see her extremely clever play on words. Now you're torn on whether you should like it or not (because you're feeling petty and jealous), but the photo and caption are also so perfect. You end up deciding to like her picture and screenshot the post to save her caption for one of the pictures you'll post in the future.

If you're not an Instagram user, my introduction might seem like a completely foreign language, but if you are on Instagram, you probably know exactly what I'm talking about. My friends and I have all spent way too much time stressing over the perfect caption for our carefully edited Instagram photo. With the prevalence that social media has in our lives today, writing captions for our posts is a relatively new **genre** to be explored. According to the ISU Writing Program, one way to describe genres is as

different types of writing that include different **conventions** (or features), which can vary as they move through and across different types of media. For example, the genre I'm focusing on in this article is social media captions, and the specific platforms I want to look at are Facebook, Instagram, and VSCO. The question I want to ask is, what is the process that goes on when creating a social media caption? Since I'm focusing on the *process* of writing a caption on different social media sites, I'm using the ISU Writing Program's version of **cultural-historical activity theory** (**CHAT**) to examine these captions, as CHAT provides us with a framework for understanding all of the different people, objects, activities, and so on that go into the creation of different texts in different genres. I will look at the different genre conventions of each platform and also look at responses from a survey I conducted to better understand the **activity** that goes on while these captions are created. Activity is the practices that happen as a text is created (Walker 76). Each platform's unique conventions make this process different for the three platforms. From my own research, I've come to see Facebook as a platform that helps users keep their friends constantly updated on what's going on in your life in a simple, straightforward way, and captions on Facebook reflect this by being simple and straightforward. Instagram is more of a way to entertain your followers and show off the best parts of your life, and the captions on Instagram help achieve this. Instagram is a prime example that everything truly does always look better in pictures. VSCO is a platform that isn't as heavily used as the other two, which leads to its users posting more obscure photos with more secretive captions than they normally would on Facebook or Instagram. In fact, according to a 2017 blog post written by Jessica Phillips and published by the Family Online Safety Institute, VSCO is a photo-sharing app that allows users to be more creative with their use of filters, and, because it's a less well-known site, "Teenagers often use it to share their riskier photos."

I also think **ecology** is a major factor that goes into creating a caption. Ecology is defined as "the physical, biological forces that exist beyond the boundaries of any text we are producing," by Joyce Walker in her article, "Just CHATting" in the first edition of the *Grassroots Writing Research Journal* (76). Basically, ecology is a combination of all the outside forces that affect the creation of writing. Factors of ecology that are part of the caption-writing process on social media could be the people who follow you and who are going to see your post, where you physically are while creating your post, or even the communities you are a part of, which is also connected to the term **socialization**. Joyce Walker describes socialization as how people interact while texts are being distributed, produced, and used (76). Once a caption is distributed through social media platforms, people are able to interact with each other through what is written in those captions.

Trust the Process

The genre of writing captions interests me because it's a newer genre that is basically self-taught. It's not like we're taught how to write social media captions in school, but it is a new writing genre most of us face very often. I do have some experience with caption-writing and have written quite a few myself over time.

Unfortunately, when Facebook was in its prime and everyone was making an account, I was still pretty young, and my mom was still very against social media, so I didn't actually end up making my own account until I got to college and felt like it was necessary. I've never actually posted something on Facebook, though. Based on seeing my friend's posts, I think that, if I were to post something on Facebook, it would be a few pictures from an event, and the caption would be just a simple description of what's going on in the pictures or what event they were taken at. My goal on Facebook would just be to inform my friends about everything going on in my life and all that I'm involved in and doing. You can see an example of what this looks like in Image 1.

My experiences with Instagram are very different. I've been using the platform since I was in seventh grade and feel like I'm pretty much an Instagram expert. I start thinking about the pictures I'm going to take and the captions I'm going to use days and weeks in advance. For example, I'm going to a Jason Aldean concert in three weeks, and I'm already planning which song lyrics I want to use for my caption for the picture I know I'm going to take that night. I tend to use song lyrics for captions very often (as seen in Image 2), and I think it's pretty much required to use the artist's lyrics as a caption for a picture from a concert (as seen in Image 3).

Image 1: Photo on my Facebook with the caption, "Class of 2018!"

Along with song lyrics, I also love to quote well-known lines from movies. I think this can tell your followers a little bit about yourself and is usually relatable. My favorite movies are *Ferris*

Image 2: A photo from my Instagram with the caption from Jason Aldean's lyrics, "Girl you got the beat right, killin' in your Levis."

Image 3: My Instagram post with the caption from Zac Brown Band's lyrics, "Ain't it funny how it's the little things in life that mean the most? #zacbrownband."

Image 4: My post with the caption from *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*, "Life moves pretty fast, if you don't stop and look around once in a while you could miss it."

Bueller's Day Off and *La La Land*, and you can see examples in Image 4 and Image 5.

Another type of caption I often use is a creative spin on a basic description of the picture or of the event that the picture was taken at. It's almost a joke about what's going on in the picture. You can see some examples of this idea in Images 6 and 7. In Image 6, the picture's caption says, "Still burnt my tongue on the hot chocolate." The caption is playing off the fact that in the picture I'm blowing on the hot chocolate to try to cool it off, but I ended up still burning my tongue. I think using that as a caption is a little more interesting and creative than, "Hot chocolate at Crete Country Christmas!"

Image 5: My post with the caption,
"City of stars, are you shining just for me?"

Image 6: Instagram photo with the caption,
"Still burnt my tongue on the hot chocolate."

My followers already can already tell I'm drinking a hot chocolate or coffee, and they can already see that I'm in Crete based on the picture's location. The caption in Image 7 states, "We don't know the final score, but we do know that Butler definitely lost." I could've just said, "ISU Football Game!" but I personally think that's a little lame. My followers probably already know I go to Illinois State, and, if not, they can see we're at an ISU game based on our t-shirts. When I use the creative spin approach, my followers now know who the other team was, how the game went, and that we probably didn't stay the entire time. I personally think that's a little more interesting.

Image 7: Instagram photo with the caption,
"We don't know the final score, but we do know
that Butler definitely lost."

I personally think the best captions, and hardest to come up with, are puns

and clever plays on words. They can get a little cheesy and can sometimes be a bit of a stretch, but they're definitely the kind that would convince me to like a post just for the caption. I've given this type of caption a shot a few times, and you can see my best tries below in Images 8 and 9. For Image 8, I knew I was going to be taking a trip to Nashville and to the Grand Ole Opry, so this caption was planned a few days in advance, and the picture was taken for the caption, but that isn't always the case. The picture in Image 9 was taken at my best friend's graduation party, and we were laying in her bed at 2 a.m. when the party was over googling "Hawaiian puns"; that's when we came up with the caption "LuWOW." So, in this case, the caption was created for the picture.

I also have some experience with writing captions on VSCO. I have been consistently posting on my VSCO for probably about a year and a half. Since VSCO is more photography-based and has a smaller audience, I usually use VSCO to post pictures that aren't "Instagram quality" or that are maybe edited a little heavier with harsher filters. Basically, there is a little more freedom on VSCO, and there isn't as much pressure to have the perfect picture where every part of you looks just right. VSCO is a place where you can be a little more real and vulnerable. The pictures you choose don't have to be the best of the best. The captions I use on VSCO are usually either a quote from someone earlier that day, or a short statement that usually stems more from my personal feelings or emotions instead of humor or entertainment, like on Instagram. You can see examples of some of my VSCO posts and captions below in Images 10 and 11.

Image 8: Instagram photo with the caption, "We had a GRAND OLE time."

Image 9: Instagram photo with the caption, "LuWOW."

Image 10: VSCO post with the caption, "What are the odds you jump in?"

Image 11: VSCO post with the caption, "one big clash."

Research, Research, Research

To try to better understand the caption-writing process I had to conduct some research outside of my own antecedent knowledge. First, I looked at other *Grassroots Writing Research Journal* articles from previous editions that had topics that were similar to mine. I studied the vocabulary they used and the formats they set up for their articles. These articles helped guide me in the right direction and helped me create my outline. After studying other articles, I started the research process, which was all primary research. One of my biggest concerns going into this article was my lack of experience and knowledge about Facebook. Even though I wasn't very comfortable with this platform, I knew exactly who I could go to for help: my best friend, Maddie. She's been using Facebook since before we were in middle school and knows all the ins and outs of the platform, and she has definitely watched it change

over time. She helped me understand exactly what people post and the process one goes through to post a picture with a caption on Facebook.

I also conducted a survey about the three different platforms. I asked questions about whether or not the participants use the platforms, if they caption their pictures, and, if they do, how much time they spend on their captions and where the inspiration for their captions come from. I also asked some more specific questions for each of the platforms. I distributed this survey to some of my classmates, and I also tweeted the link on my personal twitter hoping to get responses from some of my friends. The people responding to this survey were mostly, if not all, part of my age group—people who are almost done with high school or people in college. I ended up getting a total of 50 responses, which gave me a broad range of opinions. After gathering all of this research, I felt like I was ready to analyze the caption-writing process for each of the platforms.

Facebook: The Mother of All Social Media Platforms

The first platform I want to explore is Facebook. Like I mentioned earlier, this is the platform I am least familiar with, so I decided to interview my best friend about this platform. First, I asked her about the posting process: what does it involve? She explained to me that to post something you click on "what's on your mind?" so the goal of posts on Facebook is to constantly keep your "friends" updated on what's happening in your life. This makes sense because, when asked in the survey, "where do you find inspiration for Facebook captions?" the majority of people who use Facebook and caption their posts chose the response, "basic description of what is going on in the picture." This makes me think that one goal of captions and descriptions for pictures on Facebook is not so much to entertain your friends, but more to inform them about your life and keep them updated about what's going on in your life. Facebook allows your friends to have a deeper look into your life and see more than just the surface level. So, socialization occurs through Facebook posts. When people are updating their friends about their lives on Facebook they are interacting with each other through their posts and captions. That said, Facebook users have the option to post more than just a few pictures on this platform, so when they post just a single picture the caption is simple, and there isn't much thought put into it. Based on my survey, most people don't spend more than just a few minutes on their captions for Facebook posts. That is, if they even choose to caption their pictures on Facebook; a lot of people responded that they often don't even caption their pictures.

Instagram: Where You Show Off Your Best Self

The second platform I want to look at is Instagram. Instagram is personally my favorite platform out of the three and the one I have the most experience with and feel the most knowledgeable about. Instagram is the platform where people want to entertain their followers and try their hardest to show off their best side. Until recently, you were only able to post one photo at a time so you had to carefully choose your favorite to post. You can post more than one at a time now, but only a few. It's also out of the norm to have more than one post per day or for a specific event, so you have to choose the caption for your single post carefully as well. The results from my survey show that most people claim they spend a few seconds or minutes on their captions, but my survey also showed that there are some people who spend hours on their captions or even plan their captions days in advance, which was not the case for Facebook. My survey showed that people use and post on Instagram more than Facebook as well. I think these two factors show that people have made their Instagram pictures and captions more of a priority. A lot of people even admitted that they do some form of research when creating an Instagram caption, whether it's looking up lyrics, making sure a quote is correct, or even just checking spelling. When asked, "where do you find inspiration for Instagram pictures?" on my survey, most people responded that they use puns or a play on words and humor. I think this stems from the fact that people want to entertain their followers on Instagram, helping them gain as many likes as possible. Most people figure that if their followers don't like their post because of the picture, hopefully they will like it because of the post's caption, because they found it relatable, or because it made them laugh. So, socialization is happening on Instagram too. People often interact as their picture and caption are being produced, such as by getting their friend's opinions before they post. People also interact through likes and comments while their posts are being distributed on the platform. There's even an interaction through the caption because the person posting is sharing a little bit about themselves with the audience.

VSCO: The Secretive Social Media Platform

The last platform I want to discuss is VSCO. This platform is unique for many reasons. First, it isn't as popular as the other two platforms. Fewer people use this platform, so there are fewer people you know looking at your posts. In my experience, most of these users are girls, and I've heard a lot of people call VSCO the "girl's bathroom," not only because most of its users are girls, but also because their posts are often full of hidden secrets.

A lot of times you'll see girls posting pictures on VSCO that you'd never see them post on Facebook or Instagram. I think this is because they think they can get away with these riskier posts on VSCO because not as many people will see it, and the people who will see it are mostly other girls their age. There is no Aunt Pam who, without fail, always comments on your posts on VSCO. Along with these risky and obscure posts usually comes a secretive caption. These captions usually have multiple meanings or have a confusing choice of words. I think the goal of these captions on VSCO is to keep other people wondering and desperately wanting to know what they mean. Below in Images 12 and 13 are two perfect examples of this. Both pictures aren't exactly "Instagram quality." In Image 12 you can't see the girls faces, and in Image 13 you can see there's two frozen yogurts, but you don't know for sure whose they are. I think the goal of these VSCO posts is to keep their friends wondering about what's going on, who's in the pictures, or where they are. You can try to guess by the color of the hair or maybe by the keys

Image 12: VSCO post with the caption, "Oh, it's been a day."

Image 13: VSCO post with the caption, "Houston, we have a problem."

and lanyards, but you don't know the details for sure. The caption in Image 12 says, in quotes, "Oh, it's been a day," leaving friends wondering, who said that? Why has it been a day? What happened? In Image 13 the caption says, "Houston, we have a problem." This also leaves friends wondering, what's the problem?

Second, VSCO doesn't "keep score" like the other genres do; you are notified if someone follows you, or likes or republishes your post, but it doesn't keep count of these interactions, and they aren't visible to the public. I think this helps take some of the pressure off of creating a perfect caption. Because, even though your caption might get you more likes and republishes, you're the only one who will know, and no one else can see how many total interactions you've gained on a post. If a post does end up being successful and gaining a lot of republishes, sometimes the person who posted it will literally count every individual republish and state that as their caption so everyone will know how well their photo has done.

Third, this genre is much more photography-based than socially-based like the other two. Because this platform is very photography-based, it is more socially acceptable to post more than one picture per day or for a specific event, so you have the opportunity to come up with and use many different captions. I think this means that you don't have to take the captions as seriously. Additionally, a lot of people responded in my survey that they don't even caption pictures on VSCO, and I think this could be because a lot of people might adore a photo but won't republish it simply because of its caption. This idea was supported by my survey results too. The socialization that goes on through VSCO is unique. The interaction is different because there isn't any direct communication except through the photo's caption, which, as I noted, can sometimes be vague or confusing. Additionally, VSCO captions are usually more emotional and show a little about how you're feeling, so other users don't necessarily want to repost your emotional caption. Because of that, though, someone republishing your photo can be a major compliment because then your photo with your caption appears on their page and their feed.

Final Thoughts

Social media captions are a unique genre that may not seem very important, but that is actually prevalent in the lives of many of us. The caption-writing process becomes different as it's used on different platforms, and everyone has their own unique process for writing captions and their own unique style of caption writing. The answers to my survey reflect this because there was

a wide range of responses for almost all the questions asked. So, next time you're scrolling through Facebook and see Jennifer's update, her perfectly edited photo, or her "punny" caption on Instagram, or maybe even her obscure photo and secretive caption on VSCO, hopefully you will appreciate the process she went through to create her captions on these platforms.

Works Cited

Phillips, Jessica. "What is VSCO?" *Family Online Safety Institute*, 28 March 2017, https://www.fosi.org/good-digital-parenting/what-vsco/.

Walker, Joyce. "Just CHATting." *Grassroots Writing Research Journal*, vol. 1, 2010, pp. 71–80.

Jessi Batterman is a freshman at Illinois State University majoring in accounting. When she's not stressed about her school work, you can find her hanging out with her friends, buying country concert tickets, or baking chocolate chip cookies.

The Evolution of Note-Taking: Using a SmartPen as a College Student

Maddi Kartcheske

In her article, Maddie Kartcheske studies the conscious and unconscious decisions she's made while using a SmartPen. By analyzing her relationship with socialization and antecedent knowledge, she discovers the pros and cons of operating on autopilot while she takes notes.

Prologue

I'm one of two undergraduate interns in the ISU Writing Program, and one of the things I love most about my job is my coworker, Colleen. She's smart, funny, and has a work ethic like no other. We both have packed schedules, and the only days that we're in the office at the same time are Fridays. One particularly cold Friday in February, Colleen was sitting on the little blue couch in our office that faces my desk. She updated me on our to-do lists as I was researching for this article. Looking up smart devices like the pen I intended to write about, I stumbled across a particularly ridiculous-sounding one, and I asked my coworker if she'd heard of a "smart refrigerator." She said she'd seen a commercial for one, but didn't know much about them. We raced to Google to see what the fuss was about, and Colleen fell in love. She listed all the pros of having a refrigerator that can take pictures of the interior of the fridge, share grocery lists with associated family members, and even play movies.

Even with her extensive explanation, I couldn't fathom how this filled a need that our other devices don't already fill. Instead of using the fridge to

share grocery lists, I wondered why you couldn't just text your family. Instead of playing movies *on your fridge*, why couldn't you just bring your laptop into the kitchen? We went back and forth for way too long before she pointed to my pencil cup on my desk, full of multi-colored pens and highlighters. "Why do you need a SmartPen if you have all of those, then?" she asked.

I didn't have an answer. She was right.

Yes, like the fridge, the SmartPen is cool. I can come up with many ways to validate my purchase, but that doesn't change the fact that I spent hours upon hours working and saving up for a machine that I essentially already had (analog pens and paper). Is it worth the investment? How is this different from the fridge?

In this article, I hope to look at the ways in which a SmartPen, something seemingly trivial and unnecessary, radically changed the frameworks within which I view my notes. First, I'll explain what the SmartPen is at its most basic. Then, I'll explain how it physically altered the way I take notes. Finally, I'll discuss my largest challenge with the pen, developing new habits in order to *use* the pen, and explore reasons these difficulties may persist.

Image 1: My SmartPen.

Why a SmartPen?

The Neo Smartpen N2 is a machine shaped like a pen that holds a ballpoint pen ink cartridge and tracks the ink as it moves along a special paper using a built-in camera. The first time I used the pen, I felt like I was living in the future; it seamlessly transfers the notes I take on a dotted paper to a smart device like a tablet or smart phone.

Using **CHAT** (**cultural-historical activity theory**) to analyze the beginning of my writing process (which, for me, is the selection of materials with which to write), I find that I tend to rely heavily on **production**, the tools and processes I need to produce a piece of writing, and **ecology**, the external forces (typically out of my control) that affect my writing. So, in search of the best tools to write, I saved up for an entire summer in 2017 to purchase the NeoSmart Pen N2, and I fell in love with it instantly. Of all the pens I found online, it's the sleekest and easiest for a student's on-the-go

use. I saw that some pens would need an external sensor to track each pen stroke on *any* paper, but the idea of juggling notes and a sensor in class with every page turn made me nervous. By purchasing a notebook with the appropriate kind of paper, the pen simply records the strokes as you write. This way, I don't have to lug all my notebooks around if and when I need to study or write a paper. No adjustments per page, per notebook, or per day. This was incredibly important to me, because I wanted the shift in my tool usage to be as seamless as possible. I wanted to write with my new pen in the same way that I would write with any other pen. I've had years to practice taking notes and to develop the note-taking strategies that work best for me; because of this **antecedent knowledge**, I didn't want to have to start over and re-learn how to take notes. This pen was perfect for that goal. I could hold it in any direction as I wrote with very few inconsistencies in my digital copy. The only ecological problem I had to worry about was when I reached the bottom of a page: when the camera falls off the paper, so does its recording. Though the ink may still write on the page, the camera can't pick it up. This may seem obvious, but since I was used to being able to write until I ran out of physical paper, it took me a few months to become used to this new stipulation and to turn the page when I still had a few lines left.

Image 2: Close-up of the SmartPen camera.

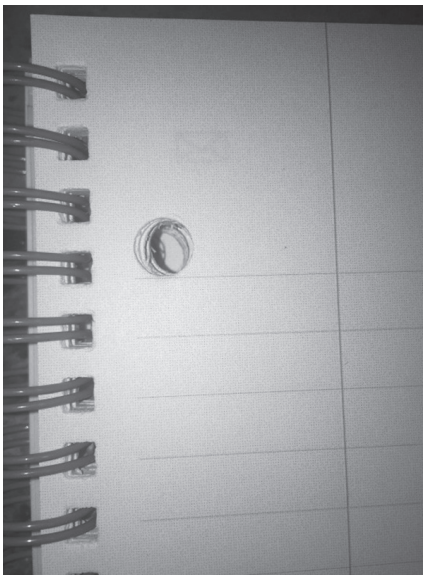

Image 3: Close-up of special paper.

It may seem intimidating that the pen needs special paper to write on, but the notebooks are relatively inexpensive and, instead of having any paper as a tool, special notebooks simply became part of producing my text, just as a special pen did. This involved a slight shift in my production, but not an invasive one. I purchased the college-style notebooks for my classes, which come in a packs of three. The way the camera on the back of the pen can track pen strokes is through tiny dots and lines printed on every page, as you can see in Image 3. This allows for storage of my notes on another device.

I saved up for a new smart device to use as the storage for my pen, an iPad, so I wouldn't have to bog down my phone with the data. This way, all of my digitized notebooks are in one convenient spot, but it doesn't impede on the functionality of my cell phone. Thankfully, my summer job covered these costs, but I think the ability to have it on a phone makes this pen extremely user-friendly and accessible to a large variety of people, which makes it successful in the realm of ecology. On the app, after you've written and synced your notes, you can transcribe your handwriting into text. I'm generally a person who enjoys writing things out on paper before typing them and editing, but it takes a *long* time to go through those steps. From an ecology standpoint, the transcription feature saves me time when re-typing before the editing phase with an accuracy I didn't expect. Even with my terrible handwriting, the app deciphers it well! It's not something I've used many times, but it comes in handy. Other features include a recording option to capture audio using the microphone on your device, different digital ink colors for post-class editing or color-coding, the option to email your notes to others, and more. These were simply bonuses to my pen and things I hope to use in the future, but I haven't added them to my regularly-used list of tools yet.

The final thing I had to worry about, the biggest thing, was battery life. This was the only part of my new note-taking that strayed particularly far from the way I take notes with an "analog" pen. Previously, when I would get up for classes, I just had to throw my notebooks and a pencil case in my bag and go. It's extremely convenient and is a lot more forgiving of forgetfulness. While engaging with a new writing situation, I'm hyper-aware of ecology. The pen has to be charged; the tablet has to be charged; I have to remember to take the pen *and* the tablet off the charger before going to class; I have to turn off the pen after each class so I don't waste battery; I can't have a ton of games and apps on my tablet, which will drain its power (etc., etc., etc…). I've had many class periods where I'm watching the pen's battery life dip below 20%, and I spend more energy on monitoring the numbers than the actual notes I'm taking.

Overall, It has been a surprisingly easy transition, but I find more and more unique qualities as I use the pen. As I alluded to before, its functionality and gadgets are interesting in and of themselves, but I'm consistently intrigued by how my notes have changed, visually.

Computer Files on Paper

I've always been an avid and involved note-taker. My first *Grassroots* article that I wrote in English 101 (Composition as Critical Inquiry) was on note-

taking and doodles, since I carry my planner around everywhere to write down important events or thoughts throughout the day. I love to write, and I love to make pages "my own." In that first article, I was emphatic: note-taking is a form of self-expression and a way of breaking out of an institutionalized space. Though I believe it's important to be creative in every aspect of writing, if I let it go too far, my notes start looking like … well, this:

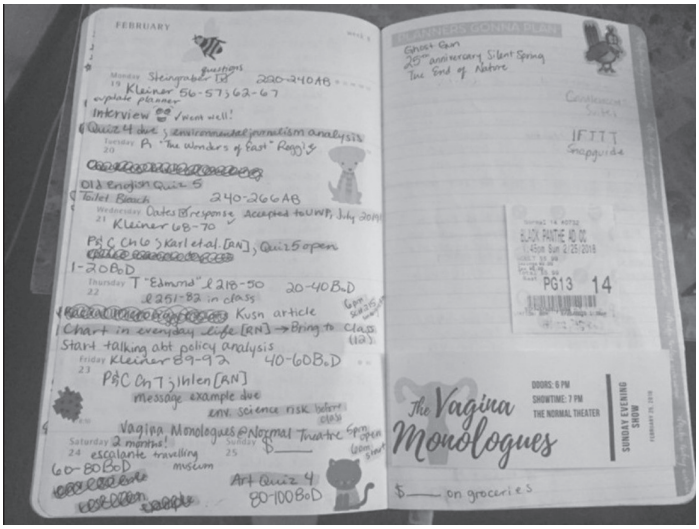

Image 4: My planner, junior year.

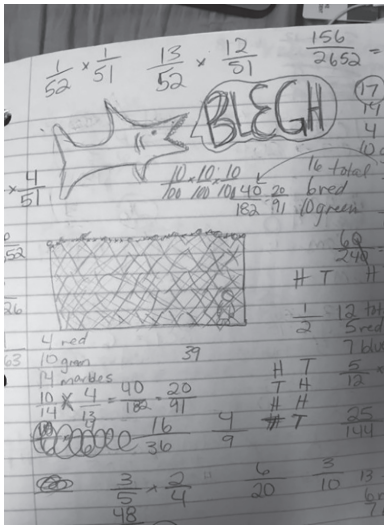

Image 5: Math class, freshman year.

Fun, but chaotic, almost to the point of illegible. Before I introduced a SmartPen into my list of tools, taking notes was the same as writing for fun, meaning it's an extension of myself. And I'm not the only one who feels this way. As Nathan Schmidt says in *The March of the Llamas: Or, How to Be an Effective Note-Taker,* "Doodling introduces disorganization into an otherwise organized system, a sort of mathematical chaos into a neat 1:1 ratio of representation to finished product" (103). But even being a staunch, anti-institutional note-taker, I realized that my notes still started to *look* different. As we can see above, my margins are crammed, the fun drawings or stickers take up valuable page space. Looking at the pages afterwards, your eye is more drawn to the "fun" part than the "valuable" part.

When it comes to my planner in Image 4, I've intentionally constructed it in this way. When I look at a page of boring, black-and-white text, unless I absolutely *have* to use it, I get too bored and overwhelmed. When it comes to studying for a test or reading for a class, there are direct repercussions for not reading the material. In a planner, however, I've been **socialized** to think that a huge amount of plain text means I'll have to suffer through a task to get to my end goal. To put socialization in other words, through my

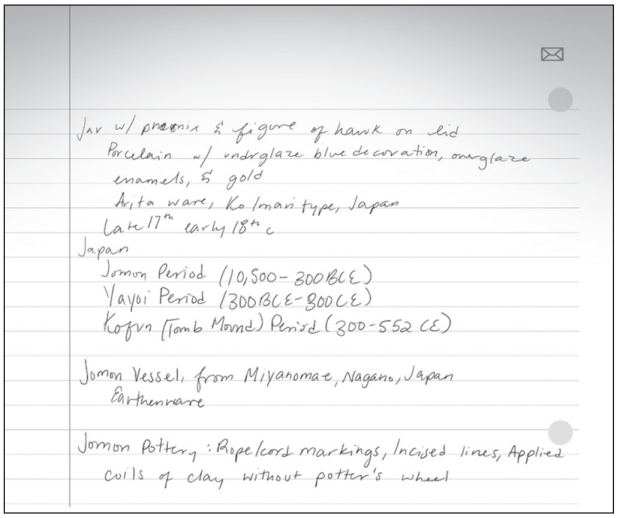

Image 6: Art history notes taken with my SmartPen.

Beliefs and practices in Japan
Shinto
Animistic belief and ancestor worship
Kami – spirit or local deitins in nature
Clans built shrines for their guardian kami
Priests made offerings of grain and fruit

Buddhism from China via Korea
Sponsored by ruling elite
Creation of statues for worship
Building of temples
Imperial patronage and the diffusion of Buddhism

Ise Shrine
Main Shrine, dedicated to the sun goddess Amaterasu
Wooden construction with thatched roof
Granary inspired
Rebuilt every 20 years, next reconstruction in 2033

Horyu-ji [ji means temple in Japanese]
Founded by Empress Suiko and Prince Shotoku
Current buildings end of 7 c

Image 7: Art history notes taken on my computer (when I forgot my pen at home).

experience as a college student and as a writer, I've associated boring blocks of text with a negative reaction. Since there isn't a direct repercussion for not using my planner, I had to come up with new ways to ensure I use it. In my case, I had to make sure it was fun and exciting to look at. Sure, the stickers, colors, and mementos are distracting, but I only have to look at the planner for a few minutes per day to figure out homework and daily tasks.

When it comes to studying, as we can see in Images 4 and 5, legibility and clarity are extremely important. If every page has a fun picture on it, and every time I turn the page my eye is initially drawn to it, I'm wasting the initial moments of each page-turn on something unrelated to schoolwork. It's far easier to get distracted as I study this way because I've literally and physically worked in a distraction once per page.

Now, we can look at how I take notes with the SmartPen in Image 6, notes I took in my general education Art History class. It's shockingly similar to the typed notes in Image 7, notes taken in the same class on a day where I forgot my pen, but not my laptop. We may be tempted to assume that I consciously made the decision to make my notes "less distracting," but I only noticed the change in my note-taking style after beginning research on the article. Instead of deciding to change how I take notes, the use of my tablet showed me ways to make this writing situation more useful to me. To break this down, I'll return to socialization. When we think about using a file on a computer, we assume that all the information we will need will be *in* that file. For example, if we look at an infographic, we assume that all we will need to know will be right there in the image. We can contrast that with a book, which might take hundreds of pages to get to "the point." I think I was

socialized to view my notes in the same way. When I used an analog notebook and pen, I viewed the notebook as a whole and prepared to flip through the entire book while studying. The book was a compilation of the entire course, and I expected to sift through material in order to get to the point. In this framework, part of the course includes my drawings and the extension of myself. I am a person within the space, and, thus, I am a factor within my notes. Now, each page is its own "file" on my tablet. I began actively making sure that each page had vital information on it, sometimes even leaving the last five lines of a page blank in order to start a new topic or bullet point on the next "file." As I take notes with the pen, it automatically syncs to the tablet in real-time, and so I'm constantly aware of the end product.

Since I began subconsciously associating my writing activity with its end product, the digital medium on my tablet, the lens through which I viewed my activity changed. Doodles and extra information became inappropriate for the writing situation I'd created: a digital space on a physical medium. Studying became faster, because I knew that each "fact" or piece of information that I needed would be on a single page that I could flip through easily on my tablet. I spent less time distracted and more time focused on the topic at hand. Taking notes in class became separate from taking notes in my planner, and it's kept me organized. A subconscious differentiation between the two activities has radicalized the way I approach school.

When Socialization and Antecedent Knowledge Go Too Far

But, of course, it isn't too good to be true. I relied heavily on both my antecedent knowledge of note-taking across platforms and the way I was socialized to behave in those platforms, but these two things lead to me giving up on the pen for the second half of my fall semester here.

General education classes are notorious for meaningless, tedious notes. And while I *loved* the discussion aspect of my Politics 101 class, I dreaded the copious amounts of notes from a PowerPoint that we took each class period. As I was writing about Rousseau's opinion on Society and General Will, something unthinkable happened: my pen ran out of ink. Of course, if this had been any other pen, I would've been prepared. That comes with the territory of a physical medium. Only, I'd associated my pen with a *digital* medium, and both the pen itself and my tablet had a battery charge over 90%! I wasn't prepared with more ink cartridges because I was so concerned with the digital framework of the pen. As luck would have it, the pen actually *does* still work without ink—apparently the camera follows the ballpoint ink cartridge more so than the actual black marks on the page—so I managed

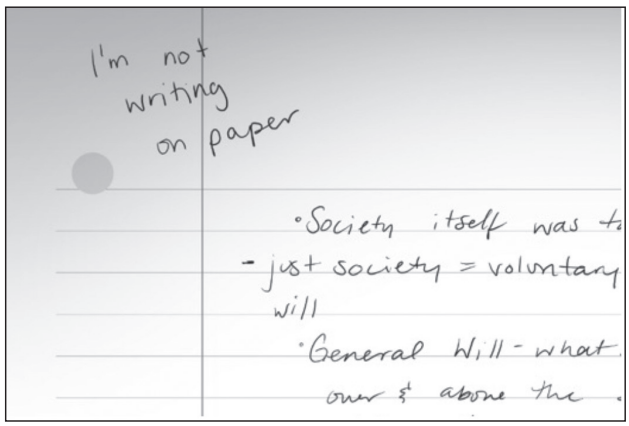

Image 9: When the ink ran out …

to write Image 9 in the corner of my page without ever physically writing on my notebook.

But in class, that doesn't help me very much. Not only would I not be able to read what I was writing without looking at my tablet, but how insane would I look to my neighbor, writing on an entirely blank piece of paper? I finished the rest of that day's work in pencil and, as soon as I got home, I ordered the appropriate inkwell size and color. For the next week or so, I wrote in cheap "analog" pen on my special paper. Since I could sync words to my tablet without ink by writing using an empty cartridge, I'd planned on writing over my analog words in order to stay on track with the course. But, since I was relying on my antecedent knowledge, I never did. Part of note-taking, for me, is that I don't have to look at them again until test-time. But when the box of inkwells arrived at my apartment, I *still* wrote with analog pens. I promised myself to start up again as soon as I traced over all my notes, but the pen sat on my desk, charging and collecting dust for months.

It would've been easy to just re-load my SmartPen, to just pick up as soon as I'd received the package, but I'd re-socialized my notes to the point that it made me *uncomfortable* to start up again. Just as my note pages became files, the copies on my tablet became a kind of archive, and I had a *mountain* of work ahead of me. Instead of getting part of the archive done, instead of picking up as soon as I could, I fell back into old habits and into my antecedent knowledge, my comfort zone, of analog note-taking that I'd developed for over a decade. If the archive wasn't complete, it wasn't worth doing at all, and I could continue taking notes in a more familiar writing situation. I created arbitrary borders for my writing: my pages are files, my notebooks are archives, and my writing situation exists within a semester. Once the fall semester ended, I had no problem picking up the pen again! The period in which I had failed had "ended," and I could start new.

But, as Shane A. Wood writes in his article on failure in the writing classroom, "If writing is a process, then failing is a large part of succeeding in that process" (66). It has been important for me to understand that, sometimes, something will be incomplete. Sometimes, it will be comfortable to shrink back into your comfort zone, even if it means leaving an expensive piece of technology at home instead of letting it *help* you. Sometimes, it will

be scary to admit defeat. But that doesn't mean it's impossible or that it isn't *worthwhile* to keep progressing and moving forward.

Epilogue

This seemingly useless piece of technology has taught me a lot about how I approach writing. I'm adaptable to new situations and often make the most of trans-media writing situations. It's also taught me that to constrict myself within arbitrary boundaries does me more harm than good. And, it proves that changing one's writing activity isn't as easy as it seems. We rely on our antecedent knowledge more than we think we do, and, when faced with a new and intimidating challenge, we're likely to fall back on it. And if one can find *all that* in a SmartPen, who's to say that a SmartFridge wouldn't have the same effect?

Works Cited

Schmidt, Nathan. "The March of the Llamas: Or, How to Be an Effective Note-Taker." *Grassroots Writing Research Journal,* vol. 7, no. 1, Fall 2016. pp. 99–109.

Wood, Shane A. "Atychiphobia, Failure, Genre, and Vulnerability Inside and Outside the Writing Classroom." *Grassroots Writing Research Journal,* vol. 8, no. 1, Fall 2017. pp. 63–72.

Maddi Kartcheske is a second-semester junior here at Illinois State University studying creative writing and minoring in civic engagement and responsibility. She's enjoying her second and final year as the Writing Program co-intern, and she couldn't be more proud of what she and Colleen Keefe have accomplished this year with the help of the WPLT. When she graduates, she'll be travelling with Up With People (Cast B, 2019!), and she's excited to start making a difference outside of her community!

Constructing a Little Free Library and Building Literary Citizenship

Courtney Cox

Drowning in extra copies of her campus literary journal, Courtney Cox found a solution to connect her work as a writer and editor with the intended audience of her campus journal. Through the implementation of PCHAT, she examines how Little Free Libraries serve as a complex activity system that can help foster community-based literacies and improve literary citizenship.

I pass them by on my walk to campus, when I drive through town completing errands, and when I least expect them, such as at the zoo, local coffee shops, and alongside the trailhead as I finish a late summer hike. Little Free Libraries seem to pop up in the strangest of places, and despite their prominence, I cannot resist peering into each one I pass. Inside, I will find a lending library filled with books of all kinds, texts that are mine for the taking. When I unlatch the handle, creak open the doors, and browse through the books inside, I'm reminded of the transformative potential of words, of the valuable time I could spend losing myself within the chapters of these free texts. Most days, I close the doors with a resigned sigh, continue my walk to my office, and page through the seemingly endless reading I've been given to complete.

The presence of Little Free Libraries is relatively new. Established in 2009, the initial model of the new-fangled generation of lending libraries was dreamed up when a man from Wisconsin built a miniature replica of a one-room schoolhouse in honor of his mother, a passionate teacher and reader. Quickly, a non-profit organization to foster this idea was developed, and the

Image 1: A residential Little Library that's located in Normal, IL.

trend spread. By 2012, there were more than 2,500 Little Free Libraries (littlefreelibrary.org). The mission statement of the non-profit organization has remained true to its origins; it reads: "Little Free Library is a nonprofit organization that inspires a love of reading, builds community, and sparks creativity by fostering neighborhood book exchanges around the world" (littlefreelibrary.org). In October 2015, Little Free Library was awarded the Literacy Award from the Library of Congress, a designation that honors organizations that have made a significant contribution to innovate nationwide literacy efforts. The last count in 2016 revealed that there are more than 50,000 registered Little Free Libraries throughout all 50 states and in over 70 countries. Little Free Libraries continue to emerge as spaces where community literacy can thrive, where access to texts is unhindered (littlefreelibrary.org).

As an English student and instructor, I'm thrilled by this access to texts and by the concerted effort to make evident that reading and writing matter in the world. Little Free Libraries provide a space where writing can be shared and savored. They're a visual reminder that books matter, that words have power, that the pages within have something vital to share with any reader who may pass by the library. When we examine how physical places act rhetorically (meaning how they persuade us to behave or not behave in certain ways), we can see the ways that the features around us fit into our understanding of our complex **literate activities**. When we use our rhetorical lenses to examine the places where composing becomes complicated, we realize that literate activities are all of the practices, routines, and processes surrounding writing, language, and communication.

When I was working on my Master's degree in Publishing, I spearheaded the installation of a Little Free Library on my campus. Our campus publication, which we spent months laboring over, accompanied a long tradition of community disengagement. Regardless of the number of flyers we posted, announcements we shared, or books we placed around campus, we struggled with student engagement. I voiced my disappointment to a friend outside of the department who had been attending the university as an undergraduate. At the end of my rant, she hesitated, "Wait … we have

a campus literary journal? That's actually really cool. I had no idea." Endless copies filled the supply office of the English department, with journals spanning through the entire 40-year history of the publication. Not only was this a fire hazard, but it contributed to an increasing sense of apathy among the editorial staff. What was the use of our publication if we were the only ones who read it?

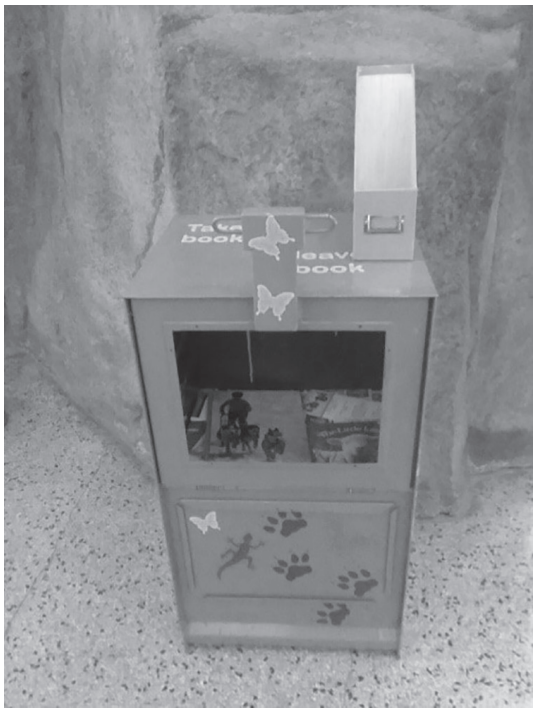

Image 2: A Little Library from Miller Park Zoo in Normal, IL.

As the managing editor, I was distraught that my effort was futile, but also that the creative work of my fellow students was going unnoticed. I racked my brain for a way we could share the books, reach beyond our insular circle of English students, and maybe even encourage those outside the department to begin their journeys as creative writers. While on a walk a few days later, I saw my first Little Free Library. I was immediately impressed by what they represented: an open-access space where books could be exchanged. With a free book in hand, it occurred to me that this sidewalk fixture was more accessible than my campus's imposing brick library. Rather than boring texts students are forced to study, the books from the Little Free Library were there to be enjoyed. By the end of my walk, I'd already begun a scheme to bring a Little Free Library to my campus to help foster greater engagement and pride in the literary community there. With this goal in mind, an **activity system** began to unfold before me.

The ISU Writing Program uses concepts based in **cultural-historical activity theory** (**CHAT**) to provide a framework for understanding literate activities as they exist and interact with the complex world around us. Literate practices can have far-reaching trajectories, and ISU's version of pedagogical (or teaching) CHAT (or PCHAT) provides us with a complex lens to examine the broad impact of words in the world. Rather than thinking of our interactions and the texts we encounter as closed systems, impenetrable to outside forces, PCHAT envisions aspects of our existence as influenced by and shaping features of our literate activities. Oftentimes our literate practices are intersectional and overlapping, so with PCHAT as a guiding framework, we can trace the complicated network of people, objects, spaces, tools, and texts that contributed to my goal of bringing a Little Free Library to campus. In order to examine the negotiations that accompany

Image 3: A Little Library located inside a local Bloomington, IL business.

literate activity, I direct our critical thinking to considering the activity system I travelled through to establish the Little Free Library. An activity system encompasses all of the people, places, objects, and so on that interact to achieve a goal. In this case, the activity system of constructing the Little Free Library as a place of literate activity is complicated because it examines both the library as a space and also the texts that are contained within that space.

Once I presented my half-baked idea of bringing a Little Free Library to campus to the rest of the editorial team, I sprang into action. Our faculty mentor offered enormous support in asking his father to build our library based on the dimensions that we found online. I scheduled meetings with administrators around campus with the goal of finding an ideal place to put our Little Free Library. Once the meetings were scheduled, I secured permission and fostered engagement within my community to delegate tasks among us. This was an unprecedented endeavor on my campus, and since the stakes were personally high for me, they became increasingly complicated and muddled.

Through the lens of PCHAT, **production** includes the tools and practices that contribute to literate activity. In the production of the literary journals, we are restrained by different sociohistorical ideas about what a literary journal is, by assumptions about the materiality of a literary journal, and by the nature of literary journals as collaborative efforts. The journal's production is a tradition on campus with a 40-year publication history. This shapes how the text is presented, what sorts of writing it includes, writing that is, potentially, negatively shaped by the practice of disengagement that pervaded my campus literary community. In order to produce a place where the journal could be successfully distributed to students, we had to take these factors into consideration. Constructing the Little Free Library was complicated because of the various stakeholders involved in it and the distinct roles those stakeholders played in the process of building the library. Each member of the team, especially members of the editorial staff and our faculty mentor, had a distinct view of our audience and of how we could

successfully catch their attention with our Little Library.

Image 4: A residential Little Library in Bloomington, IL repurposed from a newspaper stand.

Our library materials were donated and assembled with the help of our faculty mentor, who volunteered the help of his father in constructing our book box. When building the library, they consulted an established building plan for Little Free Libraries. This included the dimensions for the library, as well as the designations for building materials and design elements of the presentation. These features of production affect the way that writers can expect users to engage with the space and also affect how users are invited to the literate activity of taking a book from the library. By standardizing the form of the Little Free Library with those that are already present in my community, users are guided to interact with the library in certain ways based on their existing expectations of what a lending library is and does. The standardized design of the libraries that we consulted for our own library allowed users to draw upon their antecedent knowledge, or what they already know about lending libraries, and also provided users with context clues for how the library should be used and how students could interact with the Little Free Library. Yet, after the library was placed on campus, we personalized the box so that it was welcoming to students. We accomplished this by affixing signage to the library clearly explaining its purpose and use and by drawing attention to the library itself by painting it a subtle but eye-catching blue. Not only is blue my favorite color, but it also directs students to the presence of the lending library, inviting them to take a book if they so choose.

Production is always embedded in the **ecology** of a literate activity. Ecology is the biological and environmental features that serve as the background to the textual production. The particular ecosystem of my campus is that of a community with a lack-luster sense of literary citizenship. In addition to the obstacle of students' unawareness of my literary journal's presence, my campus was one with few communal spaces where students could gather because the majority of the students, myself included, are commuters.

In spite of its counterculture to the mainstream campus culture, however, I was certain that there were students such as myself who could build a dedication and enthusiasm for writing. In order to reach these students on campus, the placement of the Little Free Library was crucial. Since most of the staff also lived off-campus, we conducted research into campus ecology to determine what placement of the library would be most effective. We considered spaces in residence halls, in communal spaces in academic buildings, and nooks within the library, but ultimately decided upon a location within the campus food court. This was a space where students congregated during meals and could also gather in their free time. In addition to the space as a communal feeding area, it also provided a space where students could watch television on the several mounted screens positioned conveniently between the campus bookstore and an upperclassman dormitory. In considering the role of the campus community in contributing to the success or failure of the Little Free Library, the location that we selected was important in reaching the students in a space where they'd be receptive to taking a book and spending time within its pages. I met with representatives from the library, residence halls, and campus facilities to determine a place to mount the Little Free Library upon its completion. Ultimately, we found an empty wall under one of the television screens. This not only put the lending library within eyeshot of the students, but also positioned the texts in a space where students were spending time recreationally.

In selecting where to place our Little Free Library, the decision also had implications concerning the **distribution** of the journals and how they could help revive our campus literary community. Within the frame of PCHAT, distribution considers how a text reaches its audience. This term focuses on where a text goes and who it reaches. In considering how best to distribute our journal, we used our **antecedent knowledge** of campus to try to figure out how to invite students to take our journals. For instance, if we had placed our lending library closer to the campus library, this might have invited confusion over how these texts were to be used. This could have interfered with how students used and returned university texts. In order to fulfill the needs of our lending library and distribute the texts within our community, the placement of the Little Free Library needed to communicate that students and visitors are invited to open the doors and search through the books that are placed inside. Distribution involves not only filling the shelves with texts, but also inviting students to take a book and read it as their own. In this way, the position of the library and how it was presented also contributed to the success of our distribution.

With my lead as managing editor, I relied on the **socialization** of the rest of the staff and my support system around the university to help with

the development of our own Little Free Library. Socialization considers how the interactions between texts and practices transform those practices. The decisions that we made regarding the lending library sent off a flurry of socialized activity. This included spreading the word with my team, telling students I knew outside of the English department of my goals with spearheading the developing of our own Little Free Library, talking to on-campus students about the places where they would be most likely to borrow books from the lending library, and posting about our developments on social media to keep others in the loop with our process. The final socialization was the ultimate goal of the project: to present a fixture on campus that could serve as an active literary hub for students. The Little Free Library on campus provided a space where students could gain access to the texts, but also enter into the wider literary community.

The outcomes of the Little Free Library on campus intersect with **reception**, which is how a text is taken up, used, and re-purposed by readers. After filling the library with books, within a few days, we noticed that books began to empty from the unit. The following year, we had a much larger editorial staff, one that included perspectives outside of the English department. Additionally, for the first time in recent journal history, we also received visual art submissions. With these submissions, we were

Image 6: My Facebook post announcing our campus Little Library.

Image 7: The final Little Library ready to distribute literary journals to students.

able to produce a text with the potential of engaging students through **multimodality**, which describes how certain texts use multiple different modes, like visual or audio or alphabetic modes, to communicate a message. This also sparked additional investment by our graphic collaborators, awareness of our literary contributions by university administrators, and a heightened morale boost for existing editors who were disappointed about the previous reach of the journal.

As a result of the Little Free Library and the activity systems that were developed through its introduction on campus, we saw a growth of the literary community and found an outlet where we could share our hard work so that the journal began to *do* something in the world. Rather than re-purposing the text itself, a shift in the distribution of the text presented an opportunity for students to become more aware of the potential for their voices to be heard and shared within our campus community.

Works Cited

"The History of Little Free Library." *Little Free Library*, 2017, littlefreelibrary .org/ourhistory/. Accessed 15 Sept. 2017.

Courtney Cox is a PhD student in rhetoric and composition at Illinois State University. In her fleeting memories of free time, Courtney liked to ride her bike, cook eccentric recipes, and scheme to obtain free books.

The Sound of Perseverance

Matt Schering

Is pop culture equipped to deal with complex social issues? In this article, Matt Schering examines an unlikely source, heavy metal lyrics, to see if pop culture is capable of discussing the issues important to our daily lives, issues including drug abuse and animal rights.

When I mention the genre of heavy metal, what is the first thing that comes to your mind? Do you think about neon spandex? Gratuitous amounts of hairspray? Satanic worship? A cacophonous combination of caustic chords? Lyrics attuned to the complex social issues that dominate our society? Wait, what was that one about social issues again? If any of those examples sound erroneous, it is probably the last one, but to me, that is the definitive aspect of this genre. It can be easy to write off heavy metal as the sound of white noise, but, like so much in this world, music is often overlooked for the unique way it can address issues we face every single day. With the rise of **multimedia** in writing, it seems worthwhile for teachers and students alike to examine the merits of media, music, and, in this case, metal. Writing is a pragmatic act, and when writing you generally want to connect with an audience. Can music provide a bridge to engagement? By using some aspects of cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT), what can we learn about the merits of metal music? In this article, I will examine the perceived value of heavy metal music, so put on your favorite Slayer shirt and throw up the devil horns as we jump into the mosh pit of heavy metal and writing!

Disclaimer

I will be the first to admit, I may be a bit biased on the merits of heavy metal lyrics, as I am a headbanger (an endearing term for a fan of heavy metal) myself. Additionally, I was also a member of a thrash metal band, Dark Entropy (see Image 1 below).

In my band, I was one of the primary lyricists, and I composed lyrics dealing with topics common to the metal canon: the futility of war, political and economic corruption, literature, and complex contemporary social issues. With my lyrics, I always try to write about events that are important to my life and to other people in this world since connecting with your audience is critical to your success as a writer. Using topics about real life issues to inspire lyrics is quite common in heavy metal music, and a great example of these sorts of lyrics can be found in Death, the appropriately named death metal band.

Death frontman Chuck Schuldiner, affectionately known as "The Godfather of Death Metal" and "The Philosopher of Metal," wrote a great deal about real life issues until his untimely passing from brain cancer in 2001. Schuldiner's mother, reflecting on his music, commented, "his lyrics came from his feelings about life happenings … and things he felt was wrong in the world. He was a very concerned person for the wronged people in this world, and it saddened him" (Scapelliti n.p.). Writing about real things that happen in the world is an important concept for not only metal, but also any creative outlet. People need to feel a connection to your creation, and Schuldiner knew that and used it as a basis for his lyrics. Be it a thrash metal song, billion-dollar movie, or a paper for your English class, people need to see why your topic matters to you (and to them). For me, music is a great

Image 1: Dark Entropy rocking the Star Bar. Photo by David Star.

outlet for discussing the issues we all face, and there are some scholars that see this value as well.

Let's CHAT about Metal Lyrics

Before we start a circle pit (a common genre of mosh pit where people, fittingly, run around in a circle) and blast some Annihilator for the benefit of society, let's take a moment to think about how media and song lyrics can operate in an academic sense. Over the next few pages, I am going to break down two songs to show off some of the depth of heavy metal lyrics. Being a huge metal fan, I am aware of the value in these lyrics, but will others see the value in these verses? To examine this form of media effectively, I'll be using a version of **cultural-historical activity theory** (**CHAT**) developed by the ISU Writing Program as an approach to understanding writing that looks at the whole process of creating and sharing texts, whether those texts are print-based or based in some other media. From the perspective of a teacher or a student, CHAT can help us understand the importance of lyrics and give us some ideas on how to present lyrics to an audience as well.

The Merits of Megadeth

For this article, I have decided to examine two songs: "Poison Was the Cure" from Megadeth's 1990 platinum-selling masterpiece, *Rust in Peace*, and another Megadeth song, "Countdown to Extinction" from the 1992 double-platinum album of the same name. The lyrics to both of these songs are included in appendices to this article so that you can follow along. These songs are packed with poignant lyrics carefully crafted to not only tell a story, but also to provide people with an opportunity to reflect on pressing social issues. While some may think metal lyrics fall into a stereotype of finding glory in gore, or satanic supplication, the genre actually typically asks us to pause to reflect on complex social issues, like drug abuse and animal rights.

Methodon't

This is certainly the case with the song "Poison Was the Cure," which was written in response to Dave Mustaine's (Megadeth's founder and primary songwriter) drug abuse. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Mustaine went to rehab several times to try to kick his addictions only to find himself addicted to methadone, a drug used to assist people battling opioid addiction. His

lyrics provide a description of his struggle to find sobriety. Using CHAT to examine these lyrics, we can see how others can take up this song in ways that ask them to consider the seriousness of opioid abuse and addiction as a social issue.

In the CHAT model, **reception** "deals with how a text is taken up and used by others" (Walker 75). With Megadeth's lyrics, and the lyrics of other songs, we can think about how they can be used by others for their own **uptake,** meaning their ability to "take up" or learn new things. In the following Megadeth songs, the lyrics are penned not only for entertainment purposes, but also to allow others to receive the lyrics in a way that gets them to contemplate these complex issues and form their own thoughts and opinions about these issues. While you can still enjoy the music without paying close attention to the lyrics, doing so can deprive you of chances for self-reflection.

"Poison Was the Cure" is a song full of raw emotion, and it tells a genuine story about someone living through withdrawals and addiction. The lyrics begin with the lines, "I miss the warm embrace I felt/The first time you touched me/Secure and safe in open arms/I should've know you'd crush me" (Appendix B, lines 1–4), providing a cautionary tale to others. Mustaine shows how drugs once provided him with a pleasure, but now he is haunted by their presence. Mustaine continues with the lines, "Serpent swims free in my blood/Dragon sleeping in my veins/Jackyl speaking with my tongue/ Roach egg laying in my brains" (lines 9–12) to further illustrate the dangers of abuse, as Mustaine shows how he is no longer in control of his life. The song here is not looking to glamorize addiction, or draw pity for abusers, but, rather, Mustaine seeks to provide a real glimpse of the agony of addiction. There is no glamor; there is no pleasure; there is only the depressing reality of waiting for the next fix.

Reception and Uptake

People may turn to music to find solace in their lives and to see issues they are facing told in familiar pattern and represented in music; Mustaine's work here would resonate, as it is full of authenticity from an actual addict. Given the prevalence of opioid addiction in the United States, this song is as relevant as ever and can be useful to raise awareness about the dangers of addiction and to provide solace to the afflicted. The sincere and brutal honesty of addiction is depicted in the lyrics here, which can be quite useful to many people suffering from addiction and to those that are concerned for the safety of others.

Animal Rights

While drug abuse is a nearly ubiquitous topic, the second song we will examine, "Countdown to Extinction," deals with something we may not think about often, if at all: trophy hunting. Though this topic doesn't come up as often as addiction, it still conjures up intense emotions. In recent years, Walter Palmer, "a dentist from Minnesota is said to have paid $54,000 to bow-hunt Cecil, a . . . black-maned, 13-year-old lion who lived in Zimbabwe's Hwange National Park . . ." (Actman n.p.), causing an uproar on social media. Additionally, Donald Trump's children, Donald Jr. and Eric, have crafted an ignoble reputation for participating in pseudo safaris, as you can see in Image 2. Megadeth's "Countdown to Extinction" discusses the impact of these types of hunts on certain species and shows the dangers of inviting this type of activity. "Countdown to Extinction," in addition to being a commercial success, also won the 1992 Doris Day Award for showcasing issues related to animal rights. The audience's uptake is such that they reflect on the ethics of big-game hunting and trophy hunting. For some, the chance to hunt and kill wild game may seem exciting, but is this really sport? What challenge is there when prey is merely presented to you, and you hold a supreme technological advantage? As Mustaine sings, "Technology the battle's unfair/You pull the hammer without a care/Squeeze the trigger that makes you man/Pseudo safari the hunt is canned" (Appendix C, lines 5–8). Mustaine clearly intends for his audience to consider some of the problems with hunting in their reception of the song. Yes, in some cases hunting is necessary, but is that true in every case? This unique philosophical dilemma manifests itself in the cases of Palmer and the Trump boys, and Mustaine's lyrics give us an opportunity to consider this subject, a subject that may not cross our minds otherwise.

Image 2: Donald Jr. and Eric Trump kill a leopard.

In addition to raising questions about canned hunts, "Countdown to Extinction" also draws our attention to sustainability. The chorus of the song states, "All are gone all but one/No contest nowhere to run/No more left only one/This is it, this is the countdown to extinction" (lines 10–13), and the lyrics here give the audience another chance for reflection as they receive the song. Though some may say these lyrics are somewhat vague, such vagueness

offers a chance for many types of uptake. These kinds of lyrics can invite many questions with more than one answer and can incite many different actions on the part of the audience. For example, a person might read or hear these lyrics and think, what impact am I having on the world? With our desire to hunt, kill, and tame the world, are we starting the countdown to extinction? Should we shift our focus to more renewable forms of food? All of these questions, and many more, are sparked from these lyrics and may lead to variety in responses and generate valuable discussion about the issue of trophy hunting.

As a heavy metal fan, I am privy to much of this information, and my **antecedent knowledge** (which is what I already knew about the genre) of the musical genre helps me appreciate the value of these songs. But, does this translate to the uninitiated? Can people see past unflattering stereotypes of thrash metal icons like Megadeth and give their lyrics a chance? This is where CHAT can once again be useful.

The Ecology of Thrash

The musical genre of heavy metal is very unique, and the music itself exists in a very unique ecology. **Ecology** is an aspect of CHAT that asks us to consider "the physical, biological forces that exist beyond the boundaries of any text we are producing" (Walker 76). Heavy metal is a very powerful genre of music, and the jarring nature of its sounds might prevent its audience from seeing the merit of the arguments within its lyrics. While writing these

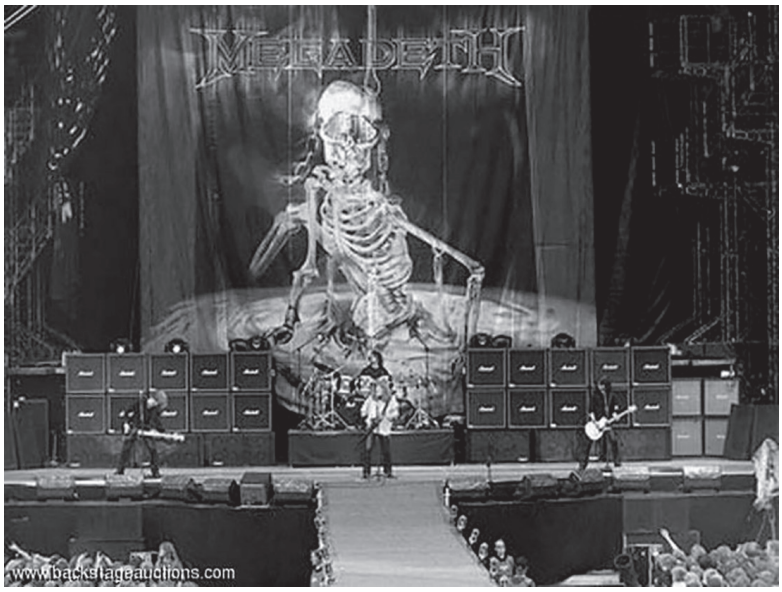

Image 3: Megadeth on stage at a concert for their tour *The World Needs a Hero.*

songs, Megadeth was picturing an ecology of a heavy metal concert. Now, I don't know if you've ever been to a heavy metal concert, but things can get a bit loud to say the least. Articulation can be difficult when you have a wall of speaker cabinets at your back, as you can see in see Image 3, which is from a Megadeth concert in 2001.

I own the same model of speaker cabinet you see in Image 3, a Marshall 1960 series, which contains four separate 75-watt speakers. Just one of these speakers provides more than enough volume to play any small or medium-sized venue (or to cause some serious hearing damage). So, when heavy metal fans are seeing a band live, more of an emphasis may be placed on a kinetic connection between the band and the audience through performing and through moshing, or headbanging. In this environment, the articulation of lyrics is still important, but can easily be lost in the wall of sound the other instruments produce. As such, the ecology of our source material might not necessarily match the needs we may have as authors.

The ecology of metal can be quite a shock to those new to the genre. While writing this article, I interviewed two colleagues of mine, Charles Woods and Shelby Ragan, both PhD students at Illinois State University. In the previous pages, I discussed the merits of heavy metal music, but I am a die-hard headbanger. I have spent many hours listening to this genre, writing my own songs, and contemplating the meaning of metal lyrics. With all this experience, I see the value of metal, but will that translate to others? I set off to find out.

Charles Woods, a PhD student in rhetoric and composition and my first interviewee, isn't a huge metal fan. When asked about his genres of choice, he mentioned listening to 1960's rock and country. I asked Woods to listen to "Poison Was the Cure" to see what his uptake of the song would be. The song itself can be difficult for those new to this genre of metal, as it is incredibly fast. This song is played at around 163 beats per minute (bpm), with a double-time feel for the guitars, making the song sound like it is played at over 300 bpm; if you don't have a music background, that's about 5 notes a second. Given the sheer speed of sounds here, it can be difficult to understand the song, and that was reflected in Woods's response to "Poison Was the Cure." I asked Woods what he thought of the lyrics, and he was unable to decipher most of the lines in the song, stating, "I couldn't understand most of it," which is something I expected. With rapid drumming and lightning-paced legato guitar riffing, there is a lot going on aurally. Through listening to the song, Woods's uptake was limited, and he saw much more value in the song after reading the lyrics. In fact, after reading the lyrics, Woods stated, "Instead of it being something inflicting harm, it seems like someone is inflicting harm

on themselves with drug abuse or something like that." So, Woods was able to take up the important topics discussed here, albeit through the lyrics as opposed to the performance. Given the nature of the performance of the song, I expected some may have trouble taking up the lyrics, even when reading them, but Woods was able to find a lot of value for potential addicts in this music, showing that there just may be some value to metal lyrics.

In addition to Woods, I also interviewed Shelby Ragan, a children's literature student at ISU. Ragan, like Woods, did not typically listen to heavy metal. She "grew up listening to country music … and top 40 kind of stuff, and some indy-folksy pop." These genres are about as far away from thrash as you can get. For this interview, I had her listen to "Countdown to Extinction," and her uptake was much more similar to what I think Mustaine originally intended for his lyrics. This gets at another important CHAT term, **representation**, which, according to the ISU Writing Program, describes how writers think about and envision their piece before they write it (and during the writing process as their ideas and, therefore, their writing change). Mustaine's representation included his desire to talk about important social issues and to communicate with an audience in a way that would prompt them to critically reflect on those issues.

Now, "Countdown to Extinction" is much less cacophonous than the "Poison Was the Cure." Countdown has a much more subdued vocal style. As Ragan herself puts it, "It was far less screamy than I thought it would be." In addition to the clearer vocals, the first verse is delivered over clean guitars (guitars without distortion), and a simple bass line; this song also clocks in at a much more manageable 128 bpm. With this song, a much stronger emphasis is placed on vocal melody and lyrics. This more palatable style changed the audience's uptake, as evident by Ragan's answers, and also tells us a little about Mustaine's representation and how he did potentially care about getting his lyrics across to the audience; he cared enough to put the emphasis on the lyrics in this song and not on a fast beat or distorted sound. Thus, Ragan was able to pick up on the key issues presented in the song. Ragan states she thought the lyrics centered on the theme of "hunting as a sport but taken to the extreme," which is the precise message Mustaine was discussing here. Ragan elaborates more when she deciphers the lyrics, "When you have super rich people collect game and put them in an enclosed space … you weren't hunting, you were just killing," which matches up well when Mustaine sings, "Killed a few feet from the cages/Point blank, you're so courageous" (lines 20–21).

With the songs here, uptake was varied, but still present. Woods was able to pick up some of the key themes of "Poison Was the Cure" after reading

the lyrics, while Ragan was able to grasp the concepts of "Countdown to Extinction" from listening to the song alone. These interviews show that people unfamiliar with metal can still take up the key themes in these songs, but the differences in their uptake (reading lyrics vs. listening to music) leads us to one final aspect of CHAT, **production**. Production "deals with the means through which a text is produced. This includes both tools. . .and practices" (Walker 74). With writing, we typically imagine tools like a word processor, or a pen and paper, but Megadeth doesn't follow that path. Megadeth is looking for a more unique way to express their thoughts, and they make use of distorted guitars and double bass drumming in addition to using the written word. While these may be a bit unconventional, the music they compose helps set the mood for their topics. I mention production here specifically because the sheer shock of the aural power of this music can leave people a bit confused. With metal in general, most people can be taken aback by the power, speed, and mass amounts of distortion. So, production, and the tools used to make these songs, needs to be accounted for; what does a massive wall of guitars, bass, drums, and vocals do to an audience? For my interviews, I didn't really discuss the nature of the songs before playing them. Had I discussed the style, speed, and techniques used in these songs, my audience may have been in a better position to understand the lyrical themes.

Conclusion

So, where does my exploration of metal and its lyrics leave us? Well, as a fan of heavy metal, I will forever appreciate complex amalgamation of guitar solos, double bass drums, and raspy vocals. But, what's more, this genre of music offers a lot of unique critiques of social situations and can be a great way to provide inspiration for writers looking for potential topics. While many may ignore the value of this genre of music, I hope the preceding pages provided some insight not just on the merits of heavy metal, but also on how representation, ecology, production, uptake, and reception are complex processes that affect one another. Mustaine's representation with regard to his songs may have included a desire for the audience to take up those songs in certain ways, but the ecology of the performance of those songs and the audience's consequent reception of those songs may have changed the audience's uptake. So, I think this shows us that it's important to consider what media you use when composing any sort of text, as that media shapes how the audience receives the text, how they take up the text, and what they then do with that text. I believe the sort of uptake that Mustaine likely envisioned is possible with metal music; however, when invoking

heavy metal, or any form of media, it is important to think about audience, production, and ecology. How you present your media can significantly affect audience uptake.

Works Cited

"Donald Jr. and Eric Trump Kill a Leopard." New York Daily News, 2015, http://www.nydailynews.com/news/politics/pics-rump-adult-sons-hunting-game-africa-resurface-article-1.2308107.

Megadeth. "Countdown to Extinction." *Countdown to Extinction*, Capitol, 1992.

Megadeth. "Poison Was the Cure." *Rust in Peace*, Capitol, 1990.

Ragan, Shelby. Personal interview. October 13, 2017.

Starr, David. "*Rocking the Star Bar*." Chicago Ridge, Il, 2015.

Walker, Joyce. "Just CHATting." *Grassroots Writing Research Journal*, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 71–80.

"The World Needs a Hero Tour." 2001. http://www.goldminemag.com/articles/guitars-memorabilia-headline-megadeth-countdown-extinction-auction.

Woods, Charles. Personal Interview. October 9, 2017.

Appendix A: Interview Questions

- What kinds of music do you typically listen to?
- When I mention the genre of heavy metal, what comes to mind?
- Based on the name of the band, and title of the song, what do you think it is about?
- After listening to the song, what are your initial reactions?
- What did you think of the lyrics?
- After reading the lyrics, did your perception of the song, or its value, change?
- Do you feel music is a viable way to address complex rhetorical situations?

Appendix B: Poison Was the Cure

Music & Lyrics by Dave Mustaine

I miss the warm embrace I felt
First time you touched me
Secure and safe in open arms
I should have known you'd crush me

A snake you were when we met
I loved you anyway
Pulling out your poisoned fangs
The venom never goes away

Serpent swims free in my blood
Dragons sleeping in my veins
Jackyl speaking with tongue
Roach egg-laying in my brain

Stalked beneath your shadow
Sleepwalking to the gallows
I'm the sun that beats your brow in
Till I finally threw the towel in

Never knowing if I'd wake up in a
Whirlpool got redundant
My brain was just some driftwood
In a cesspool I became dead
From a rock star to a desk fool
Was my destiny someone said
Life's a tide pool
Taste the waters life's abundant
Taste me

Appendix C: Countdown to Extinction

Music & Lyrics by Dave Mustaine, Marty Friedman, David Ellefson, and Nick Menza

Endangered species, caged in fright
Shot in cold blood, no chance to fight
The stage is set, now pay the price
An ego boost, don't think twice
Technology, the battle's unfair
You pull the hammer without a care

Squeeze the trigger that makes you 'Man'
Pseudo-safari, the hunt is canned
The hunt is canned

All are gone, all but one
No contest, nowhere to run
No more left, only one
This is it; this is the Countdown to Extinction

Tell the truth, you wouldn't dare
The skin and trophy, oh so rare
Silence speaks louder than words
Ignore the guilt and take your turn
Liars' anagram is "lairs"
Man you were never even there
Killed a few feet from the cages
Point blank, you're so courageous
So courageous

All are gone, all but one
No contest, nowhere to run
No more left, only one
This is it; this is the Countdown to Extinction

"One hour from now
Another species of life form
Will disappear off the face of the planet
Forever, and the rate is accelerating"

All are gone, all but one
No contest, nowhere to run
No more left, only one
This is it; this is the Countdown to Extinction

Matt Schering is an English studies PhD student at Illinois State University focusing on rhetoric and composition. Prior to attending to ISU, Matt taught composition at several community colleges, while also playing in the thrash metal band Dark Entropy. The highlight of Matt's tenure in Dark Entropy came when the band opened for master watchmaker and ex-Anthrax lead guitarist, Dan Spitz.

How to Learn a New Language on Your Own

Pouya Vakili

In this paper, Pouya Vakili introduces readers to the concepts of translingualism and contrastive rhetoric and their relationship with language learning. Additionally, he also discusses some important language learning theories and shares his own experience of learning English.

Introduction

Have you ever been to a place where you didn't know the language? Have you ever wanted to learn a language, but thought the process is too difficult, or thought that it takes too long? Have you thought, "What's the best way to learn a language? What's the quickest way to learn new words? How can I sound like a native speaker? Do I really have to study grammar?" These are some of the questions that may pop up in someone's first thoughts when they embark on learning a new language. Learning a new language is always challenging, frustrating, and sometimes just plain difficult, so you might try to avoid it. Maybe you've looked for the quickest and easiest way to learn the language, but felt the language was just "impossible." Well, I'm here to tell you that it's not impossible, and if we focus on translingualism and then take a look at different sciences, theories, and learning styles, we can figure out different methods of learning a new language. After all, despite the difficulties of learning new languages, bi- or multi-language acquisition is rapidly growing in popularity around the world, and bilingualism is

becoming a highly-desired resume addition. Furthermore, when we learn a new language, unintentionally, we are exposed to a new culture and a new life. We discover rhetorical differences in our writing and even speaking. These can be two major challenges that language learners need to deal with when learning a new language, but they're not impossible! I know this from my own experience learning English as a foreign language, an experience I'll share a little about.

Some Important Terms

First, though, you might be thinking, "What's translingualism?" Well, **translingual** phenomena are words and other aspects of language that are relevant in more than one language. Thus "translingual" may mean "existing in multiple languages" or "having the same meaning in many languages," and sometimes "containing words of multiple languages" or "operating between different languages." **Translingualism**, then, is simply the existence of translingually relevant aspects of language. Now, that said, there's another important concept you should know, and that's **contrastive rhetoric**. Contrastive rhetoric is an area of research in second language acquisition that identifies problems in composition (or writing) encountered by second language writers and, by referring to the rhetorical strategies of the writer's first language, attempts to explain them. Contrastive rhetoric maintains that language and writing are cultural phenomena. As a direct consequence, each language has rhetorical conventions unique to it. Furthermore, the linguistic and rhetorical conventions of a writer's first language interfere with his/her writing in the second language (Connor, 2003).

Therefore, we need to learn a new language *and* its associated culture (either in speaking or writing) if we want to write with that language successfully. But, how can we achieve this? This is, undoubtedly, one of the main questions we all, with no exception, have asked ourselves or others in one stage of our learning or another. But what we need to remember is that "there is no best method for learning a language" (Pennycook, 1989). I know, you're disappointed. You were probably thinking I had the key, the secret, to successfully learning a new language. I don't, but I am going to introduce you to some different methods for learning a new language that I have learned both from my study of linguistics and from my own experience about learning English as a foreign language. Hopefully, sharing some of these methods with you will help you start to think about the complexity of language and of writing in the world.

An Overview of Some Important Language Learning Methods

When we step into any language center, language teachers are probably using different methods and giving conflicting advice. Some suggest learning vocabulary by memorizing word lists; others suggest learning vocabulary by reading in the language you are trying to learn. Some concentrate on the pronunciation first; others suggest improving pronunciation as you go along. Some prefer giving students grammar drills; others recommend not to open a textbook for grammar practices. They all probably claim that their method works best, and that they know it works best because they have been using it for quite a long time and everyone has been satisfied. Here, I don't want to either prove or disprove their claim; I want to introduce their methods and others without passing any judgments, again, to demonstrate that language and learning language is complex.

Throughout the history of language learning, a lot of theories and methods have been proposed, and each of them has been built on the premises of the previous one(s) in one way or another. Because I think it's important to think about language learning more completely, I'd like to offer a summary of some of these methods in the genre of foreign language instruction and then describe its sub-genres. Now, one of the earliest methods of language instruction in the world was the grammar-translation method. This method was introduced in the 1500s (Chastain, 1988). At that time, Latin and Greek were the two classic languages of the world, and people tried to learn either of them. In this method, the main task for students was to translate sentences from these languages into English, so they had to memorize large lists of words. Conversation was considered the last skill in this method. Therefore, the learners might have been able to master the skills of reading and translating, but other skills were easily ignored. It was a method that really focused on writing, not on speaking.

The next theoretical method was called the direct method. Unlike grammar-translation, the main focus of this method was communication. The teacher and learners had to use the target language in the class. This method tried to imitate the process of language learning by a child, so it aimed at speaking and simply disregarded writing and reading. But this meant that students' vocabulary knowledge was often unsatisfactory, and they had very little knowledge of grammar (Chastain, 1988). So, to remedy this, the audio-lingual method was introduced in 1945, and even now it is used by some language centers around the world. This method mainly relies on speaking and grammar. Repetition is one of the favorite activities in this method. You can still find some examples of this method in nearby institutes. The teacher says a phrase and then students repeat after the

teacher. Then, the teacher changes a word in this phrase, and the students do the same and it goes on and on (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). But some scholars claim that this method just considers the form of the language and neglects the meaning (Chastain, 1988). But, the last and most current method that I would like to introduce here is communicative language teaching (CLT). The main focus of this method is "interaction" between the teacher and students. The texts students learn from are authentic, and nearly all the skills of language are addressed with more or less emphasis. Now, some linguists criticize this method for not having strong theories. However, you can find many books designed based on this method (Ridge, 1992).

So Why Does this Matter? My Own Experience in Learning English as a Foreign Language

You may be wondering why I'm bothering telling you about these methods. Well, I used different aspects of each to help me learn English, and translingualism played a big role in my success. But before sharing my own experience in learning English, I would like to briefly write about the educational system in Iran, since it might help explain my experiences and my learning.

In Iran, schooling is divided into three parts: elementary (five years), middle school (three years), and high school (four years). English is introduced at the second grade of middle school on. The method that is used doesn't seem to be very effective, since most students still don't seem to know much English (even after taking five years of classes!) unless they have taken additional courses in other private language schools. I wasn't an exception, and I didn't do anything for my English, and, eventually, I ended up a twenty-two-year-old with no knowledge of English. But then something changed my life totally, and I think it launched me on the path of my passion. I have a cousin who is as old as I am with the same name, but the difference is that he was born and raised in England, while I was born and raised in Iran. He was going to pay a visit to Iran, and due to a sense of jealousy I had for him, I decided to learn English. But how?

I had come from a family with low financial capabilities; my father was a simple clerk who could hardly afford us (me, my sister, and my three brothers), and my mother was a housewife, so it was terribly difficult to ask my father to support me financially for a language school.

So, I decided to learn English on my own.

In order to start my practice, I bought two books: one vocabulary book and one conversation book. My plan was to study English for as long as I could in a day. I started with vocabulary. I read one unit (introducing 12 words with examples), then tried to memorize the sample sentences. In this way, I was learning both vocabulary and sentences. In the meantime, I started memorizing the conversations in the book. The book, as far as I remember, had situational conversations. I tried to memorize them. But then I realized I was not moving fast enough because my cousin's travel was approaching, so I decided to bring English into my everyday life. I memorized the sentences plus the words in my vocabulary book, I tried to memorize the sentences in my conversation book, and I was repeating them throughout the day. For vocabulary practice, every night I read one unit, but before that I reviewed the previous units. For example, when I was supposed to start unit 10, I first reviewed 1–9 and then started unit 10. So, it was taking me a long time to practice English every day, but I was learning it! The other activity I had was making sentences with those new words and substituting them with the words or phrases in my conversation and vocabulary book. I tried to integrate English into my life; I was getting accustomed to thinking in English. For example, whenever I wanted to do something or say something to someone, I first repeated that in my head in English, then I did it or said it.

Along with these activities, I had been doing something really hard, but interesting. I had bought a small pocketbook titled "100 short stories, by 100 English writers." I started translating the book into Farsi (Persian). That was a real burden for me; the words, structures, concepts and etc. But it helped me think translingually. I got a better sense of the similarities and differences between my native language and English from translating those stories, and I then translated one page every day (while reviewing that translation the next day before proceeding) until I sent one of the translations to a children's magazine and got my first translation publication. I was gaining confidence; I could think in English, I was able to speak about my daily activities in English, and I had gotten published.

My next interesting activity was oral translation (i.e. interpretation). At that time, Iran was in a war with Iraq, and we didn't have a lot of facilities; our TV just had two local channels which started programs at 6 a.m. until midnight, and all the programs were in Farsi. How could I manipulate this situation? Well, I started watching TV (any programs: movies, documentaries, news, etc.) and then translating the sentences I heard in my mind. As they were speaking Farsi, I was speaking English in my mind. If I had a problem with words, I wrote it down and later checked it in a dictionary. I also did this for the phrases, and I became a professional interpreter and translator from Farsi into English. Once again, switching between the two languages and

having to think across those languages and think translingually was helping me master English.

But how about my grammar? As I was memorizing words and sentences, I was doing a kind of discovery learning. I was trying to understand why this sentence is like this, and I tested that in as many other sentences as I could. For example, in one context, I saw that a verb ending in "ing" followed the word "enjoy." I paid attention to this feature in another context, and I saw it again, so I realized that whenever I use "enjoy" I need to add "ing" to the following verb (example: I enjoy danc*ing*). I did this every time I saw something odd about grammar, and it ended up significantly helping me.

Ultimately, this whole process took me almost two months, but during this time I was really involved in English, and I had brought English into my life in every moment. So, I can say it might have been a sitting-practicing time for two to three hours a day, but I was actually practicing English throughout the time I was awake. Then, since I had a part-time job, I could save some money for my English class. So, I decided to register in one English intensive course to practice mainly my speaking. After taking a written exam and having an interview with the head of the institute, to my great surprise, the head asked me, "Would you like to teach here?" That was something I had never expected.

And there you have it. That is how my English journey started. Once I started teaching, since I had practiced and learned English on my own, I tried to inject this idea into my class and encourage my own students to bring English into their life in order to help them identify different translingual phenomena that could help them really learn English. What I did was to train my students to learn *how to learn*. Rather than prescribing some methods for them, I just traveled with them on this trial and error path to see what worked for them. Then we together tried to improve that method. Then, after two years teaching English in different language schools in Tehran, I had won a good reputation. Many institutes sent me letters of invitation and asked me to cooperate with them, but I was just tired of teaching, as I had been working 14-hour days. It wasn't just teaching; I had been working in three companies as an interpreter and in two translation institutes. As you see, the methods I had been practicing had helped me a lot, and my jobs were directly related to the way I learned English. Therefore, I decided to give myself a break. Yes! I decided to go to university to learn this language (which had become my life) academically. After taking the university entrance exam, I was accepted in one of the good universities in Iran. I will never forget the first week of my university. All of the instructors were my colleagues in language schools I was teaching at, and I was the supervisor of two of my own university instructors. That was awesome!

My Writing Experience in English

While speaking English and translating my native language into English were both important to helping me learn English, so was writing my own ideas in English. When I learned English as explained earlier, I started to write again. But this time, I started to write in English because I didn't want others to read what I was writing. It was like escaping from others. In fact, I used English as a kind of defensive method to express my thoughts and emotions. I sometimes wrote letters to my parents in English (I kept them for myself, as I knew they couldn't read them). The more I wrote, the more I enjoyed writing. When I was admitted to university, I got more interested in writing, and I started reading and analyzing written pieces. I was a junior student when I realized there were some major cultural differences (and not similarities) between Persian and English writings (we hadn't studied that before), and I asked one of my instructors about that, and the answer was, "You will learn about it in the masters; don't be in such a rush." I wasn't satisfied with this answer at all, so I again started my own studies and research on this issue, and here is where I became familiar with translingualism and contrastive rhetoric. I found a lot of differences that English speaking people have in their thinking from people who speak other languages, and that was truly what I was looking for and really what I had been focusing on the entire time I was learning English on my own. I learned that what appears in writing or speaking is directly a reflection of how people in that culture view the world. For instance, English speakers tend to think in a linear fashion, or in a straight, direct line, so as you read their pieces or talk to them, you can find this straightforwardness. However, many Asian cultures think in a circular way, so when you read their writings at the end you should ask yourself "So what?"[1] These have been great breakthroughs for me, as I could see the differences, and I was trying to generalize these into world problems. I actually think the main reason for most world conflicts is the misunderstanding of each other's language in general and culture in particular. If we understand that people in one language think differently from us with another language, then we can nurture respect and esteem between us.

The Ending …

So where does this leave us? Well, I hope that I have shown you that you don't need to be worried about learning a new language; it just requires us to think about what method works best for us and, regardless of the method(s) you use, to think about translingualism and find those similarities and differences in your language and the language you want to learn. Remember, there is no

single method in the world to claim as the best one. We need to practice trial and error for a while and then decide on which method is ours. Mistakes are always there; we shouldn't be worried about making mistakes at first, as these mistakes may also help us learn. I know all of this from my own experience, and I hope sharing that experience has helped you learn about the value of translingualism and helped you come to better appreciate the complexity of language. For me, after all of this work learning English, I realized it was time to think about my own career in the future more seriously. I decided to teach at university, and for this purpose I had to continue my education to the highest degree I could. After finishing my Bachelor's degree, I was immediately accepted in a Master's program in the best university in human science in Iran. My overall rank was 7 in the country, and that meant a lot to me and to my family, too. So, I know first-hand the value of focusing on translingualism when learning a new language.

References

Chastain, Kenneth (1988). *Developing Second Language Skills.* 3rd ed. San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

Connor, Ulla (2003). *Exploring the Dynamics of Second Language Writing* (pp. 218–43).

Gu, Jiazu (2008). Rhetorical clash between Chinese and westerners. *Intercultural Communication Studies* XVII: 4 (pp. 44–51).

Kellman, Steven (2000). *The Translingual Imagination*. University of Nebraska Press.

Larsen-Freeman, Diane (2000). "An attitude of inquiry." *Journal of Imagination in Language Learning* 5:18–21.

Pennycook, A. (1989). The Concept of Method, Interested Knowledge, and the Politics of Language Teaching. *TESOL QUARTERLY,* Vol. 23, No. 4, December 1989.

Endnote

[1] Some scholars think that this difference is due, at least in part, to the influence of Greco-Roman rhetoric in Western cultures contributing to the linearity of English language structures, while the influence of Confucian thinking contributes to the more circular structures of language style in Asian cultures (Gu, 2008).

Pouya Vakili is a PhD student in TESOL and linguistics. He loves travelling and driving, and he has driven almost all the way across the U.S. In his spare time, he enjoys watching movies and TV series. "The Usual Suspects" and "The Sopranos" are his favorite.

Multimodal Writing in a Second Language: CHAT and Duolingo

Claudia Sánchez

In this article, Claudia Sánchez explores the notion of multimodality by means of a multimodal tool: Duolingo. With the help of CHAT, she gives an insight to the world of language learning and writing in a second language.

Intro to My World: Let's Get the Language Party Started!

I remember my English class when I was in high school; it was all fun and games until the day for dictation arrived, and it was once a week. On that day, the teacher would dictate a text and we had to write exactly what she was saying. At first it was chaotic; no one would get the right words, grades were low, and we were all worried about how it would affect our final grades. But then we decided to talk to our teacher. We talked to her about our concerns and how we found it really hard to follow the dictation since sometimes she would include new words. Her solution was simple: she would briefly introduce phonetics (the study of sounds of a language) so we could interpret the transcriptions of words in the dictionary and, therefore, recognize the words and sounds when we heard them. That went on for a few weeks and after that, she suggested that every day for around 10 minutes we should try to open an English dictionary on a random page and just try to pronounce the phonetic transcriptions, maybe even do it online and try to reproduce the audio piece of the pronunciation of the word. I thought this

was really fun and, honestly, it helped tremendously to improve my auditory skills. However, a few years later when I got to college, writing became something very different. It didn't involve dictations or simple exercises in which to identify the subject or right vocabulary word. Instead, we had to take a class on *academic* writing. Yes, you read that right. This writing class consisted of reading academic articles, identifying their thesis statement, considering arguments in favor or against them, and producing our own thesis statements from text excerpts. It was sort of boring and monotonous, but it helped me improve my writing skills for the several papers that I would have to write in the following years.

That said, as someone who has been instructed in and learned several languages (Spanish, Fala, French, Greek, Portuguese and English), writing has always been one of the most challenging skills to acquire when learning another language. When students of a second language are facing the new language, everything related to the four basic skills (writing, listening, speaking, and reading) seems difficult, and composition becomes a true challenge; students not only have to be aware of the vocabulary they use, but also be aware of other variables such as word order, verbal tenses, and formality. After reflecting on this, I began to wonder if there could be some tools out there that would help students tackle messy grammar and difficult vocabulary all at once; and so, I came across Duolingo through one of my friends. I started researching it and became really interested in exploring how Duolingo can help us improve our language skills (writing included) by means of multimodality and to what extent it could be considered an effective tool in language learning. To be able to do this, I explored the notion of multimodality and how the different modes through which it presents information affects language learning while also employing some CHAT terms to better understand how Duolingo works. A very brief CHAT definition so you know what I'm talking about is this: **cultural-historical activity theory.** It is a theory based on Lev Semyonovich Vygotsky's insights into the dynamics of consciousness. Along with Alexei Nikolaevich Leontiev, they both belonged to the school of Russian psychology, and they stated that the history of each person and their social and cultural experience shapes the way they perceive the world. CHAT helps by providing a framework through which we can analyze texts and "deconstruct" them into their most elementary parts and stages. You may ask, "how?" Well, by looking at the historical period and the culture in which it is situated. But you must be wondering, "how does this tie back to Duolingo?" The connection is easy; if we analyze a multimodal tool such as Duolingo by means of CHAT, we may be able to uncover the reasons behind its creation and the way it approaches its audience.

Different Types of Learners: How Do I Learn Best?

Before we get into deeper stuff about my life and my experiences (because that is what this is all about), we should understand that learning, whether it's about language or something else, is a very complex process that can work differently for different people. For example, there are kinesthetic learners (people who find it easier to memorize and understand by using physical movements), visual learners (people who learn by the use of visual stimuli like pictures or video), auditory learners (people who learn through the use of sounds), and reading/writing learners (people who find it easier to learn if there is reading or writing involved). In my case, I realized that visual stimuli, reading, and writing were the best strategies in order to memorize content or, in my case, learn Portuguese. That was another reason why I decided to give Duolingo a chance.

As a last note before we get to Duolingo as a tool, it's important to talk about the traditional classroom setting that we are all used to and what it implies. The issue comes when the instructor of a class has to teach certain material and, at the same time, fulfill the learning necessities of all her students. To do so, she has to make sure that she includes activities that involve most, if not all, of the requirements for the learners listed above. It is the same case for software developers when they need to create software or apps for language learning. They must include a variety of activities that attempt to cover the learning necessities of all the potential consumers.

How do software developers try to do this? By means of multimodality. You are probably wondering, "what the hell is that?" Let me explain: **multimodality** can be understood as combining different ways of communicating such as visual, gestural, spatial, or linguistic. When it comes to multimodal composition, we could understand the term as "works that use more than just words and letters to communicate a thought—they may include audio, video, photographs, drawings—basically, any visual element used to supplement the text in some purposeful way" (VanMaele). Duolingo is a great example of multimodality because it uses alphanumeric text and images to communicate with the audience.

Languages, CHAT, Writing, and … Wait, What?

I know this all may be a lot to process, but bear with me, don't give up just yet. Let's start from the basics so you know where I'm going with this. First I need to explain what it means to be fluent in a language other than our own and how it specifically transfers to writing skills; that way you'll understand

how I managed to improve my own skills in all those languages I mentioned before. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, "fluency" (noun \'flü-ən(t)-sē\) is "the ability to speak easily and smoothly; especially: the ability to speak a foreign language easily and effectively" (Merriam-Webster). Fluency also applies to listening, reading, and writing. Now, one of the hardest things for me when I started learning English back home was understanding the different kinds of writing that I may encounter in the future. There is nothing harder than trying to guess what an audio or someone is saying when you need to write it down, especially when you don't write the same thing you say! English is one of those languages with non-phonemic orthography; this means that words (as compounds of letters) do not always represent the sounds that each letter separately would represent. Instead, the letters within the word merge and produce new and different sounds. For example: the letter 'e' is pronounced /i/ if it stands alone; however, if we use the letter 'e' in the word 'merge' the first 'e' is pronounced /ɜ/ and the second one is not even pronounced. In contrast, Spanish (which is my first language) has 27[1] letters in its alphabet, and each of them represents a specific sound, regardless if they stand alone or in a word; now, this makes things way easier. As I have mentioned before, one of the tools that has been helping me cope with all the complications of languages such as this is Duolingo.

Why Duolingo?

As you can see, being a second language learner is far away from easy, so being able to access tools such as Duolingo can make things waaaaaaay easier. Let me explain a bit what Duolingo is and how I became an avid user. Duolingo is a phone app that was developed by Luis von Ahn and Severin Hacker in 2009 at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh. It relies on multimodality, which is why I thought it would be interesting to examine how it approaches different types of learners, including me. Duolingo seems to be an effective tool for addressing visual learners (since it has pictures associated with words in certain activities), auditory learners (since it includes audio in most of the activities) and reading/writing learners (since that is mostly what you do throughout all the activities); however, kinesthetic learners will have to (hopefully) wait for future updates in Duolingo's activities in order to fully enjoy their potential.

I first discovered the app back in 2013 when one of my friends (who also loves languages) told me about its existence. After doing a bit of research I realized how quickly socialization made Duolingo known around the globe. **Socialization** as understood through CHAT refers to the interactions of

people that were initiated by the creation or reading of the text and the types of language and cultural practices they engage in, as well as the ways that texts can help to shape cultural understandings (Walker 76). Although I was sad Duolingo did not include many languages to learn from Spanish, I was amazed. The languages accessible for Spanish speakers through Duolingo are German, French, Italian, English, Portuguese, and Catalan, and the languages accessible for English speakers include all of the aforementioned languages plus Dutch, Norwegian, Irish, Welsh, Swedish, Greek, and Esperanto. We could say that Duolingo makes an average of 5 language courses available for speakers of a given language; but think about all the possibilities that it presents to you so that you're able to socialize with so many speakers of other languages all over the globe! Anyway, since I wanted to try all the languages available for Spanish speakers that is exactly what I did; I ignored (partially) all the languages available for English speakers, although I could have accessed them or taken the language courses (I actually did access it to get the pictures I will show you in a bit). I started with Portuguese and was a bit skeptical since I had been hearing Portuguese and even speaking it almost my whole life. To my surprise, not only was I not as proficient in Portuguese as I thought I was, but there were also many words from the Brazilian variety of Portuguese that I had no knowledge of.

Although Duolingo is only available for electronic devices like smart phones or tablets, the service could be accessed by anyone who doesn't own any of these devices; for example, Duolingo could even be distributed by local libraries that have computer stations available for the public. According to Wikipedia, Duolingo offers 59 different language courses across 23 languages, meaning that people who speak any of these 23 languages will be able to access some of the 59 language courses available. Furthermore, there are 23 additional courses in development. What I meant by "distributed" a few lines back refers to what CHAT defines as **distribution**: to whom the text is given and where it can be found (Kostecki 82). Going back to Duolingo, this means that it can reach millions and millions of people who may be willing to learn a language, but it currently favors 23 languages. What's more, if Duolingo were distributed in different formats (let's allow ourselves to fantasize a little), such as if it were printed or even made into a podcast, it could become even more attractive to different individuals, even if it's just for pure convenience.

This sort of issue with distribution that we just talked about has a lot to do with the ecology of Duolingo too; CHAT defines **ecology** as referring to the biological and environmental forces that exist and impact many factors of the text (Walker 76). The fact that Duolingo is available for free is a

positive aspect of its ecology that most users take into account when trying to decide if they want it or not. But I believe that if the app were to cost let's say around $4, not as many users would consider downloading it; as a user, I wouldn't pay $4 for an app that has exercises so similar to one another and that can often become boring. Moreover, if the app were to be costly, it would directly affect its distribution, since they wouldn't be able to expand the number of languages available to reach a broader audience if the app itself is not very popular.

So, What Does Duolingo Have to Do with Me and Writing?

The first thing you notice when you start using Duolingo is that writing is involved in most of the activities that need to be completed in the game/app; these activities can resemble "drills" in a way because they are mostly repetitive. However, regardless what kind of learner you are, the activities manage to approach most learning styles. The different kinds of multimodal activities available for each of the languages vary in format, so let's take a look:

1. *Which of these is "…"*: In this activity, the user is presented with different pictures with the Portuguese word under it; the user has to check which picture is the equivalent for the word in their native language, just like this:

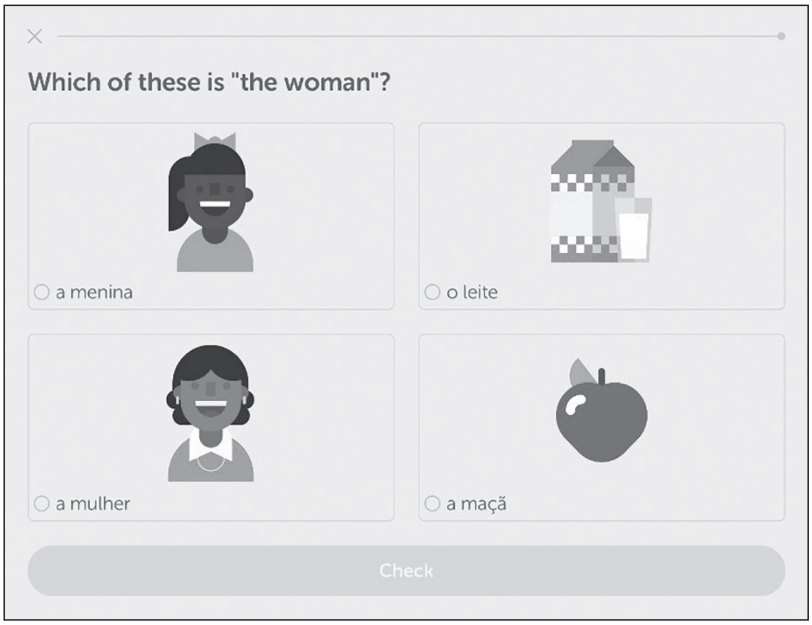

Image 1: Which of these is "…" activity example in Duolingo.

We can see how Duolingo uses this activity to appeal to visual learners as well as reading/writing learners. The first thing the user notices is a picture that they can relate to a concept in their minds they understand; once the concept is recognized, they don't need to go back to their native language to understand it. Instead, they are given the Portuguese word so as to relate concept to written form in the target language without the need to go back to the native language of the user.

2. *What did he or she say?*: The user is presented with a sentence in Portuguese and an audio of the sentence that can be played more than once. The user has to translate the sentence into their native language. Depending on the level, the sentence will be shorter or longer and use more complicated verb tenses or more simple ones. Here is an example:

Image 2: What did he/she say activity example in Duolingo.

Once again, Duolingo manages to effectively engage auditory and visual learners as well as reading/writing learners. While traditionally in regular second language textbooks students are only exposed to a written form of language when completing translation activities, Duolingo uses audio support in order to tackle both recognition of aural cues as well as written form of words.

3. *How do you say… ?*: This activity presents a word in the native language of the user, and they have to select the equivalent in Portuguese from a

selection of three to four words. Look at this example with English and Portuguese:

Image 3: How do you say activity example in Duolingo.

This activity could also be a good example of how Duolingo approaches reading/writing learners; once they memorize the written form of the word, they will automatically recognize the concept.

4. *Translation*: The user is given a sentence in their native language and he or she has to select the correct equivalent in Portuguese from three pre-made sentences (I'm sorry I couldn't find a pic for this one!). It is important to make a note on how much translation Duolingo uses; as a language teacher, I don't know how I feel about it (I don't believe is the most effective way to learn a language). But, nevertheless, it seems to work!

5. *Tap the pairs*: The user is given four words in Portuguese and their native tongue scrambled, and they have to tap on the Portuguese term and their native tongue equivalent for each word. Check it out:

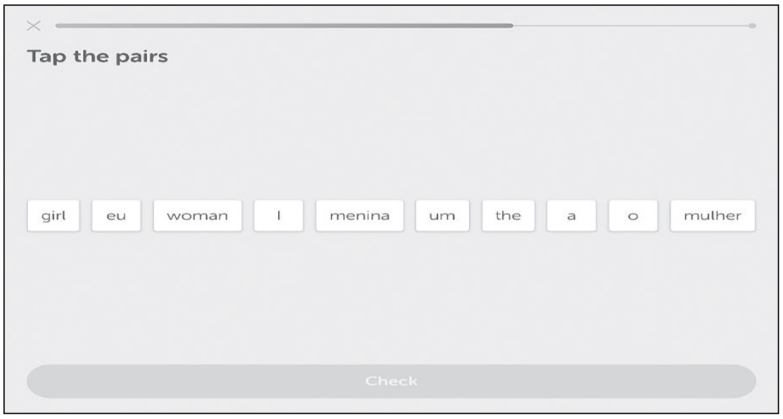

Image 4: Tap the pairs activity example in Duolingo.

Here Duolingo is using word recognition as a way to associate written form with mental representations of words. Reading/writing learners can benefit once more from this type of activity.

6. *Audio*: The user is presented with an audio without written support. The user can play it as many times as needed at a regular speed or at a slower one. They have to write in Portuguese what the audio says, just like this:

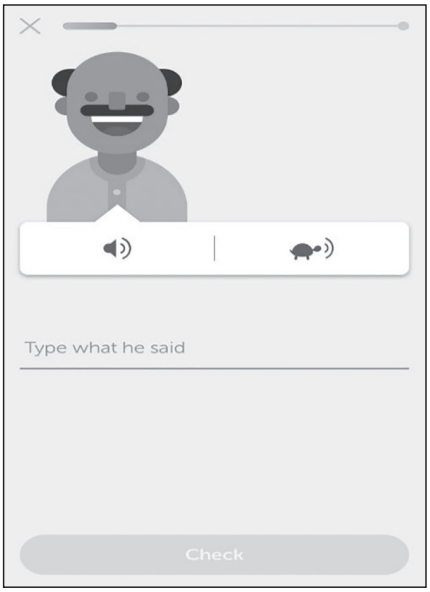

Image 5: Audio activity example in Duolingo.

As you can see, most of these activities do a good job of trying to approach most kind of learners with activities that go from recognition of aural cues to written form of the target language as well as production of the latter. However, reading/writing learners seem to be the most benefited in Duolingo activities.

So how exactly does Duolingo approach learners in general? I found it really interesting that Duolingo follows the education model of "one to one," meaning the app teaches the learner continuously while adapting to the learner; at the same time it also perfects a method for teaching that specific student by using the data collected from other learners that already took the modules. With this app, not only will you learn on your own without somebody else's help, but you will also have personalized learning. Not bad for a free app, huh?

Not Everything Can Be Perfect (There Must Be Something Weird about It …)

Like everything nice, there must also be something not so nice about this app; with regards to its limitations in **ecology**, the fact that it is only presented in electronic app format is a big disadvantage, but I guess this has to do with the app consisting of "drills" over and over. If the creators of Duolingo managed to make it a downloadable software in our computers, it could get higher exposure to all kinds of audiences. People could possibly even start to socialize through the software, find a kind of "electronic pen pal" with whom they could communicate in order to practice the target language (this is just a random possibility that I thought of, but there could be many more!). This also makes me think about the issue with distribution and the structure of the activities; the amount of foreign language to which users are exposed has a maximum length of that of isolated sentences; there are no paragraphs, no letters, emails, or other genres, just sentences. Again, based on my own experience as a student and teacher of languages, I believe the best approach to learning writing and composition would be the use of more complicated pieces as the difficulty of units rises. Furthermore, using this app can get really boring at times and even discouraging; this is due to it being composed almost solely of "drills" that make the different activities and even final tests of units very similar in format. In sum, I'd say the app lacks complexity with regard to production of written pieces by the user; after you have been using the app for a while, content as well as what's expected for you to produce as the user becomes predictable and not challenging at all. Yes, Duolingo seems to be an effective multimodal tool capable of reaching different types of learners, but the way it does so could use some improvement.

I personally believe learning with a physical, real teacher is more interactive and challenging, as well as amusing for that matter. Think about it: if, in addition to getting information and explanations from a teacher in a classroom, you can also have time to ask questions and get additional responses, and you are provided (verbally) with suggestions on how to improve, you are presented with a broader variety of activities to make sure you fully understood the concepts, and you are even introduced to new vocabulary more often instead of in small units like Duolingo…it can be so encouraging and exciting!

In Conclusion …

After all, I have to admit that CHAT helped me in part to understand not only Duolingo, but also the complexity of the writing within it. At first, I perceived CHAT as a tool to analyze texts, and by "text" I mean solely

papers, maybe posts online, and stuff like that; little did I know that CHAT would also help me understand the complexity of a language app such as Duolingo. By means of cultural-historical activity theory, as well as the notion of multimodality, I was able to analyze thoroughly the different elements that compose the app. At the same time, through the use of multimodality, I was able to analyze the way information and more specifically writing is presented to the user.

I also have to admit that Duolingo did indeed help me become a better writer through the use of multimodality. It helped me be more aware of word order differences and taught me certain letters such as "ã," which is similar to "an" in "angry," "êm," which is like a more nasal version of the "en" in "engine," and "ô" like "oa" in "coal." These new letters were present in the Portuguese alphabet but not in the Spanish one since they are nasal sounds; thus, I had to practice pronunciation and make sure I used them in the right context when writing or trying to spell words. Duolingo helped me with writing in a way that, later on, I felt confident enough to transfer that knowledge onto other platforms; I feel comfortable now when I post something in Portuguese on Facebook or when I write messages to my friends in Portugal. Maybe the way Duolingo approaches different types of learners is a bit selective in the sense that it focuses more on reading/writing, auditory, and visual learners, but the multimodality through which it does so seems to be an effective way to do it. I believe that Duolingo can help those who want to learn a language from the comfort of their homes and also everyone in general, which includes you, yes you, whoever you are, reading this article.

To sum up, just like I was hoping to find out, we could define Duolingo as a multimodal tool to help us improve our language skills (writing included) by using multimodality, so I believe that we can consider it an effective tool in language learning to a certain extent. I really hope you enjoyed this article about my craziness for learning languages and my growing support for CHAT theory in writing classes. *Muito obrigada* for exploring all of this with me. Oh, by the way, that literally means "I am very grateful" or, like normal people say, "thank you." So yeah, thanks for reading me, pal!

Works Cited

"Duolingo." *Wikipedia*, 4 Oct. 2018, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Duolingo.

"Fluency." *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, 2018, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/fluency.

Kostecki, Tyler. "Understanding Language and Culture with Cultural-Historical Activity Theory." *Grassroots Writing Research Journal*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2012, pp. 79–88.

VanMaele, Brittany. "Defining Multimodal Composition." *Digital Life Place Narratives*, 6 Feb. 2011, https://multimodalcomposition.wordpress.com/2011/02/06/defining-multimodal-composition/.

Walker, Joyce. "Just CHATting." *Grassroots Writing Research Journal*, vol. 1, 2010, pp. 71–80.

Endnote

[1] There are actually five possible combinations of letters or digraphs ("ll," "gu," "rr," and "qu") that are considered independent letters by some, but we won't get into that.

Claudia Sánchez, a native from Spain, is a PhD student at Illinois State University who loves languages and traveling the world. She is currently working on language ideologies issues and is very much into linguistics. When she goes home, she likes spending time with family and her dog Fós (Greek: φως, English: Light). Her personal motto is Η δύναμή μου είναι η ψυχή μου. (If you wanna know what it means, you'll have to look it up!)

Learning from My Mistakes

Anya Gregg

Using the antecedent knowledge of the *Grassroots Writing Research Journal* that she gained from a previous submission, Anya Gregg uses genre studies and CHAT to explore why and how her original submission didn't quite fit the conventions of the journal.

Another group text. Something about a bonfire. I reach to delete the messages when my mother's voice rings out behind me. "Y'know if you keep staying home from these things, no one will want to invite you anymore." I roll my eyes as I reply, "Good. I don't like parties." I make my way up to my room and never answer the invitation. These situations seem to happen quite a bit in the Gregg household. Most people would brush it off as just not being in the mood to party, or being anti-social. It very well could be, but psychology has discovered an alternate solution. This solution is the introvert-extrovert scale (Bushak).

Introvert? Extrovert? What are those? What do they have to do with writing, anyway? Before I get to that, you should know that I did write a different article that was not published. This is the (sort of) revision of that article. In my first article, you would have known that the terms introvert and extrovert are two very important topics having to do with social psychology. That is not the article you are reading; however, I will use that article to help you learn about writing. In my 8th grade English language arts class we were assigned articles to write. These weren't just any articles, though. These had a chance of being published in a college journal, the *Grassroots Writing Research*

Journal. Of course, we had to involve our curriculum (which was based around CHAT) in our articles somehow. As a normal research guideline, I picked a topic I was interested in. Most of the paper went something like this: an introvert is an inward drawn person who enjoys time by themselves more than social events, and extroverts are the opposite … dopamine … brain … survey … blah, blah, blah. In short, that article was not published in this journal. I made a very obvious, common mistake that a ton of my peers make. Using CHAT (or even common sense), I could have picked up the conventions of this journal; *Grassroots* Writing *Research Journal*, not *Grassroots* Science *Journal*. Thus, most of the articles are about *writing*. I just came up with a topic I was interested in researching and continued on my merry way with that idea. I realize that many students begin this way, and many instructors might be interested in expanding upon and teaching about this idea. The purpose of this article is to explore the types of writing I have encountered and relate how this **antecedent knowledge** affected my general ability to write the original article in the first place. Hopefully, it will take you through the problems I encountered and explain them in quite some depth.

Fantastic Terms and How to Use Them

Now you might be slamming on your mental breaks if this is the first experience you've had with some of these terms. "What's CHAT? What are conventions? How can it help me?" I hear you scream. I will kindly summarize the ways I use and understand **CHAT** (**cultural-historical activity theory**) in some long, weird sentences and give you a few examples. CHAT is weird at first, and as I use it you may not get the terms straight off the bat, but I'll show you how to apply them, too.

The terms I learned to use were **ecology**, **reception**, **distribution**, **production**, **activity**, **representation**, and **socialization**. They originated from an article called "Re-situating and Re-mediating the Canons: A Cultural-Historical Remapping of Rhetorical Activity" by Paul Prior and many other authors. That article is as long and difficult to understand as the title is, and you can find that article in *Kairos*, an online journal of rhetoric, technology, and pedagogy. You probably won't be asked to read that article, though. My class didn't read it, but it is the article that introduced the terms my classmates and I used to understand our writing. I'll break down just the terms I used for you. There are a few more out there, of course, but I'm going to focus mainly on distribution, production, and representation.

Representation deals with all of the planning, activities and materials you use to get your writing done. This is generally done before and while

the text is produced, as it sometimes has to deal with the planning and goals we make in our head. An example of representation is if you were going to make a t-shirt for a family reunion, you would have to find out where you're going, who's family it is, what company you will be using to print them, etc. Like I said before, I did have an outline sort of forced on me for my previous article, such as deadlines for completion of certain sections like the abstract, but I did have some questions before I just started writing, which was part of the representation of my original article. An example of one of my questions was, how do I write an abstract? I researched this using other articles and my teacher.

Distribution is exactly what you might suspect; it's how your text gets distributed, to whom, and for what specific purposes (Walker 75). Along with distribution, I like to throw in the terms representation and trajectory. The term reception deals with how other people end up thinking about using texts that get produced. Trajectory on the other hand deals with any unintended audiences and how your text got into their hands. Trajectory is a really stubborn term, as you can't predict it well. Trajectory isn't exactly a CHAT term, though, and there's a bit of debate going on about it. The distribution and trajectory of my original article worked out in the best way possible. The editor and assistant editor at the *Grassroots Journal* saw my article, read it, and gave me a letter of edits they would like for me to make. My teacher also gave me a high grade on the paper, too, so she must have seen it either through the digital or physical version, then graded it and given it to the editors as the *Grassroots Journal*. I didn't actually know whether or not I would get a response from the journal, as I was not the only one who wanted to publish my article.

Production is how a writer goes about writing the text. Specifically, production includes the materials used and genres you select. I personally struggle with production, admittedly. One second I will be producing my text by typing about why CHAT is useful and the next I will be looking up giraffe turtlenecks on google. When I was writing my original article, I did get a little distracted, but it all turned out ok. I had a plan sort of forced on me so that I wouldn't be intimidated by the 2000 words I was supposed to write, but I didn't (really) use that plan much. I used a slew of different materials, including two computers and two wifi connections, google docs, a printer, google forms, snacks, and a class roster. I also tend to write with unreliable materials (production) and with no plan (representation).

The next term, activity, is weird, abstract, and complicated, but many people overthink it. Activity is the action of writing the text. For example, if you are texting someone, then you have a goal of communicating a message. The ways you communicate that message are activities. Lifting your fingers

and pushing the screen to create text, adding emojis if desired, and hitting send are all examples of activities within texting. However, if you did not know how to work a keyboard, then you would have a problem with activity. I, of course, knew how to use a keyboard and knew what I was doing, so activity wasn't much of a challenge in that respect. However, activity includes ALL the actions that can surround the production of a text, so writers can experience challenges at different times, and texts can be involved in activities that go far beyond the author's original activities (like when the *GWRJ* editors made changes to my text).

Application

Now that you are familiar with the terms of CHAT, I can start to identify how, where, and maybe why I went wrong in my original article. The main concepts I struggled with were related to distribution, production, and reception. First of all, the main reason why my article didn't make the cut was because it wasn't about writing. Basically, the journal is meant for research on various writing and research strategies. Sure, my article was heavy on research, but it didn't necessarily explain how I did the research, which was my original idea. As a result, the editors of the journal ended up telling me I would need to go back to a focus on writing if I wanted to publish in the journal, and I realized that the things I did right were actually a product of me utilizing CHAT. I did, however, conduct a survey where I asked my peers a series of questions about introverted and extroverted qualities. From those surveys I drew conclusions about these qualities and about the different likelihoods of certain scenarios (i.e. losing a phone, going to a party). I also learned a lot about introversion because most, if not all, of my classmates were introverted. In the realm of representation, as well, I unintentionally veered off the course of where I was planning on going with this research. In lieu of explaining how I did my research, I simply explained my results. This is much like the example of the giraffe turtlenecks when I explained production. I went off on a tangent about data and never really remembered to route back to how I did my research before the due date. This could also be just my habit of writing with less than reliable tools and no plan, which might make me seem like a not-so-perfect student (more on "good" students later).

The second place I went wrong was distribution. If I had submitted my article to a science journal it may have gotten published. Yes, the assignment was to write an article for the writing journal, but when it boiled down to it, it was my choice to even turn in the article. I wanted a good grade, I wanted to get published, I didn't want my parents scolding me. If I hadn't cared

about any of that I may not have turned it in, or even worked on it at all. My problem with distribution was also a problem with reception. The editors of the *GWRJ* ended up pointing out to me that the structure and topic of my article weren't actually connected very well to the kind of articles the journal publishes. So, if I wanted to end up getting published, I'd have to revise.

I also didn't do the right **genre research**. Now a genre is really just a specific type of writing, like an essay. Most of us already know about genres without realizing it. In fact, I've known about genres since I was in third grade when I had to read a certain number of pages per week. I didn't read my pages one week and told my teacher that *technically* I was reading all week. From the menu at the restaurant on Wednesday to all the road signs I passed, I must have read all of my pages. Apparently that wasn't a valid answer. "That isn't actual reading," she said, "You need to be reading from books." However, menus and road signs all use words and all have certain **genre conventions**, which are unique characteristics that help us distinguish between different genres, or types, of writing. Thus, menus and road signs must be writing. If you read writing with conventions then why can't it be a genre? I was later specifically introduced to this idea in my sixth-grade English Language Arts (ELA) class, and the same teacher reinforced it in my eighth-grade advanced ELA class. From this evidence, we can see that I was already familiar with different genres of writing, but they were just brought to my attention and given a name in class.

To reinforce this idea, here is another example. I specifically remember one day when my teacher told us about an upcoming project. We had just gotten done reading the book *The Outsiders*, and we had to write in a genre that had a picture about one of the characters in the book. With my creative mind, I immediately started thinking outside the box. I came up with the idea of a picture with words somehow incorporated that I could draw. I asked my teacher at the time if I could carry out the project, and she, being a very understanding college professor/middle school teacher said, "Why not?" Her reasoning was that you read art as well. You may not realize it, but Image 1 showing a kitten wrapped in string is telling you that there is a baby cat, that it was probably playing with the string, and is very happy about that fact. You know it's a cat; you know it's string. You just successfully read art. Of course, an artist could go into depth

Image 1: Kitten playing with string.
Image source: ClipArt

about color theory and other things artists use to communicate things in their art.

I am describing genre in such depth because I realized that, for my article, if I'd spent more time thinking about what *GWRJ* articles are really about (what kind of genre they are), then maybe I wouldn't have gotten sidetracked with all my research on introverts and extroverts. Here I think it's important to talk not just about genres, but specifically about **mutt genres**. In most English language art classes, teachers don't introduce students to the concept of mutt genres. These genres technically fit my previous definition of a genre, but there are often project-specific conventions all under the same general name. Most are found only in schools where teachers need to give concise, but often vague descriptions of what writing conventions they want. You have to rely on the teacher to give you all of the information, although they usually have an assignment sheet, rubric, or checklist to tell students what to do. These genres are called the "mutt genres" (Wardle, Elizabeth). They are often a mix of two or more genres, taking and leaving out conventions from each. An example of this is a high school essay. Depending on the assignment, the essay could be more like an article, a book summary, a report, or it could even take a theoretic route. There's no way to research this kind of writing because the teacher is the sole source of the conventions. They chose which conventions you need to follow.

One of my current math teachers brushed up against the general idea of mutt genres in one of his lessons. He mentioned that he wasn't a good writer (which we already know isn't true,) and how every piece of writing you will do for school falls into a basic format. This format is generally an introduction with a solid argument, then three paragraphs of support, then a conclusion that restates the intro. All of the students in my class are very familiar with this type of writing; they've been writing like this for six years! Only a few differences, only a few places to make a mistake. What my teacher didn't know is that he was actually talking about genres when he said that. Of course, you are always dealing with genres when you write, but he was simply explaining (without knowing he was) the general conventions of the particular mutt genre of a five-paragraph essay.

All of this is to show that, even if you aren't actively using CHAT as a lens or thinking specifically about genres, writing-related activities are still happening. A great example of this is riding the bus as discussed in Angela Sheet's *Grassroots Writing Research Journal* article "Angela Rides the Bus." Sheets discusses how there are unspoken understandings between people when someone rides the bus. It explains that genres and people work together to reach a certain goal. For example, the goal for the bus system is to give all people an accessible way to get around to where they need to be. Just one

genre that helps is the sign that lights up when Sheets pulls the cord. It tells the driver to stop so someone can get off. The driver then stops, and the goal is achieved. Obviously there are many more genres related to the activity system of riding a bus, and many places things can go wrong. This is just one example about how we can apply CHAT and genre studies everywhere in our everyday lives. In my case, I learned from getting my "revise" letter from the journal that I needed to rethink my topic. In the end, I decided to just write a little bit about CHAT, and how we use it in everyday life, as a way to create something that might be useful for the journal and its readers.

Why Do I Care?

Now that you have all this information about genre and CHAT, you can, hopefully, begin to understand how it can help to illustrate how writing works (and what's going on when writing doesn't quite work). I use it (although not always consciously) in school because of mutt genres and other variables, but I tend to use it more outside of school because of how mutt genres tend to focus more on what instructors want than what a specific genre might be doing out in the world. When I am trying to write outside of school or for speech club, I tend to use it more and with a better outcome. For example, when I first got on to speech team I was assigned the event radio speaking. Of course, I asked my coach questions, but after doing that I hopped straight online to figure out what exactly I was supposed to look like, sound like, and write like for the event. It didn't help very much, as not many people write about the conventions of high school radio speaking. Although, I did understand more about the general idea of what exactly I was doing.

Not only did thinking about CHAT help me to see where my original article went wrong, but it also helps me understand other situations where my writing has unexpected results. Over the summer I wrote a blog explaining a theory about a popular youtuber. It was a pretty big success. It got featured on the front page of the app and received many likes and comments. Needless to say, I was pretty happy. I wrote another theory about another youtuber expecting the same results. That was not what happened. Somewhere, somehow, something went wrong. I had the same audience, and they got it probably the same way, so distribution was out. Of course, I was writing this theory under pressure because I had promised it would be done almost two weeks beforehand. I had also thought out my first theory for 6–12 months beforehand, whereas with this I only had about a week to throw it together, with new info coming in the day I had to put it out on the app. The readers (reception) may have misunderstood some parts, or just not wanted to read it after they saw it. So, in this situation my problem areas

were production, representation, and reception. I am currently giving myself more time to write a part two where I will explain myself more clearly and hopefully have a better response.

Conclusion

All of this goes to show that, while we may unconsciously be using CHAT and thinking about genres and mutt genres, using CHAT and genre theory more consciously and explicitly can help us make more successful texts. I didn't consciously use these concepts when I wrote my first article for this journal, and that article did not get published. But, as you can see, I did think about CHAT and genre this time around, and, look! I got published. That said, I would like to end with a bit of a tangent about perfect students; there are none. The same goes for good writers. I'll explain this by first defining a bad writer. A bad writer is someone who, say, writes a narrative. Their narrative does not make sense even though they believe it does. (That might simply be an issue with representation or reception). So, if the writer does not know how to make a narrative cohesive but is very "good" at some other kind of writing, like producing cereal boxes, then the idea of a "good" and "bad" writer does not really make sense. They write cereal boxes well. The same concept can generally apply to students. It's easy to think you are a good writer if you have mastered a mutt genre (like the five-paragraph essay) that you've worked on many times, but that knowledge might not be so useful when you're trying to write a resume or a letter or a different kind of essay (or a cereal box). So, in theory, one could write an interesting and well-written article about, say, introversion and extroversion, but if it isn't submitted to the right place or written for the right reasons, i.e. if you're not thinking about CHAT and about your genre conventions, it could be a total flop.

Works Cited

Bushak, Lecia. "The Brain of An Introvert Compared to That of an Extrovert." *Medical Daily*. 21 Aug. 2014. Web.

Walker, Joyce R. "Just CHATting." *Grassroots Writing Research Journal*, no. 1, 2010, pp. 63–68.

Wardle, Elizabeth. "'Mutt Genres' and the Goal of FYC: Can We Help Students Write the Genres of the University?" *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 60, no. 4, 2009, pp. 765–89.

Anya Gregg wrote the original version of this article during her eighth-grade English class. This self-identified ambivert was introduced to the concept of CHAT during that very class. That first article was completely scrapped. With the help of her teacher, Deb Riggert-Kieffer, this article went through a year of rigorous revision. Anya plans to write more articles considering CHAT in the future.

Planting, Harvesting, Writing: The Literate Activity Systems of a Regional Agricultural Cooperative

David Giovagnoli and Jordan Kuhns

Professional Literacies Project: In this edition of the Professional Literacies Project, David Giovagnoli corresponds with Jordan Kuhns, who works for GROWMARK, Inc., a company in Bloomington, Illinois that provides goods and services to farms. He discusses the complex literate activity system of the professional writing he does on a day-to-day basis, which includes interacting with co-workers, communicating with colleagues in different countries, and working on systems that automate the writing of business documents.

For this installment of the Professional Literacies Project, I sat down (virtually) with Jordan Kuhns, who is the End-to-End Process Lead at GROWMARK, Inc., which is a regional agricultural cooperative based in Bloomington, Illinois.

Jordan, could you explain a little bit about your journey through college to the current point of your career?

I came to Bloomington from Iowa to go to Illinois Wesleyan in 2009 where I majored in Business Administration. During school, I got a part-time job at GROWMARK, Inc. helping them process year-end point-of-sales data and sending it to their vendors during the summer of 2011. I did that for the summers of 2011 and 2012 and then transitioned to work in their Seed Lab for a few months between the winter of 2012 and graduating in May of 2013. After graduation, I was fortunate enough to be hired into a full-time role as a customer operations associate in their Seed Division.

Could you explain what you do in your current role as an End-To-End Process Lead?

In my current role, I work on a special software implementation project that GROWMARK has branded "spark!" because all good projects need a name, right? It's our job to implement the SAP software package, or what's sometimes referred to as SAP ERP (Enterprise Resource Planning), which is essentially software used to run the company. It helps our employees do everything from purchasing product, selling product, managing inventory, billing customers, and paying vendors. Additionally, it does all of the necessary accounting involved in those processes as well.

My job on the team is to supervise a team of five End-to-End (E2E) Process Analysts and give SAP Consultants to ensure that we have adequately designed the software so our business users can use it effectively, stayed within the timeline that we've been given, and also stayed within the budget that we've been given. The E2E team is responsible for all purchasing and sales activities. So we're focused essentially on how we procure product and pay the vendors and then how we sell product and bill customers. We have another team, or pillar, on the project called Supply Chain that does all of the other tasks (like inventory, shipping, transportation, etc.).

What role does your position play in the hierarchy of the company?

I report to our Project Management Organization (or PMO), which is comprised of two project managers (Eric and Josh) that work to keep the project moving forward on time and within budget. They report directly to our Chief Information Officer (CIO), Keith, who oversees the project at a very high level. Keith reports to our Vice President of Finance, Wade, who then reports to our CEO, Jim Spradlin.

What kinds of writing do you do on a daily basis?

My day-to-day job involves identifying and tracking the things my team should be working on and then delegating those out to the Process Analysts, fielding questions and concerns that my team may have, and communicating priorities, changes, and issues both down to my team and up to my supervisor. This means that I spend most of my time reading and writing emails, tracking what my team is doing by reading their status updates or by reading what's called "Functional Specification Documents (FSDs)," and creating presentations for the project's stakeholders to keep them informed on our progress, roadblocks, decisions, etc.

Sometimes, I'm also tasked with writing FSDs myself, so I might also engage in some more "technical" writing as well. FSDs are essentially a

functional description of how we want something to work in the system. We write them, send them to a team of developers who write code to meet our functional descriptions/requirements, and then we test what the developer has done. You can think of an FSD as a document that explains a super basic way something should work. So, for instance, you could write an FSD that details how to write a document in Word, save the document, and then click a "Share" button which would then open your email client, attach the aforementioned document to an email, and allow you to edit the email before sending. That would be something we might write an FSD for on our project.

How does the kind of writing you do now in your career match up with the kinds of writing you were asked to do in your college and graduate school experiences, whether specifically in business courses or more generally? Are there things you do now that you didn't anticipate having to do, or which function differently than you assumed they might?

The kinds of writing that I do professionally align slightly with the types of writing I was asked to do in college and even more so with the types of writing I was asked to do when getting my MBA. First, a good amount of my writing is persuasive in nature. Whether I'm talking to my team, my supervisor, or another manager in the company, I oftentimes have to explain a topic and then persuade the reader to understand where I'm coming from, why I'm taking a certain approach, then to agree with it all. For instance, I might be writing to convince my supervisor to extend a deadline by two weeks so we can get something done, I might also be writing to a teammate to convince them that working longer hours for the next two weeks is necessary for us to hit our goals, or I might also be writing to a manager in another division of the company trying to explain that we won't be designing the software the way that they're suggesting because it will cost too much money and take too long. In all of those cases, persuasive writing from college comes into play and is very helpful.

Second, the other type of writing I do a lot of in my job is analytical writing. So much of what my team and I do every day is interpreting a process and then writing it down so we can explain it to others, at the most basic level. We spend a lot of our time listening to "users" in the company talk us through their processes. A process can be anything from "this is how I sell grass seed to our customers" or "this is how I publish prices so customers know how much to pay for our products" or "this specific vendor requires that we submit a down payment before they ship our product and we need a way to do that in SAP." Once we listen to those processes in depth, we must

then write them down so that we can explain them to our developers who are oftentimes offshore in India.

Because those two types or writing are a large part of my job, I would have to say that the most important parts of my education were classes and assignments that required analysis of written material, persuasion of the audience, and even recaps of other materials. Those three types of writing were pretty common in both my undergraduate classes and my Master's classes. During my undergraduate, I got experience in these types of writing in a wide array of subjects. Philosophy, business law, English and literature, and history all instill these types of writing in their courses to a certain degree.

The one thing that I wasn't adequately prepared for, which is a surprise in the global world of today, was how to write to someone who may not speak your language very well, or someone who may not understand the subject that you're writing about very well. A lot of the writing we do at work involves putting together documents that will be read by developers in India. They speak English as a second (or third) language and also have no idea what GROWMARK is or what we do. Writing to that type of person takes a lot of patience and practice, and you learn very quickly that some of the things we put in our writing don't necessarily translate to someone who isn't a native English speaker and doesn't understand the inner workings of a regional agriculture cooperative.

How did you learn to navigate these new writing situations in your career? Was there a lot of training, or did you have to learn how to write on the fly?

There were very few formal learning opportunities that taught me how to craft a formal or semi-formal email in the workplace. A lot of that learning was done on-site during my first few months on the job. My very first supervisor would sometimes critique my writing, showing and telling me ways that I could have rephrased my email, things I could have said instead, etc. But the majority of my writing skills, when it comes to email, have come from experience and assessing the audience to which I'm writing. So I guess that means that a am taking a few more cues from my academic training in writing than I probably think. The majority of the time, however, I've learned how to write or how to improve my writing simply based on experience, trial, and error. For instance, the first time you send an FSD off to India to be developed and the developer needs to schedule a 2-hour conference call to clarify what you've written, you realize some of the things you could have done differently. When the project began, there weren't any formal opportunities to learn how to write these FSDs in an efficient manner, so we all had to learn as we went. Flexibility was key.

What kind of tools do you use to communicate at work, in terms of platforms, technology, and things like that?

To communicate at work we use Microsoft Outlook for email, Skype for Business and Slack for instant messaging, Office 365 for collaboration on word documents, spreadsheets, etc. which I believe is a form of communication, our intranet for company-wide or team-wide announcements, an application called HP Application Lifecycle Management where we log defects and bugs related to our SAP software, and also quite a few conference call/ webinar applications so we can communicate with our offshore team more effectively.

Who are you writing for, most of the time? Do you deal a lot with external audiences or are you mainly talking to people who work for GROWMARK? How does communicating with different people affect the way you write?

I would say that I spend about half of my time talking with internal employees and the other half of my time dealing with external contractors, like consultants, developers, etc. I don't deal with vendors or customers anymore, though I used to.

The communications between internal and external people do very. I can get away with less formal emails with my teammates and peers, but if I'm talking to consultants or developers, I need to be slightly more formal. Additionally, when communicating with internal employees, I need to vary my style to be more formal if I'm talking to a superior as well. An email that I would send to our CIO asking for an extension, for instance, would not be the same type of email that I would send to my team explaining that I was going to ask our CIO for an extension. When talking with our CIO, I need to be fairly formal and detailed, yet brief. He's busy, but informed. So I need to include enough detail to satisfy his questions, but not so much detail that he feels like he's being dragged through the nitty gritty details. Furthermore, I will oftentimes include answers to questions I anticipate he'll ask in those types of emails as well, because that saves us both time. When communication to my team, however, it might only be a few sentences long, I may not use a greeting, and I can say things like, "If you need more information, just come find me." The two styles of communication are very different and for good reason. My team doesn't need me to communicate to them like our CIO expects me to communicate with him. That'd be overkill. Furthermore, if I talked to our CIO like I talked to my teammates, he wouldn't have the necessary information he needs to make decisions, and he might think I'm unprofessional or incompetent at explaining complex ideas in writing.

Who has power over the way you write? Are standards about writing set by the company, or does it more depend on who you're working for specifically? Are there legal regulations about the writing you do?

It all depends on who we're working with. The company as a whole has set standards as to what our email signatures should look like and the information they should contain, but there aren't any hard-and-fast rules or standards to follow outside of that and common sense. Writing to your audience, as mentioned above, is very important, though. So I would say that to a degree, office politics, rank and title, and the topic of your writing all hold some intangible power of what we write and how we write it, if that makes sense. Furthermore, some of the things we write in the FSDs become written proof of what we were asking for. So if we write an incomplete FSD without fully explaining the requirements, we'll oftentimes get an incomplete development back that's filled with defects and bugs. If we were to challenge the developer on that, they could pull out our FSD and say "you next asked me to do that." So again, there's some power over what we write and how we write it in that regard as well.

What are some of the impacts of your writing? In other words, what does success look like in your writing tasks?

The writing that I do, and my team does, ensures that we get our software designed in the most useful way possible. We are in charge of explaining to developers how we need the software to work, so clarity, accuracy, and depth are all critical to our success as writers. Furthermore, the writing that I do ensures that those in leadership roles above me are well-informed as to what my team and I are working on, the progress that we're making, and the issues that we're facing. If I can't accurately and effectively communicate that to my superiors, they may not understand my situation and thus make ill-informed decisions.

How do mechanics, style, grammar, spelling, and that sort of thing factor into the success of your writing? Do you think about them much?

Those sorts of things are very important to my writing. So much of what I do is through electronic communication. I have to be able to clearly explain my thoughts and ideas in writing and, at the same time, I must be able to use correct grammar, style, spelling, etc. while writing or else those I'm talking to won't take me seriously. That's especially true when communicating with those outside of the organization or my superiors, and slightly less true when communicating more casually with my peers.

If you were new, again, at this job, what are some kinds of writing that you might wish were taught specifically?

I wish I had learned more about communicating with those who may have certain barriers up between my writing and their understanding. As mentioned above, that may mean that they speak English as their second or third language, or it might even mean that my writing is more technical than their understanding or vice versa—my writing isn't technical enough compared to their understanding. If I'd been more prepared for those types of communications, with strategies and structure around how best to communicate in those scenarios, I would have been more successful during the first 6–12 months in my job.

You mentioned once that you had an automated system that constructed invoices for customers, based on a computer database. Could you describe how that worked?

Sure—Our SAP system is used in part for placing customer orders, shipping product to the customers, and then invoicing them for that product. Part of my job three years ago was to design the invoice template that would be used when the system generates the PDF that we send to our customers via email at the time of billing. The customers then use that as their invoice, and it tells them what we sold them, when we sold it, how much it cost, what they owe us, and when they need to pay us, among several other things. So the process of creating that invoice works like this: First, we create the billing document in our software system. That's the document that is used to record all of the information mentioned above. We do this in batch in the middle of the night, because it can take several hours when creating 3,000–4,000 invoices. Then, after we create all of the billing documents, we run a second program that generates the individual PDF invoices for all of the billing documents that were previously created. That program compiles the data in our database and formats it in a way that is consistent and readable (so our customers know where to look for the information they need to know), accurate, informative, and complete (so our customers have all of the information they need to pay the bill at their fingertips).

You mentioned that the sales team wanted the invoice to be able to display a different unit of measure abbreviation, but that making that minor change to the writing was very difficult from a programming standpoint. What was involved in making that change?

When designing an invoice like this, you have to consider all possible scenarios for which that invoice will be used. In our case, we needed to

consider all different kinds of products being sold using this invoice, like gasoline, diesel, fertilizers, etc. and also all different kinds of prices, taxes, discounts, and surcharges appearing on the invoice for those products. Furthermore, for certain products, you're legally required to include certain pieces of information that aren't necessary for other types of products. In the situation you mentioned, the Sales Team wanted to change the invoice so that instead of displaying "TO" as a unit of measure corresponding to Metric Tonne, we displayed "MT" which would make more sense to the customer. From their standpoint, that was a very simple change, but what it meant for me and my team was that we needed to have a developer, in India, write custom programming logic that essentially evaluated an "if this then that" logical statement for not only the "TO" unit of measure, but also all other units of measure that may be used. And by implementing custom code at that place in the form, we would need to retest the whole thing, ensuring that after our change, all possible scenarios where the invoice would be used still generate an invoice with the correct information. This would be about 100 different scenarios and would include placing orders in our test system, shipping those test orders, and running them all through billing as well. We'd then need to review all of the invoices, check all the data, and ensure its accuracy.

In terms of material impact, it seems that this system which generates those forms saves a lot of time that humans would otherwise spend doing them. Who do you see as ultimately responsible for the actual writing of these texts, in the sense of who takes responsibility for any errors/inaccuracies that they may contain?

Our team is responsible for "writing" these things. We were tasked with designing the invoice form and the program that generates it for us, and thus we support it if and when there are issues. The customers usually see the issues first, report them to our customer service department who verifies that there truly is an issue, and then they'd report the issue to us so we can take a look, find the bug, and implement a fix. That's essentially the purpose, at a granular level, of our team as a whole. We're tasked with implementing the software that's supposed to make the lives of our employees easier (so they can focus on more high-impact tasks), and then we're tasked with supporting that software into perpetuity ensuring that it continues running smoothly and any changes requested by the business users are analyzed, developed, tested, and implemented successfully.

Thank you so much for sharing your experiences about writing with us!

David Giovagnoli is a fifth-year doctoral student in English Studies at Illinois State University.

Jordan Kuhns is an alumnus of Illinois Wesleyan University and Illinois State University who works as an End-to-End Process Lead at GROWMARK, Inc., which is a regional agricultural cooperative based in Bloomington, Illinois.

Publishing with the *Grassroots Writing Research Journal*

GWRJ Editors

Our Mission Statement

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.

General Information

Submissions

Articles can be submitted to the *GWRJ* at any time. However, we do have deadlines for upcoming issues. For issue 10.1, which will come out at the beginning of the Fall 2019 semester, articles must be submitted by February 15, 2019. The deadline for consideration in our 10.2 (Spring 2020) issue is May 15, 2019. Please contact the Managing Editor at grassrootswriting@gmail.com with queries about possible submissions and to submit your work.

Queries and Drafts

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.

Honoraria

The *GWRJ* offers an honorarium of $50.00 for each article published in a print issue of the *GWRJ*.

Style and Tone

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

Previous work that exists in the journal in this area tended to focus specifically on grammar conventions or on the usage of particular kinds of stylistic or punctuation devices. However, we have noted our desire 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). In the last several issues we have seen authors take up this call in interesting ways. Issues 7.1 and 7.2 include articles featuring research into the role of language variation and its effects on both meaning-making and composing practices. See Agathe Lancrenon's article "Everything You Need to Know About Transferring Metaphorical Ducks" and Cristina Sanchez-Martín's article "Language Variation Across Genres: Translingualism Here and There" in Issue 7.1. And, in issue 7.2, see Su Yin Khor's article "Multilingual Notes as a Tool to Understand Super Dense Readings." We look forward to continuing to publish additional studies that investigate these concepts in innovative ways.

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 3.2 ("The Little Genre that Could: CHAT Mapping the Slogan of the Big Communist Propaganda"), Summer Qabazard's article in issue 3.2 ("From Religion to Chicken Cannibalism: American Fast Food Ads in Kuwait"), Wesley Jacques' article in issue 7.1 ("The E-Cat's Meow: Exploring

Activity Translingual in Mobile Gaming") or Sanam Shahmiri's article in issue 7.2 ("Translating the Untranslatable: Making Meaning of Idiomatic Expressions Across Languages"). 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*, vol. 27, no. 3, 2010, pp. 318–54.