FCJ-006 Halflives, A Mystory: Writing Hypertext to Learn

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In what ways do electronic media, and, in particular, online media or hypertext, have the potential to change the ways in which we acquire and generate knowledge? How does writing hypertextually transform the learner's experience of the acquisition and dissemination of knowledge in contrast to the kinds of learning that takes place when students engage with the proprietary systems used for online course delivery in universities. While online learning systems are believed by many in higher education to be a viable alternative to face to face teaching, many proprietary delivery systems neglect the role of the student as learner, emphasising instead the student as a consumer of course materials. Halflives: A Mystory (https://halflives.adc.rmit.edu.au) was and continues to be a research project that has enabled me to consider these questions from the perspective of a learner engaged in constructing knowledge hypertextually. [1]

My approach to this investigation comes out of Greg Ulmer's research into the development of a rhetoric for the electronic apparatus. Ulmer's interest in the ways in which the transformation of rhetoric is brought about by new technologies and the impact that this may have on educational practices does not make him unique. [2] Nor does his interest in the practical application of poststructuralist theories to education. [3] What really interests me with regards to Ulmer, and the reason I have singled his work out in Halflives and in this paper, is that his work is derived from and specifically targeted at the discipline of media studies, while still maintaining an applicability across of range of other disciplines. More importantly, Ulmer's understanding of what constitutes media studies is far more expansive than what is often recognised, within the academy and outside of it, as legitimate. Rather than emphasising the study of media (aesthetically, institutionally, politically, historically, philosophically) or the acquisition of media related skills for the purpose of making media, Ulmer emphasises the necessity of the integration of these approaches. One can have one eye on Bataille and one eye on Photoshop without any sense of disjuncture.

For that reason, I am interested in Ulmer's description, in his books Teletheory (1989) and Internet Invention: From Literacy to Electracy (2003), of mystory as a way of inventing electronic rhetoric because it allows for both the making/studying of media and the making/studying of theory simultaneously. Constructing a mystory, Ulmer suggests, helps us anticipate or actually invent a rhetoric or poetics for electronic space, for it leads us to practice the "picto-ideo-phonographic writing" fostered by electronic technology and theorised by Derrida. He writes:

> [Mystorys] were designed to simulate the experience of invention, the crossing of discourses that has been shown to occur in the invention process. (Ulmer, 1994: xxi)

Halflives: A Mystory is the product generated from the process of attempting to think cogently about the possible pedagogical impacts that mystory may have on learners as they simultaneously write about media with media. It is also an attempt to think through and practice a new kind of scholarship that is more suited to electronic culture.

From literacy to electracy

The transition from a predominantly literate culture to an electronic culture is already engendering changes in the ways in which we think, write and exchange ideas. Ulmer has been concerned with the kinds of changes that take place as a result of this transition and his primary concern has been a pedagogical one – that is, he is interested in how learning is transformed by the shift from the apparatus of literacy to the apparatus of what he comes to term 'electracy'. The term apparatus is important here as it refers not only to the technologies of print or computing but also to the ideologies and institutional practices assigned to or produced by those technologies. As Ulmer points out:

> In terms of the academic apparatus, [theorists of the apparatus] would relate the technology of print and alphabetic literacy with the ideology of the individual, autonomous subject of knowledge, self-conscious, capable of rational decisions free from the influences of prejudice and emotion; and to the practice of criticism, manifested in the treatise, and even the essay, assuming the articulation of subject/object, objective distance, seriousness and rigor, and a clear and simple style. The "originality" we require from the students engaged in making such works as well as the copyright with which we protect intellectual property are features of this apparatus. (Ulmer, 1989: 4)

The question that Ulmer posits in Teletheory (1989) and pursues in that book and in his subsequent books, Heuretics: The Logic of Invention (1994) and Internet Invention: From Literacy to Electracy (2003), revolves around how one might go about inventing practices that may institutionalize the electronic apparatus in terms of schooling, and to produce new subjectivities, or ways of knowing about oneself and the world.

10 Ulmer's response to this question in both of these books relates to the role of invention in the process of learning. In Teletheory, he calls for the invention of a new genre of academic writing, which he terms 'mystory'. In Heuretics, he argues for the supplementation of the currently dominant critical and interpretative modes of inquiry in learning (critique and hermeneutics) by a more experimental mode known as heuretics (Ulmer, 1994: xii). Taken together, Ulmer posits mystory as a new genre of writing that can be generated by the application of a process of working heuretically rather than through critique and hermeneutics. His reasons for doing so lie in his argument that:

11 > [t]he modes of academic writing now taught in school tend to be positioned on the side of the already known rather than on the side of wanting to find out (of theoretical curiosity) and hence discourage learning how to learn. (Ulmer, 1994: xii)

12 Ulmer's complaint in relation to the inadequacy of current modes of learning, and his invocation of heuretics as an alternative to the currently dominant processes of knowledge acquisition, draws attention to the role that rhetoric or composition plays in the formation and dissemination of knowledge through writing.

13 The purposeful use of language makes knowing possible. As the Sophists (and many others subsequently) noted, language necessarily affects the truths that it can say or name. How we write is as important as what we write. From this perspective, rhetoric aims at knowledge, or makes it available. How it is made available will vary according to the apparatus in which it is generated. It could be argued that the academic essay, as it has come to be institutionalised within the humanities, is a writing that demonstrates all the virtues of mainstream literacy – unity, coherence, perspicuity, closure and correctness. However, what students learn from the process of writing essays which, rhetorically, have been stripped of the art of invention, is to close discourse down, to let the conclusion dictate their thinking and to necessarily censor whatever imagined possibilities seem irrelevant or inappropriate. 'What they learn is a trained incapacity to speculate or raise questions, to try stylistic and formal alternatives' (Corvino, 1998: 210). Ulmer points out that, in this sense, the privileging of the essay/treatise in school is ideological in that it promotes the development of a particular kind of subjectivity in the learner – a subjectivity that is aligned closely with the desires of Enlightenment logocentric reason.

14 The move from the apparatus of literacy to the electronic apparatus means more, then, than merely a change in technology. It involves changes also in the ways in which we produce and assess the process of knowledge acquisition and, as a consequence, changes in subjectivity. The kinds of subjectivities that might be produced by an electronic apparatus are difficult to determine in advance. As Ulmer argues:

15 > In the same way that the practice of reading privately and silently contributed to the formation of "self", so too will performing hyperrhetoric contribute to a new subjectivication in the electronic apparatus (in which one will have to find a new term of self-reference, neither "parrot" [to use Lacan's example] as in the clan identity of the oral apparatus nor "me" in the individualism of literacy. (Ulmer, 1994: 38)

16 Ulmer argues that the introduction of electracy to schooling has the potential to overcome the impasse that faces anyone seeking to move beyond the limits of Enlightenment reason. The necessity for such a move is determined by the desire to formulate not only new knowledge but also new ways of generating knowledge. As he points out:

17 > Most of the writers calling attention to the symptoms of the closure of conceptual reason do not want to abandon the principles of the Enlightenment. They retain a desire to act in the world, to make life better for all humanity, but they admit to an experience of impasse. (Ulmer, 1994: 20)

18 This impasse is brought about by the realisation that knowing and knowledge can, in fact, be resisted. He argues:

19 We have been aware for some time, after all, of the limitations of the finest institutional instantiations of logical and conceptual reasoning – of critique and hermeneutics in the human sciences and of empiricism in the natural sciences – to the point that critique has become cynical. As Peter Sloterdijk explained, what was not foreseen in the invention of conceptual reason was the possibility of 'enlightened false consciousness', which arose when the enlightened got into power. What these Aufklärer learned was that knowledge can be resisted; that knowing can leave people unaffected; that 'people can stick to their positions for anything but "rational" reasons'. (Ulmer, 1994: 19)

20 Ulmer's project then is a political one in the sense that his call for the invention of new modes of knowledge acquisition and dissemination is grounded in a desire to overcome the impasse produced by this critique of the limits of conceptual reason.

Hyperlogic, invention and the electronic apparatus

21 While many hypertext theorists have been prepared to argue that hypertext, as a technology of electronic writing, is by its very nature revolutionary – embodying a poststructuralist view of language – Ulmer argues that we need an electronic theoria. [4] That is, writing electonically does not automatically take us outside literate practices or involve the development of new rhetorical strategies. Any cursory glance at the metaphors used in computing – the desktop, folders and files, webpages, and so on – indicates the ways in which electronic writing is still tied up with the practices of print literacy. What is needed to achieve the transition is the invention of new modes of writing specific to the electronic environment itself, taking into account the full potential of literacy as it converges with a new apparatus, and remembering that the technology of electronic writing is only one aspect of the apparatus. It would be useful at this point to examine what constitutes a mystory and how it aims to transform rhetoric in the name of electracy.

22 The greatest difficulty one has in attempting to write a mystory (or even understand what it is) lies in Ulmer's refusal to provide his readers with a model from which to work. This is brought about by Ulmer's articulation of the difference between reproduction and exploration. In arguing that '[r]eproducing as a method or way has to do with the power effect of subject positioning in a dominant ideology', Ulmer is alluding to the tendency in pedagogy to reproduce in students not only knowledge but ways of approaching and disseminating that knowledge (Ulmer, 1989: 170). The invention of hyperrhetoric, of which mystory is an example, positions the student differently in relation to language and discourse as neither a writer nor a reader but as an 'active receiver' capable of receiving and generating ideas according their specific relation to knowledge rather than to a general principle. Mystory, then, attempts to act as a relay rather than as a method. He states:

23 This alternative – the relay organized by speed, rather than the gravity of the monument – will be one of the most difficult and important issues for teletheory: how to bring the particular or singular into relation with the general or global in the manner of the relay rather than the model. Is there a contradiction, then, in trying to invent a genre for teletheory (mystory)? Perhaps not, if we keep in mind that unlike the treatise, or the conventional genres of academic scholarship, the mystory does not repeat, is not reproduced, in that no two are alike. (Ulmer, 1989: 170)

24 That said, Ulmer does provide us with a range of parameters which contribute to the invention of mystory as a genre. In Chapter Three of Teletheory, under the heading of Mystoriography, Ulmer states:

25 As a conceptual neologism, "mystory" is the title for a collection or set of elements gathered together temporarily in order to represent my comprehension of the scene of academic discourse. It is an idea of sorts, if nothing like a platonic eidos, whose name alludes to several constituent features (generated by the puncept of "mystory"). (Ulmer, 1989: 83)

26 These elements are history, herstory, mystery, my story and envois. Each element contributes part of itself to the invention of the word mystory and each element deals in part with the concerns of mystoriography. The following section elaborates on each element of mystory and how they relate to the composition of Halflives as a mystory.

27 The first element, history, serves as a reminder of the way in which patterning as a form of referential cognition is suppressed in a traditional historiography that emphasises and privileges the analytico-referential discourse of science. Where traditional historiography seeks to produce

treatises bound to the demands of rigorous procedures of verification and justification, mystory attempts to reintroduce the particular into historiography by allowing the mystoriographer to focus on the patterns that they discern in the materials that they uncover, emphasising the individual learner's role in the construction of knowledge. Mystory allows for the idiosyncratic generation of knowledge in ways that are meaningful for the learner. This process contributes to the formation of what might be termed 'electronic cognition' in that it mimics the way in which memory is organised in computing. As Ulmer argues in Heuretics:

28 > In the hardware of computers, connectionism or parallel processing (multiple low-level memory units linked in a network) is replacing (experimentally) the more standard serial processing (a central processor addressing large storage units). In short, the change in thinking from linear indexical to network associational – a shift often used to summarize the difference between alphabetic and electronic cognitive styles (or between masculine and feminine styles, for that matter) – is happening at the level of the technology itself. (Ulmer, 1994: 36)

29 Another way of describing this kind of thinking is hyperlogic, a term used by Darren Tofts in his essay 'Hyperlogic, the Avant-garde and Other Intransitive Acts' (Tofts, 1999). Where traditional historiography is bound by the linearity of logic, mystory is made possible by the introduction of hyperlogic to historiography. Tofts argues:

30 > One of the advantages of this kind of historiography, as Greil Marcus has demonstrated, is the formation of alternative histories, generated according to the principles of serendipity, audacious comparisons and unexpected links. (Tofts, 1999: 23-24)

31 To illustrate this concept, Tofts quotes from Greil Marcus' history of punk rock, Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the Twentieth Century:

32 > …late in 1976 a record called Anarchy in the U.K. was issued in London, and this event launched a transformation of pop music all over the world. Made by a four-man rock 'n' roll band called the Sex Pistols, and written by singer Johnny Rotten, the song distilled, in crudely poetic form, a critique of modern society once set out by a small group of Paris-based intellectuals. First organized in 1952 as the Lettrist International, and refounded in 1957 at a conference of European avant-garde artists as the Situationist International, the group gained its greatest notoriety during the French revolt of May 1968, when the premises of its critique were distilled into crudely poetic slogans and spray-painted across the walls of Paris, after which the critique was given up to history and the group disappeared. The group looked back to the surrealists of the 1920's, the dadaists who made their name during and just after the First World War, the young Karl Marx, Saint-Just, various mediaeval heretics, and the Knights of the Round Table. (cited in Tofts, 1999: 23-24)

33 Tofts goes on to argue:

34 > Alternative histories are interesting in that they provide another way of conceiving a particular terrain, in the process uncovering the assumptions that underlie "official" histories. (Tofts, 1999: 23-24)

35 Mystory is capable of activating hyperlogic, situating the mystoriographer within a designated subjectivity that is context sensitive. It does not aim to produce universal truths but rather lets 'specified subjectivities speak in the full context of their localities' (Tofts, 1999: 24). The pedagogical value of this lies in the positioning of the learner as an active participant in the production of knowledge rather than as a consumer of already decided "truths".

36 Halflives addresses this notion of history in a number of ways. The interpolation of genealogy and traditional historiography in the site derived from my interest in the way that these two approaches attempt to bring the past 'back to life'. In both instances, the emphasis lies in trying to recreate the past through evidence and thus remain immanent to themselves. However, as the term 'back to life' connotes, historiography and genealogy are both haunted by a spectrality that challenges their epistemological certainty. Derrida's invocation of the revenant in Specters of Marx seemed an apt way of investigating this spectrality which haunts historiography and genealogy. In particular, the ghost as revenant, that which exists only by virtue of its return, reminds us that past and present cannot be neatly separated from one another, as any idea of the present is always constituted through the difference and deferral of the past, as well as anticipations of the future. Hence, one of the main themes of Halflives draws on Derrida's theory of hauntology as a way of unsettling the epistemological certainties of historiography and genealogy.

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Thinking hyperlogically about hauntology then suggested thinking about the kinds of things that are suppressed within historiography and genealogy. This then led me to haunting, spiritualism and spirit photography. This in turn led to the analogy between genealogy and ghost hunting (in particular, see https://halflives.adc.rmit.edu.au/hl053.html). Rather than resist these flows of thought as "illogical", a mystoriographical approach helped me to focus on the patterns that I began to discern in the material I was encountering in my research. The idiosyncratic nature of those connections, both specific to my experience and the context of their production, is an important outcome of mystoriographical production and its contribution to the formation of electronic cognition.

38 The second element of mystory, herstory, directly relates to this element by emphasising the role that mastery plays in the institutionalisation of knowledge acquisition. As Ulmer argues:

39 > The pun on maistrie … suggests the problem, shared with feminism, of finding an alternative to mastery and assertion as they are practiced in conventional academic discourse. How to think that which, being a scholar, scholarship takes for granted? What has been given to us, in what place, compromising every question we ask? (Ulmer, 1989: 83)

40 Feminist desires to reintroduce experience to the practice of knowledge acquisition by legitimating both the personal and the popular as knowledge is also an important aspect of mystoriography. In mystory, the subject and the object of knowledge are brought together allowing the learner to bring their own culturally specific experiences in terms of class, gender, nationality, popular culture and private life.

41 The theme of family history in Halflives attempts to legitimate the popular activity of genealogy as a form of knowledge acquisition within academic historiography. In particular, Halflives emphasizes the ways in which personal memories and public histories matter less than the manner in which our desire shapes and remakes the past in ways to suit the present. Whereas the disciplinary role of the historian in historiography supposedly keeps the historian and the history they produce separate, the family historian is always the subject and object of knowledge in their endeavours – they are part of the history that they desire to create.

42 The third element of mystory is that of mystery – a speculative mode that requires that the mystoriographer approach her material in a way that promotes conjecture, as a mystery, rather than calculation. Calculation involves a set of rules or the imposition of an empirical grid that delimits the possibility of chance encounters by relegating intuition to the margins of inquiry. Intuition, on the other hand, is more personal and visceral, relying as it does on feelings. As Ulmer, quoting Carlo Ginzberg, argues:

43 > The key term to identify the kind of knowledge that defies all rules, that enables the lover to identify the beloved as unique is "intuition", which has its "high" forms, as in Arabic firasa ('the capacity to leap from the known to the unknown by inference on the basis of a set of clues'), and its "low" forms (rooted in the senses). (Ulmer, 1989: 88)

44 To write intuitively requires the development of the 'middle voice', described by Roland Barthes in 'To write: An intransitive verb?' and recalled by Ulmer:

45 > In the case of the active voice, the action is accomplished outside the subject. In the case of the middle voice, on the contrary, the subject affects himself in acting; he always remains inside the action, even if an object is involved….Thus defined, the middle voice corresponds exactly to the state of the verb to write: today to write is to make oneself the center of the action of speech; it is to effect writing in being affected oneself; it is to leave the writer inside the writing, not as a psychological subject, but as the agent of the action. (Barthes, 1989: 164-165)

46 One does not remain outside, at an objective distance from the object under examination, but is always within the work when working intuitively by means of conjecture – and all research relies on conjecture to some degree. Mystory encourages the mystoriographer to develop the capacity for conjecture by learning to leap from the known to the unknown by inference on the basis of clues, thereby writing themselves into the writing. This kind of reasoning is suited to hyperlogic's tendency towards "lines of flight" rather than the linear, hierarchical model of analytical modes of reasoning.

47 Writing as intuition rather than as analysis is well suited to the electronic environment, as Ulmer argues in Heuretics:

48 > The multichanneled interactivity of hypermedia provides for the first time a machine whose operations match the variable sensorial encoding that is the basis for intuition, a technology in which cross-modality may be simulated and manipulated for the writing of an insight, including the interaction of verbal and non-verbal materials and the guidance of analysis by intuition, which constitute creative or inventive thinking. (Ulmer, 1994: 140-141)

49 Intuitions may not always be, in the end, "right". But they can provide an avenue for experimentation that allows the learner to speculate – remembering that the root of the word speculate is spectare, to see – and to find a direction through writing rather than writing coming "after the fact", so to speak. This ability to find a direction through writing is helpful when you consider that electronic rhetoric has yet to be invented, or rather, is only in the process of being invented, unlike the rhetoric of print, which is well established (though, of course, open to constant revision and experimentation).

50 Figure 1 – Lillian Swan

51 Figure: Lillian Swan and the ghost of my grandfather

52 The application of intuition to the composition of Halflives allowed me to speculate on possible connections within the material I was researching. This included such connections as those between genealogy, historiography, hauntology and spiritualism. It provided me with a way into the material by focussing my attention on the photograph with which the project begins – that of my grandmother and my grandfather's shadow (see left). My identification of the punctum of that photograph, my grandfather's shadow, was the catalyst that led me to see other connections in the site. The photograph suggested my grandfather's presence by virtue of the shadow in the lower right hand corner. But it simultaneously suggested his absence as well. His ghostly presence led me to think about Derrida's concern with revenants or ghosts in Specters of Marx (1994), where he discusses the spectrality of many areas of meaning, seeing ghostly hauntings as traces of possible meanings. This connection to hauntology then led to me to thinking about the ways in which ghosts have figured more generally in our culture, which led me to both spiritualism and spirit photography. The application of intuition generated the very personal nature of these associations allowing me to write myself into the research.

53 The fourth element of mystory is My Story, an element which again invokes the register of the middle voice by requiring that the mystoriographer relate their material to themselves in the manner of a relay that may not keep its charge but must be passed on. Remember that the relay (as opposed to method) positions the mystoriographer differently in relation to language and discourse as neither a writer nor a reader but as an "active receiver" capable of receiving and generating ideas according to their specific relation to knowledge rather than to a general principle. Rather than the autonomous narrator of a series of ideas, the mystoriographer occupies a heteronomic position, engaging their own stories in the information set forth as scholarship. This, Ulmer argues, is the charge of mystory, reasoning in the mode of conduction. In contrast to the established movement of inference between things and ideas in academic discourse (abduction, deduction, induction), conduction involves a movement between things. Where abduction, deduction and induction all involve a relation between the general and the particular, conduction remains at the level of the particular. The mystoriographer is not concerned with getting to the bottom of things, in the manner of Sherlock Holmes, but rather in seeing the possibility of connections between things without having to expand or reduce particularities to general principles.

54 Conduction has a double meaning for Ulmer, alluding to the type of movement produced by a relay and the way in which we "conduct" research.The allusion to movement brings to mind the conduction of electricity moving at speed from one relay point to another. Perhaps even the movement of information packets across a network. Or, to use an example Ulmer provides, the flow of energy through a circuit. But the allusion to the way in which we conduct research reminds us that this process is "autographical" – that we write ourselves into our own research.

55 This relates to the fifth element of mystory and the idea of envois – that is, the present of any idea as always pre-sent. Using the example of Derrida's description of Freud's invention of psychoanalysis, Ulmer argues that mystory belongs to a genre of writing that invents and discovers as it writes itself. In Beyond the Pleasure Principle, Freud opens with the words, 'In psychoanalytic theory …'. In doing so, Freud signals that psychoanalytic theory exists, even though

it only makes it first public appearance with the publication of Beyond the Pleasure Principle. Freud thus positions himself as both the subject and the producer of psychoanalytic theory. The autobiographical and anecdotal status of Freud's text are significant here as Freud simultaneously undertakes self-analysis and invents it. Derrida's, and latterly Ulmer's, interest in this lies in the possibility of taking psychoanalysis 'as a potential model for a new order of reasoning, suggesting how individual idioms may be generalized into theoretical formations' (Ulmer, 1989: 91). The performance and production of "psychoanalysis" occurs simultaneously, and the acknowledgement of this suggests of a way to think about the temporality of mystory. As Ulmer notes,'[t]he mystorical essay is not scholarship, not the communication of a prior sense, but the discovery of a direction by means of writing' (Ulmer, 1989: 90).

56 Halflives did not present itself to me before the fact with a ready formed structure and set of relationships within itself. It only became so in the process of being constructed.

57 Taken together, these elements suggest that the methodology for how to write a mystory is analogous to the recipe rather than a model. This analogy of the recipe is a useful one, for whereas models aim for reproduction, recipes are more like relays in that they require the input of a range of ingredients, including the cook, to make them work. It is the role of the cook to apply a technique to the process in order for some transformation in the ingredients to occur. The use of the word technique rather than method is critical here. A method is referred to in the Shorter Oxford dictionary as a 'systematic arrangement' and the 'orderly arrangement of ideas and topics'. This objectivity of the method is perfectly suited to the apparatus of literacy in its application to academic discourse as it currently exists as it matches the rhetorical strategies used by that discourse. However, mystory, intervening on the side of the apparatus of electracy, requires, not the application of a method, but rather the application of a technique where technique is taken to mean the 'manner of artistic execution or performance in relation to practical details' (OED, 1973: 2253).

58 Remembering that mystory seeks to put into question '[reproduction] as a method or way [which] has to do with the power effect of subject positioning in a dominant ideology' (Ulmer, 1989: 4), the manner in which the artistic execution or performance of mystory takes place, according to Ulmer, is the collage. Whereas representation reproduces, collage, Ulmer argues, works to reactivate as in the manner of a relay. In the visual arts, collage is an abstract form of art in which various elements are juxtaposed on the same pictorial surface. 'In critical theory as in literature collage takes the form of citation' (Ulmer, 1989: 147).

59 I find Ulmer's invocation of collage as a technique for the production of mystory is problematic. [5] Ulmer's preference for relays that retain the flavour of high cultural production (video over television, for example) undercut the desire for an integration of the popular into mystoriography. As Niall Lucy argues in *Beyond Semiotics*:

60 > An effect of this preference is to lessen what might be learned, if only because the context in which pedagogy is developed is rather more a schooled than a schooling one. By this I mean that the Ulmer of Teletheory seems far more at home reading Derrida than watching telesoap, more comfortable with John Cage than Johnny Rotten. When he does refer to popular texts and performers, these tend to have be approved already by high culture as worthy of interest: Barthes on the Marx Brothers' A Night at the Opera, for instance, commands several pages of Ulmers' attention, outweighing that paid to any other instance of the popular. (Lucy, 2001: 129)

61 Rather than collage, I prefer decoupage as a technique for mystoriography. Decoupage, derived from the French decouper, means 'to cut out' usually with the intention of reassembling , pasting and varnishing onto objects for the purposes of decoration. As far back as the 12th century, Chinese peasants were creating paper cutouts in vivid colours to decorate windows, lanterns, gift boxes and other objects.

62 The origins of decoupage in China appeal to me for personal reasons that relate to my family's history. But it is the fact that decoupage is considered l'arte del povero (the poor man's art) that suits my intentions in Halflives. Decoupage is an amateur rather than an expert art. Like all crafts, it is a technique that can be easily learned and applied. The grafting together of disparate elements is an important feature of the craft and depends heavily on what is to hand. A reliance on ready-mades is well suited to mystory where the mystoriographer works with materials that they 'happen to unearth' (Ulmer, 1989: 83).

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And so, the technique that guides the compilation of the mystoriographical recipe in Halflives is decoupage, fusing together the ingredients of Ulmer's mystory with my family's various histories and archives, Derrida's hauntology, 19th century Spiritualism and Spirit photography, Barthes ruminations on photography and speculations about the importance of genealogy and memory to traditional historiography.

From Here to Electracy

64 The object of the research undertaken for the Halflives project was to uncover the possible pedagogical impacts that mystory as a mode of online or electronic writing may have on learners, using myself as the testing ground. Halflives is a mystory composed as an experiment to find out about how we might begin to invent an electronic rhetoric suitable for the apparatus of electracy. Writing Halflives helped me to think about what it means to undertake research in an electronic environment and also what it means to think electronically. It also raised questions more generally about the scene of teaching and learning as it currently exists in first world institutions of higher education. How does learning currently take place? What is the impact of new technologies on the learning environment? Will they open up new modes of teaching and learning that promote the application of inventive strategies to knowledge acquisition over the more reproductive strategies currently in place? As an academic working in a field fundamentally impacted by new technologies but whom, like many of my peers, is not an educational researcher, these questions are crucial. Not only in the sense that they ask about possibilities, but also in the sense that they draw our attention to the modes of teaching and learning currently in place and prompt us to consider the most productive ways to respond rather than react to the changing environment. They offer, I believe, a path of resistance to the kinds of corporate product driven education currently being forced upon academics across a range of disciplines, not just in media and new media studies.

65 In 1992, one hundred and forty years after John Henry Newman's classic discourse of the university as an institution (Newman, 1952), Jaroslav Pelikan revisited Newman's ideas in his book, The Idea of the University (1992). He identified four knowledge management roles played by the university, assigning each role equal importance:

66 > [T]he advancement of knowledge through research, the transmission of knowledge through teaching, the preservation of knowledge through scholarly collections, and the diffusion of knowledge through publishing are the four legs of the table, no one of which can stand for very long unless all are strong. (Pelikan, 1992: 16-17)

67 The separation of knowledge advancement through research and the transmission of knowledge through teaching, one that is maintained in many Western universities, positions the academic as the advancer of knowledge and the student as receiver of knowledge. It does not promote active learning in the sense of allowing the recipient of teaching, the student, to participate in the production of knowledge. Mystory, I believe, allows the learner to straddle these roles more effectively by positioning the student as an "active receiver".

68 The greatest test facing the application of mystoriography to learning in the electronic classroom, however, lies in the ways in which knowledge advancement through research is currently taking shape in our culture as a result of fiscal and technological pressures. In a recent article for Southern Review, Mads Haahr argues:

69 > Knowledge advancement can be seen as a three-step feedback loop where researchers receive impressions for example through journals, books and conferences (input); reflect and develop hypotheses and conduct experiments to support or explode them (process the input); and eventually document and diffuse the findings (output). Feedback loops such as these are found everywhere, and as discussed elsewhere (Haahr 2001), there is a strong trend in current society to focus on the input/output portions of these loops, rather than the reflection/processing portions. For the loop associated with knowledge advancement, all three steps are important: the input stage because good ideas require proper stimulation and meaningful analysis can only be performed on carefully collected data; the processing stage because this is where the insight and understanding takes place, where information is turned into knowledge; and the output stage because this is where the findings are communicated to peers and students. (Haahr, 2002)

70 Mystory is dependent upon students and teachers having the time and space to be able to adequately engage in the reflection/processing stage of the loop. With increasing student numbers

and the greater demands made on academics, engaging students in the kind of extensive experimentation required to write a mystory is time consuming.

71 However, on the basis of my experience of the process, it is time that must be found. The evolution of a new apparatus of electracy will proceed with or without our input. However, we would do well to ensure that its evolution is guided towards the ends that we would value rather than leaving it to chance.

72 Writing Halflives opened me up to thinking about my own strategies as a learner and helped me to understand the value of a heuretic approach to knowledge. The process was an empowering one in that I was forced to rely on my own resources in the construction of the site. By choosing to not follow an established rhetoric, which was driven by the desire to experiment with the apparatus of electracy, I was able to write myself into the site on the basis of the decisions I made for what would and wouldn't be included and for the directions I allowed the research to take. There were moments of true pleasure when I stumbled across unexpected links and directions. Whether the reader feels these moments in the text is beyond my control however, given that mystoriography is a learning process and that mystorys are not intended to be didactic, this is irrelevant to what I have learned from the execution of Halflives.

73 Mystory may prove to be difficult to institutionalise as a way of experimenting with electronic rhetoric and the impact this may have on the way we acquire and disseminate knowledge. The very few who have taken it up since Ulmer began to write about it in 1989 is perhaps evidence of this. [6] It is, in many respects, the antithesis of the packaged online learning systems, like Blackboard and WebCT, currently favored by many institutions of higher education in Australia. However, I believe it is a valuable approach that opens up new possibilities for thinking about how we learn and express our learning in an electronic environment.

Author's Biography

Lisa Gye is a lecturer in Media and Communications at Swinburne University of Technology. She recently completed postgraduate research at the AIM (Animation and Interactive Multimedia) Centre at RMIT. Halflives (https://halflives.adc.rmit.edu.au/), is currently touring Australia as part of the Elastic exhibition produced by the CCP. Lisa's scholarly interests include critical theory and new media, media arts, media production, alternative media practices and authoring for new media. She is currently co-editing (with Darren Tofts) an ebook titled Illogic of Sense: The Gregory L. Ulmer Remix for Alt-X Press. She is also the webdesigner for the Fibreculture Journal.

Notes

[1] This paper serves as an adjunct to the web-based research performed in Halflives and readers would undoubtedly find it useful to read and engage with the site while reading this paper.

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[2] See Cole (2000) as one example.

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[3] See, for example, Peters (1998).

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[4] The earlier work on hypertext of scholars such as George Landow and Jay David Bolter were good examples of the kind of euphoric optimism to which I'm referring here. See, for example, Bolter (2001). Interestingly, both Bolter and Landow and many others like them have recently toned down their initial enthusiasm for the revolutionary powers of both postructuralist theory and hypertext.

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[5] George Landow also favours collage as a metaphor for thinking about techniques of hypertext production. See Landow (1999).

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[6] Ulmer himself is cognisant of the fact that experiments with regards to mystoriography are thin on the ground. His most recent publication, Internet Invention: From Literacy to Electracy, seeks to

redress this by offering the reader a textbook that demonstrates how mystory is built in to the curriculum in the Networked Writing Environment at the University of Florida.

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