

The Learning Screen



ABSTRACT: Networked art, new media innovations, and the Internet as a cultural phenomenon in general are manifestations of a civilizational shift in the apparatus (social machine) from literacy to electracy. The historical analogy (grammatology) with the previous (and still ongoing) shift from orality to literacy shows that the shift is gradual, with many transitional features, but ultimately produces a new dimension of experience in every area of the lifeworld (technology, institutions, individual and collective identity behavior). This essay addresses the situation of teaching electracy in a literate institution, describing a pedagogy for bootstrapping literate practices into an electracy skillset. What is the fundamental practice (logic, rhetoric, poetics) of thinking and communicating native to online learning? This reasoning is separate from any software or hardware techniques, and concerns an aesthetic operation of organizing information into understanding relative to action using figural structures guided by affective experience. Electracy categories and abstractive compressions function not as transcendent universals but as proportional analogies exploiting patterns of repeating signifiers across all modalities. The “ratio” of this figure is open to vanguard experiment. The essay samples this pedagogy at three levels: undergraduate literature majors; graduate media studies; collaborative arts research.

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BIOGRAPHY: [Gregory L. Ulmer](#) is Professor of English and Media Studies at the University of Florida, where he teaches courses in Hypermedia, E-Lit, and Heuristics. He is Joseph Bueys Chair in the European Graduate School, Saas-Fee, Switzerland, where he teaches a summer seminar on electracy and heuristics; and coordinator of the *Florida Research Ensemble*, a creative arts research group first formed in the late 1980s, focusing on chorography through "Imaging Place" since the mid 1990s.

Ulmer's books include: a grammatology trilogy -- *Applied Grammatology*, 1985; *Teletheory*, 1989; *Heuristics*, 1994; and a second trilogy on the virtual consultancy known as the *EmerAgency* which applies grammatology and heuristics to the invention of electracy, especially concerning the practices of aesthetics, ethics and politics in the conditions of dimension pollution that Paul Virilio describes as the dromosphere (society of the spectacle). The published works are *Internet Invention* (2003) and *Electronic Monuments* (2005). The final installment in progress is [Avatar Emergency](#).

Ulmer is theorist for *E*, a collaboration with colleagues in the US and Canada investigating text mining and visualization for a poststructural web ontology.

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Introduction: Electracy

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There is an analogy for what we are doing when we collaboratively explore the possibilities of new media. We are to the Internet what students of Plato and Aristotle were to the Academy and Lyceum. When the Greeks invented alphabetic writing they were engaged in a civilizational shift from one apparatus to another (from orality to literacy). They invented not only alphabetic writing but also a new institution (School) within which the practices of writing were devised. Here is the salient point: all the operators of "science" as a worldview had to be invented, by distinguishing from religion a new possibility of reason. [Electracy](#) similarly is being invented, not to replace religion and science (orality and literacy), but to supplement them with a third dimension of thought, practice, and identity. "Electracy" is to digital media what literacy is to alphabetic writing: an apparatus, or social machine, partly technological, partly institutional. We take for granted now the skill set that orients literate people to the collective mnemonics that confront anyone entering a library or classroom today. Grammatology (the history and theory of writing) shows that the invention of literacy included also a new experience of thought that led to inventions of identity as well: individual selfhood and the democratic state. Thus there are three interrelated invention streams forming a matrix of possibilities for electracy, only one of which is technological. There is no technological determinism, other than the fundamental law of change: that everything is mutating together into something other, different, with major losses and gains. What is the skill set that someday may be assumed of electracy people native to an Internet institution?

Apparatus	Orality	Literacy	Electracy
Practice	Religion	Science	Entertainment
Procedure	Ritual	Method	Style
Institution	Church	School	Internet
State of Mind	Faith	Knowledge	Fantasy
Behavior	Worship	Experiment	Play
Philosophy	Mythology	Epistemology	Aesthetics
Ground	God	Reason	Body
Ontology	Totem	Category	Chora
Mode	Narrative	Argument	Figure
Axis	Right/Wrong	True/False	Joy/Sadness

Apparatus Table

The argument is that the disciplines of Arts and Letters have as much to contribute to the essential formation of electracy as do science, engineering, computing and related technical fields. Up until the seventeenth century, the technological and rhetorical dimensions of artificial memory developed together. The image logics of the memory arts were discredited in the context of the emerging empirical sciences because of their association with hermetic magic. One of the laws of media, according to Marshall McLuhan, is that innovation involves the retrieval of some features from the cultural archive thought to be obsolete. Contemporary imaging has much to learn from the mnemonic arts of the manuscript era. The role of the humanities foregrounded in this essay is pedagogy: the development of teaching practices to support the bootstrapping of education into an institution that is symbiotic with electracy (to learn a lesson from the unhappy relationship of Religion and Science, if that is possible). The methodology of this invention is heuristics (the use of theory for the invention of new discourses) as distinct from

hermeneutics (the use of theory for interpretation of existing discourses). Heuristics coordinates with grammatology: grammatology provides the historical example -- in our case, the practices of logic invented in the Academy and Lyceum. Heuristics adopts those inventions as a template, to suggest what is needed or possible today, following a motto derived from the Japanese poet Basho: *not to follow in the footsteps of the masters, but to seek what they sought*.

The guiding discipline for my approach to this project is poststructural theory (the French reading the Germans reading the Greeks). Jacques Derrida's reading of Kant's Critique of Judgment (the Third Critique), especially in the essay "Economimesis," is a touchstone for this theory. The lesson of this genealogy (to summarize quickly an entire problematic) is based on Aristotle's observation that Being may be said in more than one way. Heidegger (in the mid-1930s) took Aristotle's observation as an invitation to "begin again," to devise a new metaphysics (a new ontology, a new classification system), different from the conceptual one created by the Greeks. The Greeks exploited the propositional capacities of written language, declarative assertions that alone, Aristotle noted, were subject to determinations of true/false, answering the question "what is X?". Heidegger proposed a metaphysics based not on the semantics of propositions, but on poetry (and the other arts), whose aesthetic practice exploited not the properties giving essence or substance of things, but the properties producing emotional effects of atmosphere and mood. The relevance of this reference to philosophy for electracy is, first, to note that the philosophers did not invent the equipment of writing, but they invented the materialist metaphysics that capitalized on the analytical capacities of the technology, central to the shift in the apparatus from orality to literacy. Metaphysics (the determination of what counts as real for a civilization) exists within every apparatus, just as do narrative, identity formation and the rest, but configured in radically different ways from one apparatus to the next. The importance of Heidegger is that he explicitly outlined a category or classification system (metaphysics) different from the one based on substance (essences defined in concepts) created by the Ancient Greeks. This new metaphysics, drawing on aesthetic practices of language and art, is an important resource for electracy, whose categories function not through written words but recorded images.

Why does Derrida, continuing in the 1970s Heidegger's project for the creation of an image metaphysics, deconstruct the work of Kant, one of the inventors of Aesthetics, as the point of transition out of literacy into electracy? Kant is credited with making the first innovation in the status of knowledge since Aristotle's original distinction between pure and practical reason (between science and politics-ethics). Kant shifted the categories of being from nature to mind (his Copernican revolution), and promoted judgments of taste in beauty to equal status with empirical judgments of understanding (about what was necessary in nature), moral judgments of ethics (contingent matters of ethics and politics requiring human choice). Kant proposed aesthetic judgments of beauty as a bridge joining the necessary and the contingent, as a measure supporting deliberative reason in the public realm. Hannah Arendt took this proposal so seriously that the project she was working on at the end of her life (she died in 1975) was an updating of the three critiques (on thinking, willing, and judging). The judgment of taste supplemented the established and institutionalized axes of measure already in place: Right/Wrong (oral religious axis); True/False (literate science axis). The third axis, now promoted to equal status, is pleasure/pain (Spinoza's joy/sorrow), whose relevance is not to truth or rightness but well-being. Well-being (the ancient question of the nature of the good life) mediates quarrels between what is true and what is right. Arendt believed that Kant's analogy between judgments of beauty and moral judgments offered the best hope for democratic politics in an age of media spectacle (see Hannah Arendt, "The Life of the Mind", Vols 1 & 2, Mariner Books, 1981). My theme is that an apparatus has separate, interrelated invention streams (genealogies). Philosophers complain that the hegemony of the techno-scientific worldview in modernity resulted in the disenchantment of the world, an impoverishment of experience and a collapse into a one-dimensional utilitarian form of life. The Classical Greeks distinguished pure from practical reason, and committed their metaphysics to pure reason (science concerns what is necessary). Practical reason, dealing with the contingencies of ethics and politics, was not subject to science. The Franco-German updating of philosophy in poststructuralism extends metaphysics to practical reason. We may solve every technical problem, Wittgenstein observed, and still not have touched the human question.

Pure	Practical	Aesthetic	History
Understanding	Reason	Imagination	Memory
Thinking	Willing	Judging	Forgetting
Empirical	Rational	Hermeneutic	Inventive
Inductive	Deductive	Abductive	Conductive
True/False	Right/Wrong	Pleasure/Pain	Hope/Fear
Necessity	Freedom	Beauty	Uncanny
<i>Ananke</i>	<i>Daimon</i>	<i>Eros</i>	<i>Nemesis</i>

The Four Critiques

The insight derived from this promotion of aesthetics as an equal partner in modern thought, is of a new strategy of meaning that restores measure (a guide for decision, for judgment) within the one-dimensional conditions of immanence in our post-enlightenment, and post-self (post-human) world. This new strategy is a retrieval of an ancient, pre-Socratic stance of wisdom, articulated most authoritatively by Heraclitus in the Western tradition, cited by Heidegger, Hannah Arendt, and Derrida (in the lineage I am following). "The oracle at Delphi does not reveal or conceal, but intimates". The update from literate to electrated metaphysics (taking that term always in the sense of the classification or category system supported by an apparatus), is to shift ontology (bringing into appearance a dimension of the real for purposes of management) from nature (physis) to second nature (genius, that is, human creativity, cultural productivity). Included in the shift (and this is Derrida's specific contribution), is the relationship between first and second nature, that is, between nature and culture: what happens in the encounter between nature and human creativity? The event that reveals most about this encounter is disaster, catastrophe (tragedy). Following Kant's supplementing of the judgment of beauty with an analytic of the sublime, Derrida takes up the latter, to propose a thought of disgust, turning Kant's idealism into a contemporary abjectism. No attraction without repulsion.

The feature of this history tested in my bootstrapping pedagogy is the formal device of the figure (vehicle + tenor) especially structured by proportional analogy (A:B :: C:D), fundamental to any oracle, parable, allegory, maxim and similar modes. The genealogy of this modern figure is from Kant's proposal that aesthetic judgments of taste could mediate between pure and practical reason (science and ethics), through the poetics of modernist epiphany (Baudelaire's correspondences, Rilke's world-inner-space, Eliot's objective correlative, Rimbaud's illuminations, Joyce's epiphany, Proust's involuntary memory, Freud's transference, Benjamin's dialectical image, to name some of

the most prominent examples), to Heidegger's Open and Derrida's Trace (electricity + trace = electracy). The point is that this formal construction must be taught in school (beginning in elementary school), along with math and science, not as "art" but as reasoning or method.

Epiphany as logic is not experienced directly but composed, designed, in a consulting practice dubbed the *EmerAgency*, a virtual consultancy by means of which all citizens participate in an Internet public sphere (possible only through a digital prosthesis). The oracle or parable strategy is to adopt a public policy problem (a catastrophe in progress) as an image of one's own situation, thus testing the slogan of the EmerAgency: Problems B Us. Reading the properties of a breakdown of culture as a parable of my own personal situation performs Kant's bridge, producing an affective passage between macrocosm and microcosm. The economimesis of this circuit or circulation is not causal or inspective but circumspective. Neuroaesthetics is knocking on this door at the moment, but even when the physiology of our embodied emotional triggers is fully mapped, we will still need the rhetoric of arts and letters to address this affective dimension of intelligence by digital means.

With this theoretical and historical framework in mind, the following sections review my pedagogy for teaching electracy in a literate institution. It is useful to have in mind this larger institutional framing that is part of an apparatus. The worldview of orality is religion, with church as the institutional adaptation to literacy (religions of the book). The worldview of literacy is science, institutionalized in school. Thales is the first philosopher because he offered a materialist explanation of the cosmos (everything is water). Plato wrote the first discourse on method (Phaedrus), and Aristotle invented logic. The practice of analytical thinking (logos replacing muthos) was established in the Academy and Lyceum, but it took almost two thousand years for science to separate fully from religion. This historical relay helps us understand the dynamics, or economy, of the institutional forces at work in our own time. The institutional practices of electracy, so far, have been developed within the institution of Entertainment. The historical analogy help us appreciate the potential of Entertainment, not to judge it exclusively by its present accomplishments, but to imagine what it might be two millennia into the future. Electracy metaphysics is grounded in imaging, which is to say it is affective. The three worldviews with their practices and institutions coexist of course, and individuals enter the three discourses (entry into language) as part of everyday life in the modern world: family is the setting for orality, learning a native language from infancy. Entertainment is encountered soon after, through the electracy trojan horse of the TV set, videogame console and the like. Literacy often begins in the home as well, but is fully implemented when the child starts school. The institutional tensions around the borders and folds of these three institutions and their worldviews are familiar to us. The fates of Socrates (executed for corrupting the young) and of Galileo (silenced by the Church) have become emblematic of these tensions.

New media networked practices are transitional, hybrid forms and experiments. The part of the apparatus most accessible within the arts and letters disciplines is the practices of imaging. Electracy needs to do for digital imaging what literacy did for the written word. The purpose of my pedagogy, then, is to learn to use the figural as a mode of image reason, as a supplement to the existing institutional commitment to argumentation and analysis. "Figure" here is the equivalent of "logic" and stands in for any and all formal aesthetic devices, especially (ultimately) those invented by the historical avant-garde as part of the separation of electracy from literate culture. *Part One* describes an assignment in my undergraduate course on E-Lit, in which the students encounter the "emblem" as a formal device of compression, in the context of five qualities of aesthetic significance generalizable to any medium, form, genre, modality. As Deleuze and Guattari have argued, the new abstraction is not a unified transcendental but a heterogeneous assemblage. *Part Two* describes a project for graduate students, using figure and emblem to compose a subject portrait as disaster. *Part Three* takes up the figural as collective research in deliberative reason (public policy decision making), describing a project undertaken collaboratively with the *Florida Research Ensemble*. The particular contribution that my essay makes to this exploration of networked media is to open for further discussion, comparison, elaboration, and debate this pedagogical dimension of new media as apparatus. More and different approaches, case studies, cultural framings, are welcome.

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Memos for Undergraduate Education

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I teach an upper-division undergraduate course called [Internet Literature](#) in an English department. About two-thirds of the students are English majors, and the rest mostly Journalism majors with other miscellaneous areas represented (Art, Business, Psychology often included). We meet in a networked classroom, justified by the fact that until recently students composed websites, following the principle that it is helpful in learning about new media to express your experience multimodally. Now the projects are composed as blogs, supplemented with basic Photoshop. In the context of an English department, or at least the one at the University of Florida, this modest bit of online authoring comes as a shock to many of the majors, whose standard expectation is the research paper. Our assignment is called the "learning screen," to make explicit the contrast with the conventional paper.



Electronic Literature Collection

The object of study is covered now by the [Electronic Literature Collection](#). The publication online of this collection is welcome for many reasons, not the least of which is that it solves the problem that arose when I expected students to browse lists of suggested links as a point of departure for finding their own examples of E-Lit. It was amazing how many students wanted to use E-Bay, Wikipedia, Yahoo, Google, and other functional or production sites as examples of art. Now I can assign the Collection, and students accept it as they do anthologies assigned in paper classes. The fact of inclusion is evidence that the selection is indeed a work of E-Lit.

The aspect of the assignment that I want to recommend is the use of Italo Calvino's "Six Memos for the Next Millennium" as the basis for the assignment. In these lectures Calvino extracts from his lifetime experience of reading (especially) Italian literature, as well as creating some of his own, a set of qualities that may be universal, to be found in language arts regardless of medium or epoch (these are my claims on his behalf). By stating these qualities as essences (Lightness, Quickness, Exactitude, Visibility, Multiplicity), "Memos" provides an interface

between the familiar aesthetics and forms of print literature and the unfamiliar or experimental aesthetics of E-Lit. Anyone with a background in avant-garde or experimental arts recognizes immediately the formal rationale for new media, but my students for the most part lack any such background. We project onto "Memos" an intention of defining a set of qualities giving a measure of "literariness," to be tested against the experience of print literature, and as a guide for encountering the effects of less familiar forms and practices.

Our use of Calvino is typical of heuristics (logic of invention), meaning that it is generalizable to other works and different assignments. The method is nothing new, having been practiced by the Roman orator Cicero. The strategy is to adopt "Memos" as a template, meeting the prescription that if students are expected to write or reason in a particular way, they need a model for guidance. "Memos" exemplifies the genre of "memo," and much of the in-class work was devoted to extracting from the example the general rules for a template. The working title of the blogs was "Five Memos for E-Lit." A related heuristic is that we are not exactly imitating Calvino, but seeking what he sought. We accept that the five qualities are the proper ones - Lightness, Quickness, Exactitude, Visibility, Multiplicity. Calvino died before he completed the sixth quality, projected to be "Consistency." An interesting complication to the assignment would be to invite students to create this sixth quality, either "Consistency," or one of their own devising.



Italo Calvino's "Appropriated Personal Emblem"

In class we work through the first memo together, implementing a Confucian principle: *if I show you one corner (of the table), you should be able to find the other three*. The quality analyzed is "Lightness." We discern in the discussion that there are two layers to the description: objective, addressing the properties of the quality; subjective, in which Calvino expresses his own poetics and tastes relative to the range of possibilities implied by the quality. Here is one of the instructions for the blog: *use the memos as an opportunity not only to apply the qualities as a probe of E-Lit, but also reflexively as a review of your own sensibility*. The analysis reveals that each memo has six parts:

1) **Analogy #1 (Mythology)** . Calvino presents each quality in a style closer to literature itself than to criticism or philosophy. He relies on analogies and images more than on concepts. His first analogy is from Greek mythology, the story of Perseus versus Medusa. He tells part of the myth, and explains its implications as an allegory of literature. The point is that literature does not look directly at its referent, but indirectly, in the manner of Perseus using his shield as a mirror redirecting the Gorgon's look back at herself.

2) **Binary opposition:** notice the binary opposition structuring the chief property of Lightness. Lightness is revealed in the way a work treats the burdens or existential weight of living life. It is understood as including a range of

possibilities covering a polarity between "light" and "heavy" (the opposite of "light" is not "dark" but "burdensome"). This structure sets the pattern for every quality, all of which organize their property as a range of options over a binary polarity. Kundera's title, "The Unbearable Lightness of Being" identifies Calvino's insight. The structure was abstracted from several examples -- works by Kundera and Montale.

3) **Analogy #2 (Science).** Calvino continues his procedure of finding analogies for the qualities of literature in other discourses, and drawing on works that reflect his personal education and cultural background, as well as personal taste. In each instance his purpose is the same, to identify a property of Lightness. Having established his view that Lightness is a way of treating the burdens of existence, Calvino now specifies how literature accomplishes this effect, which is by dissolving the solidity of the world. The analogy used to make this point is *De Rerum Natura* by the Ancient atomist, Lucretius. The burdens of existence are revealed through Lightness to be like the physicality of substance, which in fact is not solid but is a flux that is minute and mobile.

4) **Emblem.** To make the quality and its properties memorable, Calvino selects one literary example that condenses the relevant features in one dramatic gesture or action. His thesis is that literature is light in the way that it discloses while transcending the weight of the world or the burden of living. The scene designated as emblem for this property is from the *Decameron* by Boccaccio. The scene is from a story in which the poet Cavalcanti is challenged by a group of revelers, who accuse the poet of impiety and ask him what he wishes to prove by denying the existence of God. The setting happens to be a cemetery, and the poet's answer is to leap over a tombstone, leaving behind his inquisitors. This leap, associated with the proverb about whistling past the graveyard, is the emblem putting into an icon this primary property of Lightness.

5) **Mood.** As is apparent by now, Calvino commits himself to a consistent unified definition of each quality, which unfolds step by step through each memo. The next aspect of the quality noted is that it may be discerned in the overall mood of a work. Literature through its art shows how the world actually is (the weight of living), how to behave in such a world (the leap over the tombstone), and now the mood, how one should feel about this conduct in such a world. The example is Shakespeare, whose characters take some distance from their own dramas. The vicissitudes of action are framed within a mood, with the dominant mood alternating between melancholy and irony.

6) **Analogy #3 (literary criticism).** Calvino's final criterion of measure derives from literary criticism, specifically Vladimir Propp's study of Russian wondertales. He uses Propp's insight that folktales express an anthropological context, in that literature, regardless of how fantastical it may seem on the surface, is motivated by a real human need. His final example of Lightness to make this point is another "leap," this time the parable "The Knight of the Bucket," by Kafka. Calvino's point is that the story of a magic coal bucket that carried its owner around scavenging for something to burn in the stove, refers to the wartime hardships during the time that the parable was written (1917). The story ends tragically because the bucket is so light (so empty) that it carries its owner up and away until he is lost.

The next step is for the students to go through each of the memos, identifying the features (analogies and the like) used to define the quality. The instructions for composing the blog memos were itemized on the syllabus: a) Explain the quality according to Calvino; b) Propose and justify as an analogy for the quality in E-lit an example from some other mode or domain of knowledge. Use a different analogy for each quality; c) Emblem: Propose and justify the selection of some figure to use as an icon that condenses in a single visualization the feeling of the quality; d) E-Lit Example: Select one work of E-Lit from the Collection and explain how it manifests the quality. Use a different E-Lit example for each quality. One additional required feature was to refer to the other book we read for this part of the project, Katherine Hayles's "Electronic Literature." The instruction was to select one idea from Hayles's introduction, and apply it to the E-Lit example, using a different idea for each quality (ideas such as recursion, or use of code, for example).

MEMOS FOR INTERNET LITERATURE

Introduction Lightness Quickness Exactitude Visibility Multiplicity

Introduction to Memos

In his last book, *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*, Italo Calvino details five indispensable qualities inherent, but still requiring protection and nurturing, to literature: lightness, quickness, exactitude, visibility, and multiplicity. At the eve of his death in 1985, Calvino believed these universal values ensured the survival of literature into the next millennium as they represent impressions that only literature can offer.

Now, at the beginning of the third millennium, it is apparent that despite the technology boom of the 1990s and subsequent explosion of new media art, Calvino's qualities still hold true. This Web site attempts to demonstrate the five memos to better explain their application to literature and art. For each memo, in addition to an emblem and analogy from everyday life, the example and corresponding graphics are meant to evoke the quality in reference to Internet literature and art in an effort to substantiate its modern relevance.

Memos for Internet Literature

The other lesson drawn from "Memos" more generally, as a guide for approaching E-Lit, is that each of the qualities may be read as a review of the capacities of multimodal art: a poetics for designing or composing a work of E-Lit - an E-Lit Elements of Style. This attitude to "Memos" treats them as prescriptions, rather than as descriptions (as also happened with Aristotle's Poetics), but it is a useful exercise within limits. Lightness = verbal texture, the language in which the piece is composed: lexicon, diction, syntax. Quickness = the "path of thought" of a work, which translates formally into linking in hypermedia, or the manner of unfolding of theme, plot, figure: circuitous? Direct? The rhythm of passage. Exactitude = the mood or atmosphere of the piece, focused on a scale from sharp to vague. Visibility = visualization in images, but more generally the appeal to all the senses using figures, description, exposition, as well as image or sound files. Multiplicity = the relationship between parts and wholes, on a scale between clean and cluttered. Samples of the product:

<http://literatureine.wordpress.com>

<http://android21a.wordpress.com>

An example of a Website version

<http://www.english.ufl.edu/~glue/s08/mlawrenc/introduction.html>

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The EmerAgency as Graduate Seminar

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The *Florida Research Ensemble* (FRE) was formed at the University of Florida in the mid-1990s by a group of colleagues from a number of different colleges brought together by a common interest in electronic technologies and new media. The question guiding our work was the possibility of using media for delivering knowledge to institutions outside the academy. Part of the object of inquiry from the beginning was the process of collaborative creativity itself. The present project ("Imaging Place") began with an exhibition entitled "Imaging Florida," curated by John Craig Freeman in collaboration with the University Gallery (University of Florida, 1996) that brought together the current membership of the FRE. From this collaboration emerged a virtual, on-line, distributed consultancy called the EmerAgency, a learning practice concerned with the Internet as a civic sphere. The premise is that netizens participate as consultants in the formation of public policy with respect to issues that affect their communities, and that this civic practice is at the same time an experience of self-knowledge of a group subject. The purpose of the practice is to establish care (Heidegger), an experience of relevance and responsibility between the microcosm (individual) and macrocosm (collective, historical) levels in the public sphere.

A project relevant to the EmerAgency is Paul Virilio's [Museum of Accidents](#).

Natural accidents



January 17, 1995, Nishinomiya, Japan



September 21, 1999, Wufeng, Taiwan



September 21, 1999, Wufeng, Taiwan



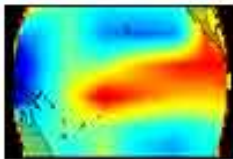
January 24, 1995, Kobe, Japan



November 14, 1999, Duzce, Turkey



July 31, 1993, Chesterfield, Missouri, United States



October 28, 1997, Pacific Ocean



July 15, 1987, Le Grand-Bornand, Haute Savoie, France



June 12 1991, Clark Air Base, Philippines



January 19, 2002, Goma Airport, Democratic Republic of Congo



January 26, 2002, Goma, Democratic Republic of Congo



August 20, 1997, the Soufrière, Montserrat



December 29, 1999, Nancy, France



January 9, 1996, Montreal, Canada



June 28, 2002, Phoenix, Arizona, United States

Unknown Quantity

"Today," Virilio says, "the media no longer exists as narratives but rather as flashes and images. History is therefore being reduced to images" (Virilio, 1999: 57). Deliberative reason survives to an extent within the spectacle -- the institutionalization of media as entertainment -- through the consumption of semiotic mythologies. Events such as

the disasters exhibited in the "Museum of Accidents" have no meaning of their own, but are put into pre-existing narratives and constructed as parables. As Steven Biel pointed out in his cultural history of the sinking of the *Titanic*, America (and other nations) use these narratives to think "out loud" about the social dramas of the day (Biel, 1997). Biel's account of the construction of the *Titanic* disaster as an emblem or icon is a prototype for how this collective authoring works.

The first processing of the event, bringing it into cultural discourse, is usually undertaken by journalists, as happened in 1912 with the reporting of the sinking. The event is domesticated by being cast in the form of an existing narrative -- in this case, the topos of chivalry, noblesse oblige, in which the upper-class or "first cabin" males give up their places on the lifeboats to women and children, and thus sacrifice their lives. Once the narrative is in circulation, it is open to revision and counter-narratives. The meaning is contested -- the selection of focus, the hero, the most relevant actions -- in the course of working through the most important social issues of the day. America was undergoing the traumas of industrialization, urbanization, the shift from a rural to an urban society. The power of the WASP elite was being challenged by women, freed slaves, workers, and immigrants. American identity -- the norms of gender, race, class, ethnicity -- and the balance of political power underlying these values, were in play.

The "myth" (in the sense established in semiotic theory by Roland Barthes) compressed this entire dialogical contest into an emblem -- a metonym for the narrative: the scene of first-cabin men adhering to the code of the sea. The parable works as a proportional analogy. The scene on the sinking ship is the denotation, vehicle, or microcosm, whose connotation, tenor, or macrocosm is supplied by the audience addressed by the story. The action itself is legible through the binary oppositions structuring common sense. The position of identification is with the protagonists' calm (not panic), courage (not cowardice), self-sacrifice (not selfishness), performing order in the midst of chaos. The binary structure articulates every level of the parable, with the connotations mapping the shifting values of the community, summarized in the tension between a Protestant versus a Capitalist hegemony, masking in this contest the synthesis described by Max Weber in his *Protestantism and the Spirit of Capital*. Weber explained how Protestant theologians, within the concept of predetermination, transvalued capitalist profit (usury) from a sin to a sign of election by God. In any case, the old values of thrift, hard work, and self-discipline were giving way to consumption, leisure, and self-indulgence. A culture of scarcity, character, and integrity was becoming subordinate to one of abundance, personality, and attractiveness (63).



Titanic Lifeboats

The purpose of the EmerAgency is to open this collective mythography to a wiki-style distributed authorship, contributing to an Internet public sphere, against the Internet Accident warned of by Virilio. Individuals participate in the dialogical counter/hegemonic argument, by appropriating a public event or disaster as a parable for one's own personal situation (the personal is political).

[Blogging the Disaster](#)

A basic version of the EmerAgency consultation was tested in my graduate seminar, Spring 2009. The reading strategy is the one Barthes applied to the maxims of La Rochefoucauld, treated as an oracle showing him his own situation in the manner of a parable (Barthes, 1980: 3). The disaster is treated as a maxim, "a for-me (and what an aim!)" Barthes says, marveling how a saying composed three centuries ago hits its target so accurately. The ultimate goal of the assignment was to create brand logos for a disaster, relative to a policy issue within an experience economy. The first step was to probe one's own capacity to be affected (after Deleuze's Spinoza), while exploring the dimension of experience that literature and the arts offer, to expand the notion of "experience" guiding commercial enterprise.

Students composed an anecdote based on an incident that they recalled as the first awakening of self-awareness (a childhood memory). The relay was the "primal scene" in Blanchot's "The Writing of the Disaster" (his memory, at the age of seven, of looking out a window at an overcast sky, and intuiting that the world is without purpose). In Readings, Helene Cixous used Blanchot's primal scene as a probe for defining the poetics not only of Blanchot but also of Joyce, Kafka, Kleist, Lispector, and Tsvetayeva (Cixous, 1991), thus establishing the generic potential of this topos as a form. Her hypothesis is that this early experience of self-awareness is the beginnings of a drive to write. The instructions are to focus on the materiality of the scene of memory, not to reconstruct one's thoughts. The disaster (already selected using the criterion of pre-existing interest) is then adopted as an archive from which to extract the "myth" of this primal scene, specifically to create a figure that evokes the feeling, the affective register of the scene of memory. The figure is composed in a blog, using principles of montage cross-cutting between the two scenes (of memory and disaster), which produces the constellation of aesthetic coherence. The montage is guided by feelings of recognition. You know you have it right when you get the feeling: *the disaster (the outside) in me*. This attunement creates an ontological image that "defines" the event (picks out the traits of mood).

Included below are extracts from my readings of a few of the blogs (plus URLs for fuller review), to give a flavor of the figures produced.

[Mauro Carassai](#)

Memory: After his obstinate behavior at a picnic, M.C.'s parents pretend to leave him behind.

Event: Mariner 1 launch abort.

The success is due to a number of factors. 1) Your tone throughout is thoughtful, reflective, questioning, perplexed, maintaining the right distance from what you are reporting. 2) The way the vehicle and tenor events are documented, juxtaposed. There is a balance of the range of materials included, theme and variation, and the repetition of certain elements distributed throughout the posts. 3) The focus within this range, zeroing in on the tiny error, the misplaced hyphen in the computer programming, that was the material cause of the aborted mission. In the context of the memory and updated personal reflections, the minute character of the mistake resonates all the more strongly with its allegorical parallel in your emotional world. 4) A good move to include the short story of the lovers, which mediates between the two sides of the figure, and suggests what the stakes are, what the existential consequences of the primal scene may be. I wonder if it would be good to make more of the fact that the space mission was precisely to Venus? To bring out the suggestive connection is legitimate, in the context of your short story. The implication overall is that your decision or self-judgment is a condition of self-destruction, of aborted missions. That is the shorthand in any case, what the materials suggest, and then the nuance comes from the concatenation of the assemblage.

[Emily McCann](#)

Memory: E.M. defends her mother during one of her parents' fights at the dinner table.

Event: The banking collapse in Iceland.

Your documentation is dense and varied, so it took me a little longer to get your point, in comparison with some of the others, which makes me think that more repetition or variation on the primal scene might be in order. The feeling hit when I got the connection between Emily rising to protest the dominant male's abuses, and the protesters in Iceland. Then I could follow the nuances of your decision, your attitude to the decision, and its consequences for your adult decision and state of mind. Featuring the term "meltdown" in the header is a cue or clue, juxtaposed with Iceland: in the allegory the vehicle suggests a cause of the family quarrels, but also the coldness of emotional life, and its possible thaw. Nice move to expand immediately the relevant documents of the disaster, essentially to include Iceland as such, through its culture (the Eddas = father); and more suggestively perhaps, the landscape, with its frozen beauty, suggesting an emotional equivalent. Even the theme of blogging was brought in, as part of a reflection on writing, with Odin and the runes, suggesting that your career choice and writing craft have been purchased at some price. We believe of course that it is worth it, or that the good thing about being a writer is that bad events make good stories.

a universal fire
the experienced image

anything goes
everything matters

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Home

RECENT POSTS

- Testing the logo
- The Movement of the Disaster
- Logonalysis
- Reflections on Heuretics
- THE Logo

BLOGROLL

- Blithedale Project
- Chadflix
- Choi's Space
- Clinamen
- Hass Disaster
- Heaven's Gate
- Heuretics
- Mariner 1
- Meltdown: Iceland and the Nation State
- Peering Through the Fence
- The Eco-Crisis
- The July War

THE UNIVERSAL FIRE

- Business Lessons Learned
- Cinefantastique

nothing is
lost forever

Blog Figure

[Charles Newsom](#)

Memory: The death of C.N.'s great grandmother

Event: The fire at Universal Studios.

What you select, and then feature through further selection, repetition, variation, accumulates into a pattern. There is a core significance established, and then nuances, qualifications, and further indications around the core. The initial figure is the basic connection between this particular disaster, the fire that destroyed the studio, the films, the rides

etc, with your memory of the loss of your great grandmother (ggm). The connection is made more intense, and personalized to an unusual degree, because of the family history of your visit to the site, including photos of a place or parts of it that no longer exist. Just a few attributes of the scene are emphasized and repeated, making them salient, and augmenting as well as pointing out the feeling: the fire itself, and specifically a burning reel of film; the King Kong ride/exhibit. Each of these features is loaded with further associations, whose unspoken power adds resonance to your expression. In the context of your interpretive comments distributed through the writing, the feeling expressed - the allegory - is that the fire is your desire, specifically your desire to create something, anything: the desire came first, and then the search for how it might find its medium or channel. The loss of the ggm, her death, and her backstory as a creative person, connect with the destruction of a shrine of the film arts. The overtone of the feeling is the fear that you may be a kind of King Kong, enormous in inherent power, but doomed to failure or loss, finding no appropriate form for the world as you find it (Kong in New York). There are further nice effects: the introduction of chance in various ways, plus the framing of the experiment with insightful selections of citations from our readings and other sources.

[John Tinnell](#)

Memory: J.T. with his mother at a grocery store that had to be evacuated due to a bomb threat.

Event: The disappearance of bee colonies.

The figure is nicely developed, creating a strong personal feeling, and also a range of overtones and nuances. Your use of images, videos, citations and other documentations proves the thesis of "figure" as addressing the senses, and the capacity of the figural to achieve precise signification. The nuance begins with the nature of your disaster, the disappearance of bee colonies, which in itself is mysterious. The reason for the collapse in some areas is unclear, although the connections with the eco-crisis are obvious. The impending ecological collapse is itself vague, at least to the extent that it seems futuristic, something for other generations to worry about, and yet a real threat. This situation is paired with your primal scene, the bogus bomb threat that cleared the supermarket. You do a great job with selection of the parking lot, and then the repetitions. The affective character is established just through the atmosphere of the parking lot as a nowhere holding area. The use of Beckett's *Godot* is superb, the equal of Blanchot's *Bartleby*, in its communication of a complex state of mind. Adding Rimbaud's career produces further overtones, relative to the theme of the sublime: the disappearance of a poet, perhaps of poetry itself (implicitly)? You make some nice connections, using the cultural symbolism of the beehive, the lives of bees as allegory of utopia/dystopia, to evoke the larger import of your disaster. The most important effect, finally, is the recognition that the feeling is existential, not confined to this particular threat, but to Threat as such, death, the unforeseeable. Your answer is: "so we should stand around in parking lots? I don't think so."

[Jong Chul Choi](#)

Memory: Racing ahead of trains in a tunnel.

Event: Rwanda genocide.

A strong feeling is created to begin with simply due to the disaster you chose: Rwandan genocide. The extremity of the case, mounted as the vehicle in your allegory, signals a strong feeling. The disaster is documented effectively, including gathering the pop culture treatments -- the movies for example. The complexity of your figure arises through a dialectical or more dialogical relationship between the vehicle (disaster) and tenor (primal scene). Part of the interest of your primal scene is the universality of the boys' dare-devil game that you describe. In the United States the prototype is boys racing trains on a railroad bridge across a river. In your figure, you are running from the oncoming event. The genocide then figures the terror of that event, which is the existential realization of death, mortality. There is more to it, as your use of philosophy effectively indicates: the other, and your responsibility ethically for the inhumanity and unfairness, the injustice of life. The historical association of the tunnel with the Korean War personalizes even the collective level of the comparison, given the split in Korea that turned one part of the nation/people against the other, as happened in Rwanda. The inclusion of Jaar as your intermediary, your witness who mediates the event through art, make precise your present stance, the attitude you hold toward these histories: maintaining a distance, but serving as witness.

Proverbs of Disaster

Giorgio Agamben explained what is at stake in these consultations, which is the restoration of the authority of experience against the disenchantment of the world due to utilitarian hegemony. The chief complaint of critique against modernity is the destruction of experience. Wisdom disappeared when the authority of accumulated tradition was undermined by science. The locus of truth shifted to what was beyond human experience (such as the sub-atomic realm). The commodity took over the level of culture abandoned by wisdom, replaced the maxim with the slogan, and appropriated the question of well-being for its own purposes, thus usurping the realm formerly occupied by prudence. An emblem of the effect of this usurpation on collective judgment is the fact that the swastika, adopted from ancient sources to serve as the logo of National Socialism, originally meant in Sanskrit "well-being." The equivalent for Kant was the notion of Wohlgefallen. The "experience economy" touted by promoters and developers places the consumer, or individual desire, at the center of design, but the "economy" referred to is what Bataille called "restricted." It attempted to confine exchange to the profit motive of capitalism, while denying the force of "expenditure" that is another version of Virilio's General Accident. Economimesis, meanwhile (Derrida) shows that the Restricted (accumulation) and General (expenditure) economies are intrinsically interrelated. Disaster indexes the temporality of interruption, the new temporality adequate to the immediate Now.

The EmerAgency positions its distributed deliberation at this threshold dividing the Restricted and General economies. Baudelaire, as the prototype of modernist poets, set a precedent for the new wisdom potential within electracy, as Agamben explains.

In Baudelaire, a man expropriated from experience exposes himself to the force of shock. Poetry responds to the expropriation of experience by converting this expropriation into a reason for surviving and making the inexperienceable its normal condition. In this perspective, the search for the new does not appear as the search for a new object of experience; instead, it implies an eclipse and a suspension of experience. New is what cannot be experienced, because it lies "in the depths of the unknown": the Kantian thing-in-itself, the inexperienceable as such. Thus, in Baudelaire this search takes the paradoxical form of aspiring to the creation of a "lieu commun" - a common place [...] But in a state where man has been expropriated of experience, the creation of such a "lieu commun" is possible only through a destruction of experience which, in the very moment of its counterfeit authority, suddenly discloses that this destruction is really man's new abode. Estrangement, which removes from the most commonplace objects their power to be experienced, thus becomes the exemplary procedure of a poetic project which aims to make of the Inexperienceable the new "lieu commun," humanity's new experience. In this sense the "Fleurs du Mal" are proverbs of the inexperienceable" (Agamben, 2007: 48).

Here is another way to state our project: the proverbs of disaster. It is the point of departure for the electrate equivalent of the commonplace topics in literate education.

[Previous: Memos for Undergraduate Education](#) | [Next: Arts Research: Creating the KaChing](#)

Arts Research: Creating the KaChing



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[Curriculum Vitae](#)



[Gordon Bleach](#), Sadly, artist Gordon Bleach passed away suddenly and unexpectedly from a brain tumor in 1998. He was at the height of his career and a valuable participant in the FRE. This web site has recently been reconstituted in his honor.

The [FRE](#) undertook a pilot consultation in Miami, Florida, in the 1990s to test the parable form of the poetic figure on behalf of a group subject (a prototype developed extensively by John Craig Freeman, including sites in Second Life). Here is part of a summary description of the project published as an "artists' statement" in *Leonardo* 36: 3 (2003).

The case used as the prototype for the consultancy is the "image crisis" declared by the government in Florida during the early 1990s in response to a series of tourist murders (a crisis exacerbated more recently by the presidential election snafu and the ties of the 9-11 hijackers to Florida). An analysis of news and entertainment documents resulted in a focus first on the city of Miami, and then on the Miami River, a 5.5 mile channel at the heart of the city that is a "zone" -- site of every policy issue in the state. "Testimonial" is a montage of documents (journals, video interviews, photographs) by Barbara Jo Revelle made during her five-week stay at an Inn on the Miami River. Testimonial is composed using a hybrid mix of the "drift" made famous by the French Situationists, the poetic form of the "ideogram" (the modernist poetics initiated by Ezra Pound), and Roland Barthes' obtuse or third meaning (a detail in an image triggers an involuntary memory).

The method reflects a "secret history" of "situation" that brings into relation Plato's "Timaeus" (chora), the Chinese "I Ching" (hexagram), Ezra Pound's "Cantos" (vortex), and Guy Debord's maps (*plaque tournante*). The poetic ideogram, extended to photography, is used to produce an image category out of the documentation of the river region. The photograph "Crossroads" (showing a Haitian trading vessel impounded by the Coast Guard) is to this image category what the topic "justice" is to a conceptual category. The testimonial generated this image by juxtaposing Revelle's documents with a public policy issue -- "Operation Safety Net" and the Caribbean Code, intended to exclude substandard boats from the port. The result is an attunement, a cognitive map in which the Haitian trader, impounded by the Coast Guard, juxtaposed with Revelle's personal situation, evokes the mood ("Stimmung") of the river zone. The EmerAgency motto is: "Problems B Us."

The name of the Miami chora -- Miautre -- refers to Jacques Derrida's discussion of "aporia" (an intractable dilemma). Miami is treated not as a problem but as an aporia. In his *Politics of Friendship*, Derrida concludes his critique of the history of political theory based on the model of "friendship," by proposing a politics of hospitality (not friend and enemy, but host and guest). Derrida's aporia of hospitality is proposed as a replacement for the dilemma that structured the Cold War (Prisoner's Dilemma). In this context, "Mi-Ami" translates as "my friend." Derrida proposes the "other" ("autre") as the guest in a new politics; hence, the testimonial works to switch the Miami River from "my friend" to "my other" (Miautre). The French terms are justified by a focus on the Haitian presence on the river (Creole). The Haitians who come to Miami are not enemies but guests. "Crossroads" becomes categorial when it is extended to cover any experience of "impoundment".

http://barbarajorevelle.com/miami_river/index.html



Image 10: "Crossroads"

Testimonial (Mystory)

The practice of consulting recommended for further development is "testimonial," using the mystory procedure, with the goal of generalizing to an Internet practice the arts experiment conducted in the Miami River zone. [As a quick reference, here is [my own composition](#) of a mystory].

NOON STAR
A MYSTORY (GREGORY L. ULMER)

Home Career Family Entertainment Community Emblem Forum

Mystery
Allegory
Diagrams
Hypermedia
Internet Invention
Measure
Myseum
Popcycle
Gregory Ulmer
Heuristics (blog)
T-Shirt

Family
LETTER MEN, CCHS
Give me a "C".
read more...

Entertainment
HIGH NOON
Showdown.
read more...

Community
GEORGE ARMSTRONG CUSTER
Where do you stand?
read more...

Image of Wide Scope
NOON STAR
Do your duty.
read more...

Forum
What is the moral of the story? A motto for the emblem. Implications, reflections, suggestions for further work.
read more...

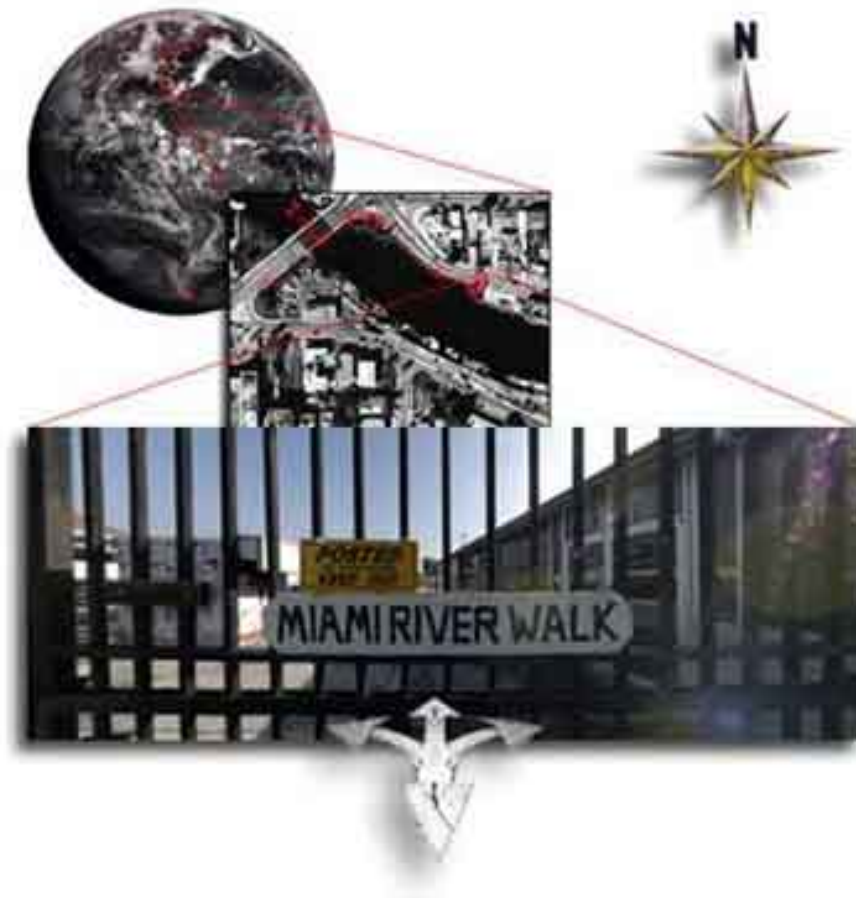
Noon Star

The image generated mystorically is "categorical" -- it extracts and holds the mood of the Problem zone, and this mood is what makes the image capacious, capable of gathering into a set the whole (hole) of the zone. The established means by which a picture holds a narrative are either that it represents the "pregnant moment" -- the crisis, peripeteia or turning point of a narrative; -- or that it offers what is typical in terms of the everyday reality of a situation. While both of these possibilities are observable in "Crossroads," neither is necessary since the method does not depend upon the form of what is visible in the image. The image functions rather as a "souvenir" of the triggering detail (punctum). The network of associations snapped in this shot is enhanced by the visualization

technologies of electracy (recalling the research and pedagogical project, to design and test a "reading and writing" practice based on imaging).

rhizomes.13 fall 2006

Place and the Electrate Situation William Tilson and John Craig Freeman



Imaging Place

To put into a database the flash of insight captured in the "Crossroads" photograph, involves unspooling the four threads ("ficelles") of allegory, in order to compose a cognitive map connecting collective history with individual experience. What is the effect of juxtaposing these four scenes? If our purpose were to write a screenplay, to make a movie, then these tracks could be integrated in one narrative. "Crossroads" is a virtual film still evoking the diegesis (imaginary space and time) of Myami (a narrative diegesis is what makes a particular story recognizable regardless of the medium in which it is represented). "Myami" is "Miami" in the media spectacle. The dynamic movement of a narrative from beginning to end is managed by the contracts governing the three modes of exchange that constitute society: economics, kinship, and communication. Events become potential stories (become worth recounting) when the contracts that regulate the exchanges are violated (the enactment of such vices as stealing, cheating, lying).

These exchanges and their violations are at work in the scene and moment indexed by the photograph. This photograph is to electracy (the digital apparatus) what a concept is to literacy. The mystery registers each exchange, juxtaposing or blocking them into an assemblage, in order to foreground a different dynamic that is also at work in the scene: contingency, luck, (it goes by many names, each with its own nuance), chance, coincidence,

synchronicity. Beyond the ordering powers of argument, narrative, and figure, there is a disruptive, chaotic operator. An "omen," for example, is defined as the conjunction of a personal problem, an event, and chance.

The Miami River is a port, a marketplace, literally a crossroads. The lines of our potential narrative are left untied in order to allow a figure -- a metaphor or metonym -- to emerge, an image, whose "event" or happening blocks the discourses into a pattern, a constellation. The point in any case is not to tell one story, but to show the ground and limits of story and concept. We assume the cultural schema, the familiarity with narrative form, so that it matters little whether we imagine "Crossroads" as a still from a movie that has been disassembled, or one that cannot be made. What are the stories?



Miami Miautre

Literal Level: History (the story of the Miami River)

Literally "Crossroads" shows a ship docked next to a warehouse on the Miami River, City of Miami, Florida. It is not the ship we anticipated in our table work (it is not the *Rose-Marie Express* but the *M/V Deliverance Express*). The cargo is not immigrants but used, second-hand items: bicycles, plastic buckets, clothing, mattresses. It is piled around the warehouse, and some has been loaded onto the vessel. Atop a pile of mattresses two crewmen are seated.

What cannot be seen but must be inferred is the Problem at work in each track or register. One of the selection principles determining what to include in each thread is this schema of Problem-Solution that frames the modern understanding of "Ate" (the blindness that produces calamity in tragedy). In this case the ship is impounded, caught in Operation Safety Net -- the "Caribbean Code" -- conducted by the United States Coast Guard, directed at "substandard shipping," vessels under 500 gross tons. The nature of the problem depends upon one's point of view or position in the situation. For the Coast Guard it is "irresponsible owners" trying to extend the economic life of old ships. The established policy solution is to eliminate such shipping through inspection and impounding. For the

Haitians the problem is to make enough money to feed dependents back home, a goal thwarted by the opponent -- the Coast Guard.

Allegorical Level: Entertainment

The place where the photograph was taken (the Miami River zone) is animated by the exchange of communication, media, language, in the sense of the circulation of stories and information that motivate or discourage tourist travel and immigration. "Problems" in the Media quarter are constructed as spectacles to be consumed as entertainment. The best representative of this register is the television series *Miami Vice*, with its pastel updating of the noir cop drama, several episodes of which used the Miami River as setting. *Miami Vice* is a kind of postmodern Eiffel Tower, holding a place for the city's identity in an international cognitive map.

The policy question in this quarter has to do with "murder" only to the extent that crime statistics influence plans for the gentrification of downtown Miami, and the destinations of tourists. A more immediate concern is the physical impossibility of moving visitors continuously through the river district. "Few things can dampen an urban experience more than the realization that each stop on an itinerary requires an automobile and a parking space. Until downtown can offer an assortment of attractions within walking distance of each other or in the reach of a short ride on a convenient public shuttle, business persons and visitors alike will have no patience with the idea of spending time downtown." So states the Master Plan of the Miami River Coordinating Committee. Solution? A River Walk, including urban renewal projects of various kinds in addition to the board walk: condominiums, restaurants, pollution controls, and the like. Thus this thread embodies the river as an object of study for the expertise of urban planners and architects.

Moral Level: Family (personal memory)

The photograph was taken sometime in June, 1998, by Barbara Jo Revelle, an artist and member of the FRE, during her five-week stay in a tourist Inn next to the river. Her personal trajectory is inscribed within the exchange of kinship, exogamy, tracing a circulation away from her father through a marriage and divorce to her present relationship with Ron. The personal memory anchoring this register was of a game Revelle played with some friends who lived in "Skeeversville," an impoverished neighborhood near her home, where she was forbidden to go by her parents. The game was called "perfume in the black hole," the "hole" referring to a pile of mattresses in the basement of the home.

Revelle's relationship with Ron is the motivation for the burning question of her consultation, which is framed syncretically as empirical and oracular. The Problem orienting the exchange is love -- manifested in this case as jealousy, which motivates the intense and repeated fights between Barbara and Ron. He accused her of wanting to start an affair with some of the men she met during her stay. His justification was a genuine fear for her safety. The given Solution is counseling, couples therapy. Her story is simultaneously that of a querent and theoros, working in the "middle voice" which is the "mood" of theoria (the tour of the problem out there is a reading of my Family situation).

Anagogic Level: Career (disciplinary knowledge)

The quarter of Expertise is absent from most narratives, since the discourse of disciplinary knowledge avoids story and prefers science, argument, document: the treatise format. The structural account of circulating objects, of exchanges governed by contracts, nonetheless applies equally well to knowledge, especially to the institution of consulting that is the target of our invention. Knowledge circulates between the academy and the community -- the agencies, commissions, and councils overseeing policy formation in the City of Miami, for example. The Problem considered within this institution is every problem and any problem that comes to the attention of the public. The Solution is science (Natural and Social Sciences) in the form of instrumental reason, empirical applied knowledge.

The difficulty for the FRE is that our expertise (Arts and Letters) is excluded from this exchange. The narrative obstacle for the FRE is that its expertise is refused, remains unsolicited, rejected as irrelevant to the policy formation addressed to the zone. It is important to note, at the same time, that the kind of knowledge we have to offer does not

conflict with the Problem-Solution terms operating in each quarter of the allegory. Rather, what we have to offer is a different category, a different framing of events altogether, from the problem-solution narrative of conventional consulting. Nor does the EmerAgency replace conventional consultants, but supplements them with eagents, student witnesses, working through a new medium -- the Internet.

[KaChing](#)



INVENT-L CONFERENCE 2007: Imaging Place

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KaChing

The consultancy borrowed from the Chinese oracle, the Book of Changes, the strategy of treating the found "disaster" (the policy dilemmas encountered in the Miami River zone) as a parable of one's own circumstances. Given the popularity of divination sites online, familiarity with this form may be assumed. In the proposed online version a querent forms a dialectical image by entering into a database (containing information on all the policy issues active in the zone) along with the burning question ("what is my situation with regard to X?") an anecdote expressing a childhood memory -- or childhood block (Revelle's memory of a childhood game in the poor neighborhood called Skeeversville). The database simulates for the online querent the accident-match in Revelle's prototype between the mattress featured in this childhood memory and the mattress-objects within several policy problems. The querent "recognizes" one of the circumstances as an objective correlative (figure): the scene of the "disaster" expresses in a figure the feeling the querent has about her own circumstances. Here is a summary of the procedure used to generate the Miami attunement.

Miautre = one situation of an American Book of Changes, dubbed KaChing (hybrid combining the name of the Ancient oracle and the onomatopoeic term for the sound of a cash register). The parts of the attunement include:

1. The river zone (Miami River and everything found there: water, police, warehouses, Cubans, Haitians, tourists, oil drums, mattresses, dogs, boats...).
2. A querent (Barbara Jo Revelle).
3. The querent's burning question, related to a personal problem ("what is my situation with my partner?").
4. A chance procedure (the mystery popcycle juxtaposing signifiers from several discourses).

5. A diviner (the FRE). The diviner makes decisions about which elements of the archive (the zone) are most relevant to the question.

How did we arrive at the photograph entitled "Crossroads" as the categorical emblem? The chance mystical procedure produced the mattress as a *sinthome*, a *vinculum* repeating across four discourses:

Family = Skeeversville ("perfume in the black hole" = Revelle childhood memory);

Entertainment = Miami Vice, the role of the *femme fatale* (the seductive woman uses the bedroom strategically);

Career = poststructural theory, Lacan's quilting point metaphor for ideology and the Symbolic order (ideology is like the stuffing in a mattress that requires upholstery tacks to be kept in place).

History = the community story of the Miami River: the Haitian traders carry used mattresses back to Haiti for refurbishment and resale.



The Caribbean Code

The FRE as diviner sees the patterns in the materials produced by the querent's encounter with the river (this role may be formalized in the database). Revelle remembers a childhood game involving a mattress. The mattress repeats, persists through a number of circumstances in the zone: Jose Marti Park (homeless); the ruins of the apartment house under demolition (immigrants displaced by gentrification); cargo for Haitian traders (older boats being forced off the river). Each of these circumstances represents a different social issue, and at the same time each contributes to the larger ecology of the river as a dilemma. The querent recognizes one of the possibilities as an answer to her question. The procedure by now is commonplace, after the plethora of quizzes created on Facebook: which Miami Policy Problem am I?

<http://apps.facebook.com/personality-quizzes>

The "table work" of the FRE resulted in selecting an impounded Haitian trader (Simon Lubin's impounded boat) as the answer to the burning question. The consultation constitutes a structural portrait: Barbara Jo + Ron = impounded Haitian + Coast Guard. The querent's situation served in turn as an attunement, measuring the Stimmung or categorial mood of the scene, constituting one hexagram or archetype of American wisdom. The genre of these choragrams remains to be defined. Working with the hexagram relay, we named this configuration "Aporia" (Impoundment, Impasse). The idea of contemporary divination as a way to add attraction to the civic sphere, to interest netizens, even school children, in public policy formation, addresses the Miami River zone as at once in its multiple elements a "tarot" system and, as a whole, one "situation" in a contemporary oracle. One consequence of this insight is the need to produce up to eight choras, which through permutation and combination generate 64 archetypal situations of contemporary American life.

The proposal for Networked is: create a service cloud to support the KaChing, or something like it, in which individual testimonials may be collected through patterns into sets of affective experience. The argument leading to this conclusion began with the insight of grammatology, that the poststructural deconstruction of Western metaphysics is in fact a mutation in metaphysics, not just a critique of conceptual thinking (essentialism), but the outline of a new ontology, a new categorial system based on imaging. The quick review of philosophy was intended to show what is at stake in networked media: not only new forms of art, but a new metaphysics as well. My research is devoted to the creation and application of an image category. The review of my pedagogy, as demonstrated in accounts and demonstrations of recent assignments in undergraduate and graduate seminars, is to relate how I am using image reason. Students not only study about imaging, but experience image reasoning in their own projects. The FRE collaboration, finally, describes an experiment in using image reason for original inquiry. The through-line of the argument is the retrieval of the oracular strategy of imaging, cited from Heraclitus by Heidegger and Arendt, and reasserted by Derrida: the oracle neither reveals nor conceals, but intimates. The philosophy is there for purposes of pedigree, so to speak, as a rationale motivating the pedagogy.

Part of the interest of divination as a relay, appropriated for an Internet consultancy, is that it manifests the logical operation of an image category that is generalizable across every level of image reason: the chance convergence of two seemingly unrelated worlds or semantic domains (as above, so below). Divination formalizes the operation: a chance procedure (flipping the coins, for example) is used to match a querent's circumstances with patterns of wisdom. Arthur Koestler introduced the term "bisociation" to describe events of creative insight that reveal a similar structure: Archimedes in his bath, Newton's apple, Pasteur's "ruined" laboratory cultures, as examples of chance exposures of hidden analogies (Koestler, 108). These folds are figural, in the terms used in this essay. Koestler observed the relationship between the Eureka experience and getting a joke. Paolo Virno made a similar connection between this joke structure and phronesis, good judgment, the capacity to make decisions within situated action (Virno). In deciding what to do in ambiguous circumstances there is always a gap between rule (maxim, habitus, law) and its application. In this passage there appears an opportunity for deviation, given the state of exception (as Virno explains) potentially in play in a decision. Jokes exploit the gap by giving us fallacies where we expect logic. Surrealist artists pushed this figural operation to the extreme, and called it the bachelor machine. The prototype is from Lautreamont: the meeting of an umbrella and a sewing machine on an operating table. In electracy, developing a metaphysics of practical reason, decision becomes ontological (this is how the philosophers put it): the action determines the rule. Divination, creative insight, political and ethical praxis, Surrealist experiments, the poetics of epiphany, the joke: from these practices electracy extracts the features of a categorial image. An important role for the learning screen as a pedagogy of networked art is to give students some practice, some bodies-on experience, using this image (flash) reason.

Hopefully the course assignments make sense even if the review of the history of philosophy is too condensed. The point is that image reasoning is not analytical but affective, not inspective but circumspensive. It persuades only if it is undergone, beyond being understood. The graduate seminar EmerAgency consultation on a disaster, and the KaChing project for an Internet wisdom, apply figural or parable strategies to public policy education. The spirit of this account is experimental, an inquiry, not an assertion, and an invitation for further collaboration and "comparing of notes." It is left to others to invent the database ontologies assumed and required for the KaChing to be practical not only as a pedagogy, but as deliberative reason for an Internet public sphere.

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References

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