

# Wired Women Writing: Towards a Feminist Theorization of Hypertext

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The electronic classroom provides a space for examining the central debates of contemporary feminism, particularly by applying feminist ideas to a theorization of hypertext and creating what I call feminist activist autobiographical hypertexts. In a feminist electronic classroom, we explore the potential for hypertext as a form with which to interrogate dominant ideologies and to produce alternative knowledge. In hypertexts informed by radical feminist theory, we bridge feminist theorizations of the social constructedness of subjectivity, and especially the mass media's role in such construction, with materialist feminist critiques of late capitalism and its oppressive institutions. We use feminist activist art as a model and take advantage of the way hypertext enables us to combine the best of both modern and postmodern strategies of textual production. Such strategies include employing a multiplicity of perspectives, collage (single-screen juxtapositions of text and image), montage (juxtaposition through linking), the juxtaposition of autobiography with social critique and with a critique of dominant media representations, the reappropriation of mass-mediated images and the recontextualization of dominant ideological signs, the articulation of the voices and experiences of previously silenced female subject, and the combination of conceptual, experiential, and emotional knowledge, including knowledge from the unconscious, where much oppressive ideology lies internalized and often repressed.

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activism autobiography critique of dualism critique of objectivity  
critique of unity feminism hypertext mass media  
materials approaches the unconscious

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## INTRODUCTION

Within the burgeoning literature on cyberspace and electronic pedagogy, many feminists are pointing out the ways sexism is present and often perpetuated in electronic environments. For example, in the book which inspires my title, *Wired Women: Gender and New Realities in Cyberspace*, Lynn Cherny and Elizabeth Reba Weise (1996) assembled an array of women who comment on the gendered nature of cyberinteractions in such domains as newsgroups, e-mail discussion lists, and MUD and MOO spaces. Yet, curiously, the World Wide Web is not similarly examined. In fact, most feminist examinations of cyberspace neglect this prominent aspect of electronic technology. Sherry Turkle's *Life*

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*on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet* (1995) similarly elided Web spaces in its consideration of gender dynamics in cyberspace. Moreover, feminist scholars and critics rarely examine the role of women as textual producers in cyberspace. In this article, I redress these elisions and outline a feminist perspective on the Web and hypertext production in particular.

First, I provide a general description of the major positions in contemporary feminist theory, touching upon the problematic and useful elements within each position. Second, I describe how hypertext in general is approached in our field to distinguish my position from the usual theorizations of this new textual medium. Next, I consider a series of feminist concerns and approaches to textual production to see how feminist critical and artistic texts suggest the key elements of a feminist theorization of hypertext. I include examples of my and student hypertexts throughout these discussions. Finally, I conclude with some suggestions for further research and theorizing.

## FEMINISMS

In this section, I use broad strokes to paint a picture of the various positions within feminist theory today. I am not attempting to document the nuances of feminist debates, nor am I noting the ways that most feminist scholars fall into the middle spaces between the categories I am describing. Nonetheless, such a schema can reveal the blindness and insights of particular feminist theoretical positions. Ultimately, I believe feminist theory will be served best by a hybrid of these positions, and I believe hypertext provides us with an avenue through which to develop more progressive and effective feminist theories. Here, I articulate a dialectical relationship between feminist theory and hypertext. That is, hypertext helps illuminate solutions to some of the most prominent debates within feminist theory, and feminist theories help to develop a model for a new form of hypertext, what I call a *feminist activist hypertext*. Before I consider the connection between feminist theory and hypertext, I discuss first the major positions within feminist theory, which I have divided into the following categories: humanist/woman-centered, postmodern/post-structuralist, and materialist/Marxist.

### Humanist, “Woman-Centered” Feminisms

Humanist, woman-centered theories, including those theories that propose a women’s writing, have their origins in the important early stages of feminist theory, which addressed underrepresentation of women writers, artists, and scientists and the androcentric biases of the canonical male figures in these fields. Thus, feminists in the 1970s were concerned with articulating women’s capability as writers, artists, and scientists and with reclaiming texts created by women in these areas. In each of these fields, theories were developed that proposed women’s superior approaches to the production of texts and knowledge, and all these proposals appealed to woman’s nature and to woman’s experience as the basis for such superior approaches.

Many succeeding feminists have pointed to the limitations of such positions, namely an essentialist and ahistorical perspective that assumes a universal category of *woman* and that thus fails to take into account the differences among women’s other subject positions, such as those differences based on race, class, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. Another

problem with this feminist approach is that it often focuses on experience to the exclusion of the social system within which experience is constructed. Along these lines, we should keep in mind Teresa Ebert's (1996) point that "capitalism has always privileged experience because the logic of experience (local and individualistic) distracts critical inquiry and transformative action away from the *system* of capital" (p. 20). Finally, as Ebert's insight leads us to note, the individualistic focus of this viewpoint is problematic in that it fails to include collective action; instead, it views resistance as an individual woman's action—her individual textual production and disciplinary achievement.

There are, however, some useful aspects of this woman-centered position. For one thing, such a view does validate women's experience, which historically has not been taken seriously by patriarchal systems of knowledge-making nor by the traditional art world. The feminist slogan "The personal is political" and the consciousness-raising groups of the 1970s were important reminders that the everyday lives, experiences, and feelings of women are political concerns. We want to use experience as a valid path to knowledge and incorporate a historicized experience into our progressive hypertexts, which investigate the intersections of the self and the social. As we invent a specifically feminist approach to hypertext, we also can adopt the modernist view of women as important textual producers.

### Poststructuralist and Postmodern Feminisms

In *Fragments of Rationality: Postmodernity and the Subject of Composition*, Lester Faigley (1992) outlined three metadiscourses of postmodernism: "(1) aesthetic discussions of *postmodernism*; (2) philosophical discussions of *postmodern theory*; and (3) sociohistorical assertions. . . of *postmodernity*" (p. 6). In this section, I am concerned primarily with the first two types, as they are closely related. That is, postmodern theories feed into postmodern aesthetic strategies of textual production, and vice versa, as much as postmodern theorization is informed by postmodern aesthetic practices, particularly in the development of critical strategies of textual interpretation.

Postmodern and poststructuralist theories focus on signification. Michel Foucault's version of this perspective, which is articulated in widely influential texts such as *The History of Sexuality* (1978) and *Discipline and Punish* (1975/1979), specifically emphasizes the role of discourse in the production of modern subjects, the way that official discourses construct guidelines for individual and social behavior and shape people's self-conceptions. Derrida's deconstruction, described in *Of Grammatology* (1974) and *Writing and Difference* (1978) asserted that origins and centers of signification are always in question, as meaning depends on deferral and a logic of supplementary. Thus, according to this view, supplementary implies an excess that refuses or exceeds closure, and so theories that attempt to explain at the level of system are misguided because no *totalization* or foundational perspective is possible. Feminist postmodernists who follow Foucault and Derrida focus on language as the arena of subject construction and thus as the arena of change. French poststructuralist feminists such as Julia Kristeva and Helene Cixous use the insights of Derrida and Lacan to critique the patriarchal nature of language. Feminism inspired by the French feminists often locates resistance at the level of bodily pleasure or in the excess of language.

Postmodern theories have limitations for politically motivated theorists. For one thing, as Ebert (1996) insisted we recognize, these theories reduce materiality to discourse and thus ignore the economic aspect of the social structure. Furthermore, such an antifoundational position leaves us no room to explain or critique social structures but instead embraces an individualistic focus and bourgeois ideology. And, finally, poststructuralist positions, particularly in their psychoanalytic interpretations, are usually ahistorical.

Postmodern feminist approaches include elements useful to feminist theorists of hypertext. First, the role of representations in the development of subjectivity is useful for feminists who want to investigate the ways culture, especially in the form of the mass media, affects subject construction and thereby mediates the relationship between individuals and the social world. Materialist feminists make it clear that discourse does not occur in a vacuum but is always intimately tied to the imperatives of capital. Thus, with this connection in mind, we can apply deconstructive methods to media representations to articulate and critique dominant ideologies.

One of the primary critiques of postmodern positions is that in their extreme form, with a complete disavowal of any “totalizing” moves or foundational premises (e.g., Lyotard, 1984), there is little room for some sense of political agency or the possibility to mobilize for action. Leigh Gilmore (1994b) pointed out that this politics-poetics dichotomy is false: We can mobilize the political potential of postmodern insights by

locating the possibilities for human agency allowed by a postmodern emphasis on subject positions, inspecting the shifting discursive field of social life, and exploring the political interventions a subject-in-process may effect in a world of power relations. (p. 14)

We are encouraged to remember that “postmodernism is an interpretive and ideologically interested phenomenon as much as it is an artistic practice” (Gilmore, 1994b, p. 15). Thus, the feminist artists who imbue their artistic practice with postmodern insights are powerful models for the creators of feminist hypertexts; I explore these connections in more detail later.

### **Materialist and Marxist Feminisms**

To articulate the kinds of interventions Gilmore (1994b) proposed are possible by adopting a more politicized postmodern position, we must have some theoretical framework for explaining the “world of power relations” (p. 14) she suggested feminists can interrogate. This is precisely where historical materialist feminist theories, such as those theories of Ebert and Carol Stabile, are useful. We avoid seduction by the postmodern play of language and move out more consciously to the dynamics of the social world.

Specifically, historical materialist feminist positions draw upon Marxism and focus on the material conditions of production, that is, labor. They adopt an antiessentialist position that sees subjects as produced by the conditions and social relations of production, which in turn result from the current configuration of capital. Materialist feminism of this sort shows how modernist and postmodernist feminisms elide a thorough critique of social structures, and particularly, the interconnection between gender and class. Resistance here is posited in its broadest form: as collective social struggle.

The problem with materialist feminist approaches like these is that they do not address the realm of the subjective in any depth. These approaches ignore affect and often do not adequately investigate signification. In short, the problem of consciousness and ideol-

ogy—that is, how subjects are produced and how they can be mobilized for collective social action—is not theorized in a satisfyingly way because the global focus downplays individual psychic experience. Some feminists, such as Rosemary Hennessy (1993), attempted to connect these two perspectives; Hennessy’s insightful theorizations have inspired my efforts.

What is most useful from the Marxist feminist position for the feminist hypertext theorist is that it acknowledges economic dynamics. These feminists insist that by disavowing totalization, poststructuralists actually deny the ability of explanatory models to help us understand social and economic exploitation and thus to work for a more just society (Ebert, 1996; Hennessy, 1993; Stabile, 1994). Following their lead, we can attempt to explain the world by looking at class structures, by exploring the way gendered experience is collective, and by investigating how social structures promote and reinforce sexism. We can remember that despite postmodern insights, there is still a real world, one which we can observe and comment upon. Further, we avoid the fragmenting and often disabling nature of much of identity politics, as all oppressions are linked to the political economy. In short, materialist Marxist feminism compels us always to historicize.

### HYPertext AND “THE FLORIDA SCHOOL”

Before I discuss how hypertexts can address both the problems and strengths of feminist theoretical perspectives, I would like to address first the theories of hypertext currently circulating in the academy. Theorizations of hypertext are almost always articulated by men. Richard Lanham (1993), George Landow (1992), Jay Bolter (1991), Michael Joyce (1995), even my mentor Gregory Ulmer (1994)—these are the premier theorists of hypertext in our field. These theorists tend to focus on how hypertext as a form can realize the tenets of poststructural theory, noting that hypertext embodies the open-ended text advocated by Derrida or the *readerly* text of Barthes (Landow, 1992). Most male theorists see hypertext as a tool through which teachers can bring information to students and have students manipulate and respond to this information in new ways. For example, Joyce (1995) divided hypertexts into two types, *exploratory* and *constructive* (p. 41). The former are texts students navigate; in the latter, students can rework and respond to the information found in the hypertext, such as with the software program STORYSPACE, which Joyce and Bolter developed (Joyce, 1995, pp. 41–47). Although the insights of these male theorists are valuable to all electronic pedagogues, a feminist perspective on hypertext can produce a different, and ultimately more politically radical, vision of hypertext as a form.

My approach here is grounded in my experience as a student of media theorist Greg Ulmer. In contrast to the versions of hypertext advocated by Lanham, Landow, Bolter, and Joyce, Ulmer (1994) lead students to experiment with hypertext (and electronic pedagogy in general) in a different direction. Although all of us who work with Ulmer and teach in the Networked Writing Environment here at the University of Florida (UF) have our own unique approaches and agendas, there are some characteristics common to our work, enough so that we tongue-in-cheek refer to ourselves as “the Florida School.” First of all, we apply a media studies approach to the electronic classroom, using, for example, theory and production techniques from film and television in the textual design projects we undertake in the classroom. Secondly, we approach the electronic classroom as an art studio, focusing on invention and design as much as on

analysis and interpretation. Thus, in contrast to the types of hypertexts Joyce (1995) described in which students work hermeneutically to manipulate and navigate an already predetermined content, our hypertexts are much more generative, drawing upon what Ulmer (1994) called “a generative productivity of the sort practiced by the avant-garde” (p. xii). This type of electronic pedagogy involves much more active and inventive roles for students: “In the heuritic classroom students become producers as well as consumers of theory. . . and learn to write original poetics” (Ulmer, p. xiii). Overall, my electronic pedagogy relies on this heuritic approach, as students read texts not only to investigate what the texts mean but also to explore what instructions they offer for designing another text, a hypertext related to the course topic.

Later, I examine the various strands of feminist theory for their strengths and weaknesses to outline how what is most useful from each position might be synthesized and then applied to hypertext. I should make it clear that I have been using these insights pedagogically for over two years now, and that both my male and female students use these methods in constructing their hypertexts. However, because, as I mentioned, theories of hypertext are almost exclusively male, and because there is little feminist theorizing about textual production in the electronic classroom, I am focusing here on female creators of hypertexts—that is, the female students and me—and I primarily discuss sample hypertexts that focus on issues relating to women.

Combining my experience of creating hypertexts using Ulmer’s (1994) methodology with insights from feminist theory, I have designed two types of hypertexts in my electronic teaching: autobiographical hypertexts and activist hypertexts. The autobiographical hypertexts require students to interrogate their positions within social history and entertainment narratives and have produced deep transformations in individual students. The activist hypertexts are collective projects in which students produced incisive institutional critiques. Initially, I allowed students in courses centered on activism to choose any topic for their activist hypertexts, but I soon discovered they often chose topics with which they had little connection. Thus, I decided to require that students’ activist hypertexts concern some aspect of the historical and political economy of higher education, so that their topics would be more closely related to the material conditions of their lives. In addition to the introductory courses in writing, literature, and media studies I taught formerly, I taught two women’s studies courses, one on women and technology and another on women and technologies of visual representation, and these students, too, choose topics to which they are connected personally. In all these recent courses, I have been teaching hypertexts as a synthesis of the two previous forms: autobiographical activist hypertexts. In my current hypertextual production, I am following the lead of my students by creating both autobiographical and activist hypertexts—that is, hypertexts that produce both a personal and social transformation. I believe feminist theory points us toward this synthesis.

### **THE DIALECTICS OF FEMINISM AND HYPERTEXT**

In this section, I discuss several concerns, critiques, and approaches to textual production to point out what feminist theorizing and feminist textual production offer to the development of a feminist hypertext, and also to explain how hypertext as a form allows us to think freshly about feminist theory. I examine feminist texts, theoretical and/or

aesthetic, and include examples of hypertexts—both mine and my students’—that address these feminist theoretical concerns and exemplify feminist aesthetic strategies.

### Hypertextualizing the Personal

In recent years, autobiographical writing has received much attention by feminists, both as an object of interpretation and also as a strategy for infusing academic discourse with a more personal flavor. Such an emphasis on the autobiographical becomes problematic, though, when “‘experience’ as a category of analysis is thematized rather than historicized” (Gilmore, 1994b, p. x). Like Gilmore (1994b), “my interest lies less in a theory of women’s writing than in a feminist theory of autobiographical production” (p. x). Specifically, I examine autobiographical works by women to develop strategies for incorporating autobiography into hypertexts.

Much contemporary feminist autobiographical art and writing reveals the relationship between the individual self and society and history. For example, in *A Chorus of Stones: The Private Life of War*, Susan Griffin (1992) examined how her life intersects with the history of her family and the history of the Western war machine, interweaving her personal story with the history of the development of particular weapons and of genocidal events during world wars. Griffin reminded us that

the story of one life cannot be told separately from the story of other lives. Who are we? The question is not simple. What we call the self is part of a larger matrix of relationship and society. Had we been born to a different family, in a different time, to a different world, we would not be the same. All the lives that surround us are in us. (p. 168)

In addition, contemporary feminist autobiographies often point to the postmodern concept of a socially constructed self, a self that is not timeless or universal, which is, as Gilmore (1994b) noted, the self promoted by the canonical male autobiographies and the traditional view of autobiography (p. xii; p. 11). Women’s autobiographies can connect the feminist call to value women’s personal experience with both the postmodern belief that discourse produces our understandings of our “selves” and the materialist feminist recognition that our experiences are situated in history. bell hooks’ (1996) memoir, *Bone Black: Memories of Girlhood* exemplified this synthesis. Although hooks explained that “not enough is known about the experience of blackgirls in our society” (p. xii), and thus proposes her memoir as one attempt to fill this void, she simultaneously offers a text that “comes together exposing and revealing the inner life of *a girl inventing herself*” (p. xi; italics added). hooks further draws our attention to the historically specific nature of her story. Demonstrating her antiessentialist and materialist approach to autobiographical writing, she said that

to understand the complexity of black girlhood we need more work that documents that reality in all its variations and diversity. Certainly, class shapes the nature of our childhood experiences. Undoubtedly, black girls raised in materially privileged families have different notions of self-esteem from peers growing up poor and/or destitute. It’s vital then that we hear about our diverse experience. There is no one story of black girlhood. (p. xiii)

Griffin (1992) understood that individual experience, including our experience of gender, is influenced by society; she said that the “requirements of gender are like the omnipresent yet partly hidden plans of a secret bureaucracy” (p. 60). However, hooks goes further than Griffin and shows us that any text that locates the self in the larger social world must artic-

ulate how race and class intersect with gender. Similarly, in *Landscape for a Good Woman*, Carolyn Steedman (1986) provided us with an excellent example of autobiography that includes social critique and that focuses on this intersection of class and gender. Raised in a working class home in England in the 1950s, Steedman placed the life of her mother and her own life side-by-side and juxtaposes the historical contexts of their lives with her mother's stories and her own childhood memories.

These feminist autobiographies, which adopt a postmodern form, and which hold onto the materiality of oppression, do not represent the unified, rational subject of the humanist tradition. Instead, we view subjects-in-process, subjects relating to the social and historical world. My students and I use these texts as models when we create our hypertexts. For example, student Sage Linsenbaum (1996) chose to examine the Holocaust and the figure of Anne Frank as the social history level of her autobiographical hypertext. Her awareness of the way her identity has evolved, and continues to change, is evident in her text. For instance, on one page, Sage has scanned in a picture of her childhood diary, and the last entry pictured said, "I just called Greg to ask if he liked me the way I liked him and he said yes!! I freaked optically out of my mind! I LOVE HIM!" Underneath the picture, Sage wrote,

This was the extent of the depth of my diary when I was young. Granted I was much younger than Anne Frank when I wrote this. However, my problems only grew in degree, not in substance. At least not to the point where I had to pray for my life, and the life of my family as we hid in an annex above my father's office trying to hide from Nazi Germany.

By using her diary as a historical artifact and comparing her childhood self to Anne Frank, Sage sees how far she has come and also understands the privilege of her own life in relation to Anne Frank's.

Student Doray Fried's (1998) hypertext examined contemporary bra advertisements, specifically the campaign for Victoria Secret's Angel bras. Doray included links that reveal how she is implicated personally in the subject of her hypertext. On one page, which shows an image of a woman from an advertisement, Doray said,

I can never decide if I want him to look at me, or her. I can't ever decide if I want to be envied or lusted after. Society really deals a big blow when they attach gender qualities to us when we are kids.

The word *look* links to another page in which Doray admitted,

That photo is my favorite ad out in magazines today. . . .she is wearing a black skimpy bikini. I like her gaze at the viewer. Her gaze makes me wonder what she really is looking at during the photo shoot. She looks like the seductress I want to be.

From the word *seductress* we come to an anecdote about Doray's experience at age 15, buying a bra for the first time at Victoria's Secret. When she asked for a 36DD the saleslady brought her a box of bras from the back of the store. The next link gives us the dialogue of the scene:

S.L. [Saleslady]: These are the only bras we have in that size.

Me: Oh, this is it?

S.L.: Well, Victoria's Secret doesn't make bras that large.

Me: Well, of course. You only make them for small-breasted chicks. Of course, I went home and cursed all of you small-boobed people.

On another link, Doray acknowledges that her own feelings are situated within larger gender dynamics and that envy is a two-way street for women. She told us,

I am always dissatisfied with the way I look. I change the color of my hair often. I change my wardrobe whenever I have the money. I guess most women are dissatisfied with what they have. Especially the size of their chests. For example, the girls at the pool party that kept telling me how they wish they had my boobs. I wish I had their figures.

And, all these anecdotes are contextualized within the larger media discourse about bras, as Doray has included Angel bra and other bra advertisements as well as statistics about more serious matters relating to women's breasts, such as breast cancer statistics.

### Beyond Binaries

Feminists have used postmodern insights to critique the patriarchal dualist thinking present throughout all Western science and philosophy. As many feminists have noted, the binaries of Western thought—such as male-female, culture-nature, reason-emotion, mind-body—associate *female* with all the denigrated items in these pairs. Although some early second wave feminists were interested in righting this wrong by reinfusing the subordinate member of each pair with value—for example, they praised the association of women with nature and with the body—recent postmodern feminists are urging us to transcend this binaristic way of thinking altogether. Hypertext, with its linked form, provides us with a unique textual form through which to realize this transcendence. The power of hypertext's multiplicity is articulated by Jane Yellowlees Douglas (1991) as based upon "rejecting the objective paradigm of reality as the great 'either/or' and embracing, instead, the 'and/and/and'" (p. 125).

For, as Landow (1992) noted, hypertext is not a nonlinear form but a multilinear one. And, thus there can be different directions pursued simultaneously, unlike in academic writing or unlike even in art forms such as film. Specifically, the multilinearity and multiplicity of hypertext makes possible what is impossible in print: that is, multiple connections are possible simultaneously, as when one *page* (or image, word, concept, paragraph, or topic) contains multiple links to/from it, and when a page can be repeated—linked multiple times, at different points, to different pages. The idea that there must be one line of thought or one ultimate endpoint towards which the text inexorably moves is negated by a text that literalizes the dialogism Bakhtin (trans. 1981) celebrated at the start of this century. Thus, hypertext's multilinearity allows contradictions in the text to be foregrounded, instead of smoothed out and eliminated as is often the case within a paradigm that carves the world up into simple oppositions of male and female, black and white.

The multilinear nature of hypertext allows the layering of different voices and perspectives within one text. Such multivocality can in part be achieved through techniques borrowed from feminist autobiographers and artists, such as the use of different modes of address. For example, in *Bone Black*, bell hooks (1996) shifted between first and third person, between present and past tense. She explained her use of the third person in this way:

Sometimes memories are presented in the third person, indirectly, just as all of us sometimes talk about things that way. We look back as if we are standing at a distance. Examining life retrospectively, we are there and not there, watching and watched. (pp. xiv–xv)

In this way, the personal realm can be articulated through different points of view. The social level of our experience can also be commented upon through this technique, as Barbara Kruger's work suggests. In her deconstructive juxtapositions of text and image, Kruger wishes to "welcome the female spectator into the audience of men" and to "ruin certain representations" (Linder, 1990, p. 62). As Kate Linder (1990) explained, Kruger recognized that "masculinity and femininity are not absolutes but rather positions in language, whose values can only be determined through the set of relations in which they are inscribed" (p. 62). Thus, "Kruger's use in her art of the terms 'I,' 'me,' 'we,' and 'you' . . . do not indicate objects that exist independently of discourse but instead suggest the positions of partners in a conversation," and "these pronouns work to dislocate the mastering effect of the image, showing that the viewer's place can shift, be indefinite, and refuse alignment with gender" (pp. 62–63). So, for example, one Kruger text features an image of the side of a sculpture of a woman's face and includes the text, "Your gaze hits the side of my face," clearly interpellating a female viewer and indicting the male who possesses the offending gaze. In another text, Kruger includes a picture of a group of men in suits shaking hands and the text, "You construct intricate rituals that allow you to touch the skin of other men," here addressing the bourgeois male businessman.

In our hypertexts, multivocality is put to good use, as we call attention to the discourses we are critiquing and at the same time address the viewer periodically in Krugeresque fashion. For example, student Vicki Wright's (1997) hypertext examined and critiqued the discourse of contemporary condom advertising and its reliance upon stereotypical and oppressive attitudes towards women and sex. Vicki included one advertisement that pictures a woman and the caption "I enjoy love, but I'm not willing to die for it," which, as Vicki noted, has been changed from its original wording "I enjoy sex, but I'm not willing to die for it." Vicki pointed out that such an advertisement is misleading, as it is sex that requires condoms, and the reality is that plenty of women have sex without love. Vicki also addressed the viewer of her hypertext directly. In one series of links, Vicki considered the way that women have been (and continue to be) associated with various *sins*. On one link, she featured an image of a classical European painting of a woman in the midst of vines, eating a bunch of grapes; beneath the image is the caption, "Defend yourself against temptation." Another page in this series has an image of a man and a woman speaking to each other, each wearing painted masks; the caption reads, "Reclaim your identity."

Some feminist theorists point out that dualistic thinking promotes a decontextualized method of knowledge-making; the world is seen in binaristic terms and is thus *read* and understood through these dichotomies. Thus, part of the feminist call to embrace the "and/and/and" that Douglas advocates is to value contextualization and recognize that different contexts provide different perspectives on the same information. One way this contextualization is accomplished in hypertext is through repetition. Following bell hooks (1996) in *Bone Black*, we draw upon "the persistence of repetition, for that is what the mind does—goes over and over the same things looking at them in different ways" (p. xiv). And, through this multiperspectival approach, we comment on ourselves and the social dimension we are examining in the hypertext. My hypertext-in-progress concerns the Trail of Tears and *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*. In 1838, President Andrew Jackson ordered the removal of the more than 16,000 Cherokee Indians from their homelands in Georgia, forcing them to travel to and settle in Oklahoma. More than

4,000 died on this journey, now known as the *Trail of Tears*. Repetition is featured in this hypertext, and one repeated item is the theme song from the 1970's sitcom classic, *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*.<sup>1</sup> As I have always sung along with this song whenever I watch the show—as a child and even now on *Nick at Nite*—this song has been formative for me. As it turns out, the song, with its reassurance to Mary, “You’re gonna make it after all,” is a pivotal part of the tension in the hypertext between hopelessness and hopefulness. I have included the song—in whole or in part—throughout the hypertext, and this repetition serves to comment on both the Trail of Tears and on my personal and family history in the text, sometimes as a contrast to the hopelessness and despair presented in these other levels, sometimes as a reinforcer of points about these other levels. The linked nature of hypertext also allows information to ironically comment on information from another level; thus there is a link from one line in the theme song, “You can have a town,” to information about the Trail of Tears and the way the American government came in and destroyed whole towns and exiled the Cherokee people.

Repetition in hypertext can also reinforce critique. For example, student Brooke LeBel’s (1997) hypertext examines the issue of rape on college campuses. Throughout her hypertext, she has a page that says, “NO MEANS NO!” By linking this page to different types of information in her hypertext, from the *official* discourse of the University of Florida regarding rape statistics to her own dreams and fears concerning rape, Brooke creates the effect of showing how regardless of the position taken, no *does* mean no, and everyone on all sides of the issue needs to fully acknowledge this reality.

### Fragmentation

Feminists and other postmodernists have pointed out that traditional literary conventions privilege the unified text, an emphasis that reflects the humanist roots of such traditions. A good text has narrative closure and allows for other meanings. Furthermore, traditional narratives are supposed to make sense; that is, one piece of information is connected to the next piece through logical maneuvers. However, fragmented narratives are being produced by feminists who want to counter the idea that texts are unified and self-containing. Frequently feminist artists, for example, produce texts that make readers and/or viewers

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<sup>1</sup>The lyrics to the theme song of *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* are:

Who can turn the world on with her smile?  
 Who can take a nothing day, and suddenly make it all seem worthwhile?  
 Well, it’s you girl, and you should know it  
 With each glance and every little movement, you show it

Love is all around, no need to waste it  
 You can have a town, why don’t you take it?  
 You’re gonna make it after all  
 You’re gonna make it after all

Significantly, after the show’s first season, 1970–1971, the last lines were changed from “You just might make it after all” to “You’re gonna make it after all.” I always feel as if that line is speaking directly to me, reassuring me, a contradiction to my self-doubt.

have to work hard to figure out the text's *meaning*, and often there is no one correct *meaning* to be discovered. Instead, the gaps in the text are seen to be points of possibility, and differences in interpretation are part of the process of textual reception, a process which involves the reader's own positionality as well as that of the author(s) of the text. Hypertext draws upon these strategies, as the text is fragmented and contains different types of information—emotional and conceptual, personal and social, historical and current, official and unofficial, rational and unconscious. These different types of information are connected in hypertext through juxtaposition, either within one page, as in collage, or through linked pages, as in filmic montage.

As a postmodern textual form, hypertexts are open-ended and eschew narrative closure. However, the pleasures of narrative are still drawn upon to create reader-viewer interest and connection to the text. As Teresa de Lauretis (1987) pointed out in her essay, "Strategies of Coherence: Narrative Cinema, Feminist Poetics, and Yvonne Rainer," narrative coherence is not the same thing as narrative closure. The former involves "the narrative layering of events [and]. . . discursive registers," while the latter occurs when "historically and semiotically specific" narrative strategies, for example, those strategies related to classical Hollywood film, are employed to produce "traps in which the subject [of reading or vision] is totally and necessarily contained" (p. 108).

To create narrative coherence, we remember that the logic of hypertext is one of association (as opposed to linear reason, as informal academic writing), and we create what I call a *frame* for each hypertext, an associative way of connecting our information. Each frame is inspired by the nature of the material used in each particular hypertext, and each frame functions as a filter for the creator(s) of the hypertext. That is, the hypertext producer looks for patterns amongst the levels to be included in the hypertext to determine which information needs to be part of the hypertext. For example, students whose collective activist hypertext focuses on the topic of the financial dimension of the university came up with the frame of contrasting two brochures in their hypertext. The first brochure is a parody of the university's own self-representation and imitates a spa or resort. The first brochure uses bright colors, features images of swimming pools and exercise rooms, and employs increasingly hyperbolic language extolling the luxurious environment for students at the University of Florida. After viewing the resort brochure, the hypertext reader comes to the brochure representing the *real* experience of being a student at UF. For these links, the students use all blacks and grays, and feature images of gears and machines, evoking the metaphor of the university as a factory. Thus, the students used this counterpoint—resort vs. factory—to point out the discrepancy between the university's self-representation and their experiences as students at UF, and they further used this frame to help them discern what information to include in the hypertext. From all the information their research had produced, only that pertinent to the ideas of university as resort or factory was included.

Another example of a hypertext's frame comes from my Trail of Tears hypertext. The overall frame is provided by the idea of the journey, which resonates within and between the various levels of the hypertext. There are several journeys—both temporal and spatial—featured in this hypertext: the journey of the Cherokee from Georgia to Oklahoma, Mary Richards' (Mary Tyler Moore's character) journey from her hometown to Minneapolis/St. Paul, Mary Richards' journey in the male workplace, the journey of self-transformation (mine and others'), journeys of exile (that of the Cherokee and those

journeys of my personal family members). Near the start of the hypertext, I list these multiple journeys, each of which begins a series of links. One page points to the way this theme cuts across the levels of the hypertext and also reveals the way the levels *speak* to each other:

Mary's journey was defined for her. She came to Minneapolis to find herself and to make a home. The Cherokee were exiled—forced to leave their homes. On a journey they did not choose, the Cherokee were going to a destination that was unknown and uninviting. If Mary "made it after all," many of the Cherokee did not. Where am I going and will I make it there?

The postmodern critique of unity applies not only to texts but also to human subjects, as postmodernism posits a fragmented self. Although there are debates within feminism about the extent to which feminists should embrace the idea of a fragmented and socially constructed self precisely when many females in our culture are for the first time beginning to have a sense of self, these postmodern insights can be usefully applied to hypertext production. That is, the multivocality and fragmentation made possible by hypertext also enable the hypertext creator to foreground the different parts of her self and to document the contradictions within which females in our culture live. So, the postmodern fragmented and contradictory self becomes a part of the hypertext, and in particular allows what I call internalized oppression to be articulated. Internalized oppression occurs when members of an oppressed group, such as women, internalize the messages communicated by the oppression, such as sexism, and then behave as if these messages are true. Further, internalized oppression leads oppressed peoples to mistreat themselves and other members of their group. Although intellectual awareness of one's oppressed position and of one's own internalization of oppressive messages is key, emotional changes must also occur for oppressed people to move out of internalized oppression, as we often have unhealed emotional hurts, which have led us to internalize oppression in the first place. The oppressive messages we internalize come from the social institutions that heavily influence our lives, such as family, the educational system, and the mass media, as well as from interactions with other individuals who act oppressively towards us.<sup>2</sup>

Hypertexts of the sort I am developing are excellent chances for textual producers to explore their internalized oppression. Instead of writing an autobiography that focuses solely on the individual, or launching a social critique and neglecting to consider the relationship of the personal to this object of study, hypertext creators explore the connections between the personal and the disciplinary, between the self and the social, through the production of the hypertext. For example, Brooke LeBel's (1997) hypertext features a hard-hitting, well-documented critique of the discrepancy between the occurrence and the reporting of rape on college campuses, particularly UF. However, she also includes links that describe her obsession with a man and that point to her identification with the character of Juliet in the recent film production of *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet* (Luhrmann, 1996).

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<sup>2</sup>The concept of internalized oppression used here comes from the theory of Re-Evaluation Counseling. For a general definition and description of this dynamic see, for example, "Internalized Racism" by Suzanne Lipsky (1987), especially pages 2-4, and "The Liberation of Males" by John Irwin (1992), especially pages 23-24. For general information about the organization and theories of Re-evaluation Counseling, see the RC Web site at <<http://www.rc.org/>>.

Brooke understands the social constructedness of her subjectivity and sees through society's promises of autonomy; on one link, she echoed her frame, "suppression," and says, "I have been suppressed throughout my life. Society does not promote individualism. I must break free." Another link in which she compares herself to Juliet seems to contradict this desire: "Juliet had faith in love. I have faith in love. Love is the tie that binds. If I believe in love, it will take me far." However, lest the reader-viewer think Brooke is simply duped by dominant ideology of heterosexual romance, another link comparing her own situation to Juliet's reveals her awareness of the tension of her position:

I, too, love someone with all my heart and soul. I, too, would give the person I love anything and everything—even my life. I, too, would make sacrifices. I, too, would endure pain so he could live a happier life. I put so much faith into the one I love. My feelings are not healthy.

And, finally, Brooke includes a journal entry, dated 30 October 1997, which says simply, "I allow my happiness to depend on him. It isn't healthy. Why do I allow this to happen? My happiness should depend on ME!" Thus, in this text Brooke shows us the contradictions of her own relationship to men. On the one hand, she takes a firm antirape stance, slamming both the perpetrators of campus rapes and the university officials who downplay the problem and let offenders off scott-free. On the other hand, through her exploration of her connection to the figure of Juliet, Brooke shows us how she wrestles with her own emotional dependence on men, or at least one man in particular.

The fragmentation of subjectivity that postmodern feminists describe can be represented thus through hypertext. Furthermore, the internalized oppression that contributes to such subjective fragmentation can be revealed and interrogated. And, this process of confronting one's internalized oppression through the creation of the hypertext is often quite emotional. Some female students, such as Brooke, report having cried at some points as they made their texts. During my first experience creating a hypertext (1995), as a graduate student in Ulmer's electronic culture seminar, I had horrible nightmares while examining my topic of Florida history, Ted Bundy. Through juxtaposing information about Ted Bundy with my object of study, the discourse of beauty, I came to see how much I have been haunted by Ted Bundy-like figures in my life. In particular, I saw the resemblance between Ted Bundy and my ex-boyfriend (and, although I did not include this connection in the hypertext, between Ted Bundy and my biological father). Facing the fears this exploration brought up moved me through a lot of anxiety and insecurity. I emerged from the experience believing in myself more and feeling less fearful and much stronger in relation to my life.

### Situating Knowledge

Postmodernism posits that it is not possible to objectively capture and represent *reality*. Rejecting such Enlightenment notions, postmodernists claim that any articulation of reality is partial and biased. Thus, postmodern strategies of textual production often heighten fragmented, multiple points-of-view and avoid taking a singular position. They also frequently critique the monolithic views of the dominant culture typically taken as *natural*. Although in my feminist theorization of hypertext I am interested in reinvesting postmodernism with a political dimension, and in reclaiming a certain version of objectivity (articulated later), at this point, I note feminists' use of some postmodern epistemological insights.

Feminists have often critiqued the traditional view of research as based upon objectivity. Particularly in relation to the field of science, feminists have pointed out that the objectivity of the researcher is a myth that obscures the sexist, racist, and heterosexist biases of a system fundamentally tied to profit. Feminists have attempted to solve the problem of how knowledge can be produced and considered valid within a theoretical milieu in which there is no belief in objectivity. One of the more interesting theories proposed to address this issue is the standpoint theory articulated by Sandra Harding (1986). Drawing on Donna Haraway's idea of *situated knowledges*, Harding proposed that the best approach to research is to recognize and acknowledge the historical and social locatedness of the researcher, as well as the institutional and sociohistorical contexts in which particular knowledges are produced. We take our cue from such feminists and agree that we are all invested in our objects of study.

The multilineal, multilayered quality of hypertext, and in particular our combination of the personal and the social, allows this connection between researcher and object of study to be made more visible than in traditional approaches to research. In addition, the creators of these hypertexts often come to learn about themselves and their imbrication within the social world as they produce their hypertext. In courses on hypertextualizing autobiography, students were asked to choose a social issue that relates to one or more identity groups to which they belong, an issue or event to which they are connected. They are asked to trust their guts in choosing their topics, and are told that they should not know the basis of this connection entirely. Student Natalie Arce (1996) chose to focus her social level on the subject of eating disorders. In her evaluative essay assessing the process of creating the hypertext, Natalie wrote, "Before I started the project I thought I was choosing the topic because I had a lot of friends with eating disorders and I wanted to learn about what causes it and what the disease does to their bodies. What I realized upon completing my project was that I am a prime candidate for an eating disorder" (p. 2). She explained that researching this topic and combining the results with personal information in the hypertext led her to realize that eating disorders were not just about the friends in her life but were closely connected to her own feelings and behavior. Natalie also recognized the link between media messages and her own feelings of inadequacy. On one page, she described trying on clothes with a friend in a department store, and we get her stream-of-consciousness thoughts, such as, "*These jeans make me look fat. Maybe it's the mirror!!!*" These thoughts are linked to a collage with headlines from diet ads and articles urging women to lose weight.

The feminist critique of objectivity in disciplines such as science includes a critique of the idea of *expertise*. Experts such as doctors and scientists, still mostly male in our society, are deemed authoritative spokespeople just by virtue of their institutional positions. Feminist writers and artists often critique these *authoritative* voices. For example, in *Girl, Interrupted*, Susanna Kaysen's (1993) autobiographical account of her stint in a mental hospital in the 1960s, Kaysen juxtaposes narrative descriptions of her experience in the mental institution with official hospital documents—records of her admission and nurses' and doctors' reports. These documents are interspersed throughout the narrative, and the juxtaposition allows readers to compare these versions of reality for themselves. We see the objectification and condescension in the language of the documents; for example, one progress note began, "The patient suffered an episode of depersonalization on Saturday" (as cited in Kaysen, 1993, p. 105). In their hypertexts, students use the technique of juxtaposition to develop a similar contrast between the voices of the experts and the voices of

people's experiences. For example, students creating hypertexts interrogating issues related to higher education include information from official university documents, such as brochures for incoming students or those brochures about campus safety. Quotes and statistics from these texts are juxtaposed with contrasting information from the realm of the students' experience and from interviews with other students. The collective student hypertext about racism ("Eracism") on college campuses provides a good example of such juxtaposition, as the students include both the university's promises of a diverse and harmonious campus as well as testimonies by students who have been the victims of racist and at times violent attacks by other students.

### Media Messages

Feminist artists and writers frequently draw our attention to the social dimension of experience and consciousness, and often they point to one of the primary sources of this dimension, the mass media, to critique its messages and resulting social and psychological effects. Kruger is one of the growing number of feminist artists who use messages from the mass media in their art. Kruger's work is based upon the recognition that signification, particularly in the form of mass media signs, forms a crucial method through which capital attempts to "control and position the social body" because "such control. . . is instrumental to society's aim of producing normalized subjects that can be inserted into its ideological, social, and economic orders" (Linder, 1990, p. 27). Kruger's method involved the disruption of stereotypes and the contextualization of signs; Linder (1990) described this technique as "seduce, then intercept" (p. 17). The seduction comes through appealing to familiar stereotypes; the interception comes through a suspension of "the identification afforded by the gratification of the image" (Linder, 1990, p. 29). In other words, viewers are seduced by the familiarity of stereotypes, but unlike with mass media texts and images, particularly those images in advertising, this identification is not used to encourage consumption of products but is disrupted instead through a reworking and commentary on the stereotype. For example, one of Kruger's texts is an image of a hand holding a note card with the words, "I shop, therefore I am," printed on the card.

Student Sarah Cascini creatively employed Kruger's techniques in her hypertext that focuses on women's hair. Recognizing the pervasive role of stereotypes in the advertising and culture of hair care, Sarah contrasted stereotypes and their masked realities throughout her hypertext. One link that features five images of different types of women, each linked to a page with text that refutes the dominant stereotype of women with the type of hair pictured. The image of a black woman links to the words, "My hair is important." A picture of a gray-haired older woman connects to a page saying, "I am still attractive." A picture of a woman's unshaved armpit links to the words, "I am not a hippie." The image of a blond-haired white woman links to the words, "I am not dumb." A red-haired woman's image connects to the text, "Yes, this is my real color." In this way, Sarah employs a montage effect of showing images that connote stereotypes in viewers' minds and following these with the refutation of these stereotypes.

In our hypertexts, we critique media messages and their oppressive ideologies by reappropriating these messages in a Kruger-esque manner. For example, student Laura Adams (1998) critiqued the advertising campaign of the cologne CK Be in her hypertext, and one page has this riff on the product's slogan, "Just Be":

Just Be . . . a lesbian.  
Just Be . . . a battered wife.  
Just Be . . . what others expect you to be.  
Just Be . . . a sex object.  
Just Be . . . a slave.  
Just Be . . . a woman.

In this link, Laura pointed to the way media messages dictate the parameters of gendered identity and thereby contribute to our oppression. This page also points to the false logic of the slogan, “Just Be” by indicating the illusory nature of such an appeal to freedom of choice.

Moreover, through juxtaposition and linking, hypertext enables us to examine more concretely the connections amongst media messages, our lives, and the social dimension of sexism. Student Heather Parker (1997) critiqued an advertisement by AT&T, which pictures a young woman amidst her brand new dress design business and features the caption, “Need a Hand?” Heather made the point that “the underlying ideology of the ad is suggesting that women want to be helped or that they are incompetent on their own.” Linking this critique to her own position as a woman hailed by sexist messages and existing within the contradictions of what she believes and how she feels, Heather linked the words “women want to be helped” to a page describing a personal incident revealing her struggles with female autonomy. When Heather first became a guitar player in a local band, she was unable to lift or fix her own equipment and experienced much humiliation and disrespect. She explained that now she has equipment she can lift and repair on her own. The connection of the advertisement to this story makes it clear that women are positioned as needing the help of men and technology invented by men to *make it* in the *male* world of culture, whether it is the world of small businesses or the world of rock bands, and that women struggle with this positioning.

### Reevaluating Reason and Reality

One of the critiques feminists have launched against traditional conceptions of knowledge is the privileging of reason—typically associated with masculinity, over the realm of emotion—typically characterized as feminine. Early attempts to reverse this position by declaring emotion as superior to reason and as the exclusive province of females have been shown to be essentialist. These perspectives also replicate the dualist logic that feminists critique. However, it is useful to bring emotions back into the picture of knowledge-making. In hypertexts, we do include information which is logical and conceptual, but we do not focus exclusively on this type of information. Instead, we combine the emotional and the conceptual, recognizing that in our desire to bridge the personal and the social, the individual and collective dimensions of gendered experience, power in these texts comes from the juxtaposition of both perspectives. This strategy of incorporating emotions into our hypertexts allows us to expose and interrogate internalized oppression, as previously described. Additionally, hypertext as a form accommodates the emotional dimension of experience. First, the use of colors greatly contributes to an emotional quality of hypertext. Second, in hypertext, colors, images, and verbal text can be arranged and designed such that a particular mood is developed. For example, in my hypertext on the Trail of Tears and *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, I use contrasting color schemes to reflect the contrasting moods of the text. While I use blacks and reds on the links related to death

and blood, I use white and bright blue for the Mary Tyler Moore links and links more hopeful in nature.

Part of the feminist questioning of rationality as the exclusive province of knowledge involves a reclaiming of mythical and mystical perspectives. In this vein, autobiographies by feminists often question the imperative of traditional (male) autobiography to retell life events in a purely rational and realistic manner. For example, bell hooks (1996) described her story of her childhood, *Bone Black*, as “an unconventional memoir,” which “draws together the experiences, dreams, and fantasies that most preoccupied me as a girl. . . . This is autobiography as truth and myth—as poetic witness” (p. xiv). Yet, hooks’ use of unconventional, mythic elements in her memoir occurs within a specific historical context—as she pointed out, her goal in the work is to “conjure a rich magical world of southern black culture” (p. xi).

Frida Kahlo (1995) offered another example of a woman autobiographer whose mythical references reflect less an isolated vision of herself than her locatedness within a particular social and historical world. In her diary, as Sarah Lowe (1995) pointed out, “Kahlo. . . saw herself as heir to an incredibly rich source of fantastic imagery through her Mexican ancestry, less strictly biological and more cultural” (p. 28). In this way, Kahlo’s incorporation of surrealism avoids the ahistoricism of much of the surrealism practiced by Andre Breton and his followers in Europe. Lowe elaborated that Kahlo’s

response to ancient Mexico was quite different from that of the European Surrealists, who sought “unfamiliar” myths and artifacts to help revitalize their art. The invocation of Aztec civilization reverberated as political gesture at a time when the growing interest in indigenous art coincided with a keener sense of nationalism. (1995, p. 28)

The political dimension of Kahlo’s mysticism comes through, for example, in one of the paintings in her diary, which combines Aztec symbols with symbols of communism.

Julie Dash’s (1992) film *Daughters of the Dust* is another text which includes the mythical realm. The film centers on an African-American family that lives on the Sea Islands off the coast of the Carolinas at the turn of the century and depicts the family’s picnic and last day together before some family members leave for the mainland in hopes of a better life. Dash spent years doing historical research on the film, and bell hooks explained that part of the film’s power derives from its use of “ethnographic details,” which are then “set within a much more poetic, mythic universe” (“Dialogue,” p. 29). Dash elaborates on the mythopoetic dimension of the film, calling it “speculative fiction, like a *what if* situation on so many different levels” (“Dialogue,” p. 29). She continues:

Like *what if* we could have an unborn child come and visit her family-to-be and help solve the family’s problems. *What if* we had a great-grandmother who could not physically make the journey north but who could send her spirit with them. *What if* we had a family that had such a fellowship with the ancestors that they helped guide them, and so on. (p. 29)

So, in Dash’s (1992) film, we have a powerful combination of historically grounded “facts,” and “a movement away from dependence on ‘reality,’ ‘accuracy,’ ‘authenticity,’ into a realm of the imaginative” (“Dialogue,” p. 31). This text exemplifies what some feminists have embraced about postmodernism—its insistence that truth is contingent, an insight that has also led some feminists to speculate that resistance must take into account the realms of knowledge, which fall outside the rational or realistic. In “Post-modern Blackness,” bell hooks (1990) pointed out that postmodern theory, including its

feminist versions, almost always excludes the thinking of people of color. In this way, we can bring women of color into this understanding and incorporation of postmodernism. Dash's inspiration from African traditions to combine the mythic with the historically accurate, and Kahlo's desire to politicize surrealist interest in myth, provide contemporary postmodern feminists with powerful textual examples of historicized mythic dimensions. If, as hooks argued, "in our efforts to decolonize and liberate ourselves as black people, or any oppressed group globally, we have to redefine our history, and our mythic history as well" ("Dialogue," p. 32), then this need to redefine mythic history applies to the oppressed group of women as well.

A pedagogy concerned with a feminist theorization of hypertext organizes itself around a central question, nicely articulated by Janet Wolff (1990): "Can there be such a thing as 'women's writing' . . . is it possible for women to *articulate the suppressed by new aesthetic strategies?*" (p. 67). Wolff echoed the interests of French feminists such as Kristeva, who are invested in discovering a way for women to speak and write outside the confines of the patriarchal nature of language. Drawing on the unconscious in hypertexts makes sense if that hypertext itself, like the unconscious, has an associative nature. That is, the information in hypertext, like the information in our minds, is linked associatively. Moreover, the unconscious is both the repository of our internalized messages from the social world and also the place from which our imagination springs. We are interested in bringing forth unconscious material to examine our complicity with dominant, oppressive social structures and ideologies. We also want to draw upon our creative selves to invent new possibilities for social and personal change.

Kahlo (1995) provided feminist hypertext producers with a good model in this regard. Kahlo includes much unconscious and untraditional material in her diary, such as dreams, letters, and poems. Lowe (1995) described how Kahlo employs a surrealist emphasis on techniques, which tap into the unconscious, including both automatic writing and automatic drawing. Circumventing the rational mind, Kahlo values spontaneity and chance in the creation of the words and images of her diary. In her first autobiography *Roseanne: My Life as a Woman* (1989), Roseanne (formerly Roseanne Barr, then Roseanne Arnold, but now simply Roseanne) also uses unconscious and untraditional techniques in her writing. She includes childhood letters, recipes, poems, and an unsent letter for her children. One chapter consists of her unusual critique of mainstream American women's magazines. For each month of the year, Roseanne has taken headlines from these magazines and juxtaposed them to reveal the contradictory information women are given from these texts.

Our hypertexts benefit from an emphasis upon unconscious and other unconventional techniques. We include our dreams, letters written with nondominant hands, stream-of-consciousness writing, and other *irrationally* inspired elements. These parts of our hypertexts contribute to a sense of the connection amongst the levels—personal, social, and media—of our hypertexts. For example, my nightmares about Ted Bundy and my ex-boyfriend during the making of my first hypertext forced me to confront my personal fears in connection with this social figure, to look at my gendered position in a world where good-looking men kill women serially and where good-looking alcoholic men can be the objects of desire for wounded women like myself not that long ago. And, student Brooke (1997) included a dream about being raped in her hypertext that critiques the way universities handle rape on college campuses, demonstrating how our social concerns reflect our personal ones.

The experiences of my students and me in making these hypertexts involve dynamics which are often not entirely explainable. For the unconscious dimension of the hypertext is not only a counter to the patriarchal privileging of rationality, it is also an acknowledgment of the power of mystical forces. When the students and I beckon the unconscious, the dreams come. And, there is often an uncanny aspect to these dreams. During the making of my first hypertext, I began to have dreams in hypertext. In these dreams, I was disembodied, and I would click on the screen to get to the next part of the dream. And, during the initial stages of making of my most recent hypertext on the Mary Tyler Moore show and the Trail of Tears, one of my best friends reported a dream that eerily reflects my hypertext. He told me I had been in his dream, which involved fires and burning, as does my hypertext. Then he said, “The ending was really strange. I can’t figure it out. An Indian was crawling across this ledge. . .” I looked at him in surprise—he had no idea my hypertext was about Native Americans.

In the hypertexts the students and I created, freed from the conventions of formal academic writing that specify that we must produce an argument that proceeds through a series of reasoned points to a logical conclusion, we included mythical, mystical, poetic, and unconscious perspectives, which allow a more reflexive commentary on the *real* events described and critiqued. In her hypertext on perfume advertisements that feature images of white women wearing ball gowns on the beach, student Tiffany Bettencourt (1998) uses poetry to enact this reflexive commentary. One page that describes this advertising trend in detached, academic prose is linked to this poem:

neighborhoods exist only in certain minds,  
 my neighborhood doesn't make much sense to me  
 not only urban, ghetto kids smoke crack  
 because you are an urban ghetto kid if,  
 you claim  
 some understanding of why,  
 we need our dopamine fantasies

businessmen smoke crack  
 literally,  
 stockbrokers are as tense and strung out as  
 any prostitute

i know a few prostitutes  
 i like them as much as any professor i've ever had  
 they seem to know, a lot about irony  
 they are coolly aware of give and take

On another page, titled “Surreal perceptions of Adolescence,” Tiffany has included an image of the cover of Bruce Springsteen’s *Darkness on the Edge of Town*, followed by this poem:

I don't know why I like this cover so much, it reminds me  
 to be tough,  
 so tough and remember  
 there were those  
 wild life pangs amidst it all  
 strange, experience of  
 Dead shows

collective unconscious,  
all before, the deep boredom,

before I battered my body with everything  
long spiraling clouds of crack smoke.  
the taste of tin foil brilliance

so tired of faces, leering male english teachers.  
stupid fat coach faces, intergenerational football males, repressed homosexual urges  
create pompous stag pride,  
Horrific flashes of cheerleader skirt girlhood,  
demonic lunchroom conversation,  
locker room confrontation  
At least it was an ok high,  
The faces blurred comically then  
hallway sweat smells

These poems evoke surreal and highly visceral images and strengthen Tiffany's analysis of the media messages of the perfume industry. Her focus is also on the fantasies promised by these products; in one link, Tiffany points to the power of capital to disarm the public imaginary, saying, "the reality gaps from/carefully constructed narrative fantasies/have left many of us/bored, dissatisfied,/unable to imagine any other way." And, another link reveals Tiffany's own situated position within the discourse she critiqued:

many confusing ballgown fantasies  
are all muddled up in others  
a promised wildness  
invert the values  
ingest, ingest, ingest

but you can't commodify what really happened  
how it all went down  
long nights where  
every second is a senseless contradiction

so why did i buy into a few stories  
so strongly.

Whereas Tiffany's hypertext on perfume fantasies of women in ballgowns on the beach counterposes a factual, analytic approach with a poetic, surreal commentaries, other student hypertexts use surrealism as away of generally organizing their information hyper-textually. For example, in their collective activist hypertext on the unfair sentencing of LSD offenders in the United States (1997), students organize their hypertexts around the simulation of an acid trip, opening with the invitation, "Come take a trip with us and decide for yourself where to draw the line between real and surreal." They take the viewer to "Timothy Leary's newsstand," where the "trip" begins, reflecting their finding that the mainstream media neglect to cover this important issue. Their hypertext is predicated on the idea that to find out about the *reality* of LSD laws and sentencing, one has to take a metaphorical acid trip through the texts of an alternative newsstand—has to enter an alternative reality. Interspersed with their hard-hitting statistics and keen analyses of American LSD legal dynamics are links that address the viewer experiencing this simulated trip. At one point they ask, "Feeling dizzy? The only way to continue is to go into the hallucination!" and later they exclaim, "Whoa! This is some really visual acid! Compose yourself!"

These admonitions to the viewer are accompanied by some complex and *trippy* images, which add to the mood of being in an altered state of consciousness. At another point, they also take the viewer through a simulation of being arrested and tried for selling LSD, using a first-person stream-of-consciousness style of writing to present the pertinent problems with the way these situations typically occur in our country.

Inspired by artists such as Dash and Kahlo, we also use mystical and unconscious material in our hypertexts to produce alternative knowledge and visions of alternative futures. In my hypertext on the Trail of Tears, I include some links with information that came to me in a meditative state:

*what if i try to call on the spirits of the cherokee who died on the trail of tears? what do they have to tell me/us? they are not bitter, i'm surprised to learn. they still believe that only love can heal. they tell me. trust your gut instincts here—you are right that to change the world you have to resist the others' call to kill those in power. violence does not solve anything. try to reach their souls. no matter what they do, they still have souls, just wounded and buried very deep. . . . anger will not heal this planet, any more than it will heal your own wounds or bring back lost nurturers. resist the cult of futility. now is the time for strength, for believing in the powers that are all around but which have been forgotten by most. this is why it is not a withdrawal from the world or refusal of the social task at hand to take time out to be quiet. you need to absorb the powers around you, feel the connection to the power within, which is the power of the earth, the power of the air, the sun, the trees, the elemental power which is not separate from the struggles that will soon be waged, but is integral to them. necessary for strength beyond guns, power beyond retribution. you see this. you want to help heal, you resist the chants of death, knowing that more death will never lead the way towards peace. self-defense, yes, but bonding in anger will be weak indeed. . . . the trail has something to teach you now. about survival. your people survived it. now some of them have given in to a harmful system—they know no other way. you see more however and you are to bring this to others. not with judgment, but with compassion. clarity and detail, but compassion. (Sullivan, 1998)*

This stream of consciousness passage speaks to my struggles, as well as that of activist movements the world over, over whether or not violence will be necessary to build a just society. The hypertext itself deals with my hopelessness about social change; allowing the voices of the Cherokee ancestors to speak through me produced a vision beyond my thinking.

### The Real World

Hypertexts in the form I have been proposing do not eschew the *real* entirely even though we question its boundaries. I am not advocating an embrace of the Derridean (1974, 1978) branch of postmodernism, which involves an emphasis on the “free play of the signifier.” Progressive textual reception is not an individually focused activity, but rather part of a collective relationship to ideological messages found in representations of the dominant culture; as Jo Anna Isaak (1996) explained, “what is requested is not a private depoliticized *jouissance* but sensuous solidarity. Laughter is first and foremost a communal response” (p. 5). This sensuous solidarity and communal response seem to be key states to produce in viewers of politically progressive texts, such as a feminist hypertexts. We must remember, though, that reading and viewing hypertext is typically an individual experience; thus, we must encourage reader-viewers of feminist hypertexts not only to interrogate their positions within dominant ideological regimes of representation, but also to join actively in efforts of collective social struggle.

Stabile (1994) quoted John Clarke's characterization of the postmodern position as "the paradox of the materialization of the sign and the dematerialization of everything else" (p. 18). In other words, the insistence that reality is constructed by discourse provides theorists with a position through which to ignore material realities of people's lived experiences, of their economic and political conditions. In our hypertexts, then, we acknowledge that discourse plays a role in people's subjective lives, and that, to some extent, there can be resistance and power in critiquing and reworking discourse. Yet, we want to use these postmodern insights and techniques to reinvigorate the oppositional potential, and thus, following historical materialist feminism, we locate our analyses and alternative visions within a material political and economic context.

Stabile (1994) reminded us that we should not limit our focus on materialization to the realm of signification, but should "combine the positive aspects of a feminism based on antiracist, antisexist, antihomophobic struggles with an historical-materialist analysis" (p. 9). By following the example of feminist activist documentary filmmakers, such as those documentaries described by Alexandra Juhasz (1995) in *AIDS TV: Identity, Community, and Alternative Video*, we include hard-hitting information about the way that sexism is more than a discursive phenomenon; it is imbricated within the structure of society and the institutions that carry out the imperatives of capital. In other words, through deconstructive techniques, we acknowledge the crucial role of signification in oppression (particularly in terms of its internalized variety) and as a key site of contestation in any serious efforts for social change. However, we do not focus exclusively on the discursive but instead acknowledge the real material struggles to be waged on the ground. As part of the preparation for our hypertext production, then, we do research on the material conditions of production related to our topic, supplementing our textual analyses with crucial information on material realities of real women's lives, material realities elided and distorted by mass media representations.

Although we want to utilize techniques and insights developed by feminist postmodernists, we ally ourselves more with what Ebert (1996) termed *resistance postmodernism* and at the same time distance ourselves from what she called *ludic postmodernism*, that is, in one articulation, the celebration of the free play of the signifier as previously outlined. Towards this end, we want to reclaim a historicized version of objectivity, such as the one Ebert outlined as important for resistance postmodernism:

To engage the interaction of various elements while insisting on the decisive role of economic forces enables resistance postmodern feminism to hold on to the *objective reality* of the material conditions of women's lives and the lives of other oppressed peoples. It provides the means for understanding the way the conditions of their working day, the exploitation of their labor, their unequal access to social resources determine not only the complex meanings, practices, and desires of their daily lives, but also their relation to their own subjectivities, to their bodies, to others, to the society as a whole, and especially, to the class struggle over economic and social justice for all. Resistance postmodernism produces historical explanations of the *dialectical* relations between the mode of production, the social divisions of labor, and the proliferating superstructural mediations in late capitalism. (p. 147)

Ebert's definition of resistance postmodernism points to the kinds of connections we are addressing in our feminist hypertexts. We take the objective conditions of women's oppression as valid and real, and we understand women's experience as inseparable from these conditions. We recognize the shortsightedness of a feminist theory, which fails to

consider the way that women's lives are structured by economic dynamics. We interrogate desire and subjectivity to more concretely articulate the connection between the social and the self, and we hope that our findings will lend themselves towards producing more useful theories and actions in the direction of social change—both local and global. In this way, the creation and consumption of a feminist hypertext becomes a commentary on “the proliferating superstructural mediations” to which Ebert referred—especially in the form of the mass media. Although the debates rage on about whether feminism should embrace or reject an orthodox Marxism—and its base-superstructure model—we can use hypertext to illuminate the ways examining sexism requires a consideration of the economic structure, as the two are intertwined in complex ways. Capitalism depends on contradictions, beginning with the fundamental contradiction that many people are not paid fully for their labor so that a few people may make huge profits and accumulate great wealth. Experientially, capitalism also produces contradictions for its subjects, as we are promised the world but made to live as grossly exploited people. Through the multilinear nature and linking effect of hypertext, we can articulate such contradictions more concretely. In feminist hypertexts, we can especially recognize the contradictions in which females live, as sexism is a primary manifestation of the capitalist system itself. These contradictions on the social level play out on the personal level, in our knowledges, emotions, and behaviors. Hypertexts help us to see the connections between these levels of contradiction. And, unlike traditional academic writing, hypertext allows us to leave contradictions unresolved, and to leave questions unanswered.

For example, in the hypertext I am currently creating in which I use *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* as my entertainment narrative, I am seeing—and showing in the text—the contradictions in the “Women’s Lib” movement of the 1970s through the character of Mary Richards from the television series. I have links describing Mary’s strength and the groundbreaking nature of the show, the first series to feature a young, single working woman as the lead character. I connect Mary’s movement out into the work world with the movement of large numbers of women in America out into that same work force. Yet, Mary’s predicament also shows the difficulties women faced; as much as Mary provides a model of hope, she is also struggling in many ways. In my hypertext, I bring in Mary’s competition with her best friend, Rhoda, who resents Mary’s too-perfect body and life. I also mention the way Lou Grant functions as Mary’s surrogate father, and I point to the codependent nature of their relationship. Once again, the woman takes care of the man in every way: emotionally, as Mary always smooths over arguments and calms Mr. Grant down whenever he is upset; physically, as Mary cooks dinner for Mr. Grant every night after he and his wife Edie split up; and professionally, as Mary picks up the pieces whenever anything goes wrong at the news room. She even makes his coffee! There is a further contrast here, as actress Mary Tyler Moore (1995) admitted in her autobiography in a passage I include in my hypertext:

It was 1980. My routine as television star and Mrs. Grant Tinker was so narrow and protected I didn't even know what to do in a bank! I had never experienced any of the situations around which *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* had been based-independent young woman carving a career for herself, finding her way in a strange city, making new friends, choosing, rejecting, saying, doing exactly what I wanted for myself, by myself, ALONE! (p. 274)

By interweaving links about Mary (both the character and the actress), my mother, my grandmother, and me, I comment on the way girls and women in the seventies were

affected by the women's liberation movement and I also reflect the contradictions in which we all lived at that time and now. That my grandmother died in her sixties while working 118 hours a week at a cotton gin—it was fall, cotton-ginning time—makes Ebert's discussions about the relationship between classism and sexism all the more real to me. I bring in these kinds of anecdotes of personal pain, as well as the triumph and pain of media figure Mary Richards and the actress who played her, Mary Tyler Moore, to demonstrate the way that economic conditions affect women's lives.

Student Denise Khor (1997) also wanted us to remember the economic underpinnings of the messages we consume through the media. In her hypertext in which she examines the role of the face in Western constructions of beauty, Denise used Marx's idea of exchange value to describe the commodification of women's faces. One link says,

Consumption=Freedom  
& the Woman's Face. . .  
BrOKen  
Fragmented  
reduced to what Marx calls an  
Exchange Value

Denise then linked "change Value" of this last line to another page, which says, "The most common cosmetic surgery performed on teenagers (age 18 or younger) is nose reshaping," demonstrating the connections between the commodification of the female face and women's behavior. Denise also pointed to the way Asian faces are used in this discourse and brought in her status as an Asian American to demonstrate the way that these media representations have material effects in people's lives. On one page, Denise included an advertisement for Prescriptives makeup which features an image of a heavily made-up Asian woman. She asked, "What masks do we hide behind? What will we find when our faces are revealed?" The word "faces" links to another page which says, "Our Faces, My Face" above a slightly distorted image of Denise's eyes and nose. Below this image, Denise has written, "—I am in between the—black and white—the value of my faces is—ever increasing descreasing—my shirt says made in Taiwan—I paid for my value—with the cost of my shoes." Her stream of consciousness points to her own liminal, oppressed position, as well as to her emotional struggles with that position. On another page, Denise brings our attention back to the social implications of this discourse; beneath an advertisement which emphasizes an "exotic" look, she wrote, "The images of non-Western women provide the consumer with a sense of freedom and imaginary travel; however, these images do not include the exploited labor of Southeast Asian and African women. The faces of these women are left out."

### Future Tense

The task of the feminist hypertext theorist/producer is to avoid stopping at the point of scathing critique. Although we need more hard-hitting materialist examinations of the conditions of women's oppression and of the connections between social dynamics and psychological ones, we cannot be satisfied merely to point out what is wrong. In the post-modern social climate in which we live, late capitalism thrives on cynicism and leaves us in a quagmire of futility. Hypertext allows us to transcend this futility, for it not only gives us the ability to arrange information in novel ways spatially, it also encourages the manip-

ulation of temporality, especially through an interweaving of the past, present, and future. As Gilmore explained, “both space and time are constructive dimensions of self-representation and not only the neutral organization of life to which an autobiographer can refer” (1994a, p. 10). Recognizing Gilmore’s point about the constructive dimension of our work, our task is to be able to both envision a better future for ourselves, and for the world, and ideally to grasp how these two visions of the future—individual and collective—are necessarily intertwined. Inspired by texts such as Griffin’s *A Chorus of Stones*, we examine the past to purge its secrets—personal, familial, and social. We face our individual and collective ghosts, see the ways they are reconnected and emerge from this confrontation with some productive alternative vision, some answers to these ghosts suggests ways of seeing and acting to create a different life and world.

Towards this end, we include an activist dimension in our hypertexts. We used the technique of the Guerrilla Girls (1995) and provided statistics about the social realms we are investigating. The Guerrilla Girls are an anonymous group of women who originated in New York City and who plaster the city streets with posters and flyers documenting the sexist and racist practices of the art establishment. For example, one poster lists all the galleries who show less than 10% of women artists (*Guerrilla Girls*, 1995, p. 8). Another poster features a dollar bill with a dotted line through it and the caption, “Women in America earn only 2/3 of what men do. Women artists earn only 1/3 of what men artists do” (*Guerrilla Girls*, 1995, p. 39). Brooke (1997) used this technique in her hypertext, including, for example, a link that says, “I wish UF [University of Florida] would be more realistic” and that quotes the “Campus Crime Statistics” from the *1997–1998 Student Guide*, “Forcible Rape Reports at the University of Florida: 1994: 3/1995: 2/1996: 1.”

In the activist portions of our hypertexts, we look to feminist activist artists, and we try to inform our reader-viewers, to move them emotionally and to encourage them to take action. Brooke included a link, which features a quote from the University of Florida’s President Lombardi and which serves to incite anger in her viewer. Lombardi said to the members of campus NOW, “I have money for a rape center—I just don’t want to give it to you.” Another link addresses the female viewer of her text:

If you are a woman and you have never been sexually assaulted, I want you to imagine being attacked. Can you see him grab you? Can you feel him touch you? Can you see yourself lying on the ground naked and helpless? Do you feel dirty? Do you feel sick? Do you feel angry? You should. You can help!

The word *help* is then linked to the Web site of RAINN, the Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network. Brooke also addresses her male viewer in another link, asking him to imagine a female close to him being raped and his resulting feelings, and this page is also linked to the RAINN site.

## CONCLUSION

Within the pedagogical and theoretical model I have described here, there is much room for further experimentation and research, in and out of the classroom. One of the central features of hypertext, its associative nature, begs for further investigation. Hypertext is comprised of links, and this aspect of hypertext has not been adequately theorized by electronic pedagogues. Progressive materialist feminists have much at stake here, as we are

trying to forge unorthodox connections to outline possible paths for real social change, and it is just such unorthodox connections that the associative quality of hypertext encourages. Similarly, the visual nature of hypertext, its incorporation of colors, graphics, and images, needs to be investigated more concretely.

More research is also needed about how these types of text are received. What kinds of shifts in thinking do reader-viewers of feminist hypertexts experience? What is the emotional aspect of consuming these texts? Do hypertext reader-viewers view themselves differently after experiencing these hypertexts? Do these texts succeed in affecting reader-viewers such that they actually want to participate in social change efforts? Do any of these reader-viewers go out and join such efforts? Underlying these questions is another issue: How to ensure that these texts reach a large and/or the intended audience. In each class I have taught, we spend time considering who we are trying to reach with our texts. At times, students decide to address people in power, sometimes students address only females; at other times, students address differently positioned viewers in different parts of their hypertexts. Inevitably, though, at the end of every semester, students are proud of their hypertexts and of their hard work, and they lament that probably not many people will actually see these hypertexts. (My revelation that many technointerested academics will view their hypertexts does not assuage their disappointment here.) Even with the availability of sophisticated search engines, the vagaries of the World Wide Web's organization are such that many connections to texts of interest are random and accidental. In courses more explicitly focused on activism, we discuss contacting organizations with Web sites related to student hypertext topics and requesting that links be added to our texts. So far, the time pressures of university semester scheduling have meant that students run out of time before being able to pursue these options. In fact, creating these hypertexts takes a significant amount of time, not just because writing HTML code is time-consuming, but because the nature of this form requires that a hypertext creator do in-depth research on the topic and sit with the material for a while, as, for example, unconscious connections sometimes take some time to discern.

Despite such occasional difficulties, I do believe that these projects, and the form of the feminist activist autobiographical hypertext as I have articulated here, are important. Theorizations of feminism and hypertext have much to offer one another. Hypertext enables us to move beyond some of the perpetual debates of feminists in the last two decades and promotes a materialist synthesis of the best features of different feminist theoretical positions. Feminist hypertexts make clear the shortsightedness of polarized perspectives within feminism, from the essentialism vs. antifoundationalism debates to the arguments about whether political action should be focused at the level of the signifier or at the level of the system. Hypertext allows us to move beyond this binaristic thinking. The subjective, situated, experiential, and emotional nature of research is highlighted in feminist hypertexts. At the same time, the political, economic, and institutional nature of sexism and other oppressions is exposed and critiqued. Multiple voices and perspectives in the hypertexts demonstrate powerfully the contradiction of living under the regime of contemporary capitalism. Deconstructions of subjects, ourselves and others, are situated within deconstructions of texts of the dominant culture, including those texts produced by the mass media. It is my hope that ultimately the production and consumption of these feminist hypertexts produces deep transformations, both personal and social.

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