

WEBS OF RESISTANCE:  
NEW MEDIA, ECOCOMPOSITION, AND RESISTANCE THEORY

By

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by

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This thesis is dedicated to Sara, my partner in “agonistic discourse.”

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Abstract of Thesis Presented to the Graduate School  
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This thesis is an investigation, linking a trio of strange participants within the discipline of Rhetoric and Composition studies: New Media, Ecocomposition, and resistance theory. The combination of Ecocomposition and resistance theory is not terribly hard to swallow; both follow out of disciplinary attempts at situating writers and their writing within social contexts and, in the case of Ecocomposition, extended material and semiological frameworks. What is novel, and certainly deserves bearing out, is the introduction into the fold of a strange conversational perspective, that of New Media studies. Throughout the thesis, I frame much of my analysis in terms of “apparatus theory,” the descendant of Derrida’s grammatology that claims connections between the technology of writing and various social and semantic structures.

Laying the groundwork of this triple-move, the thesis investigates various competing notions of space, particularly notions of “place” and “cyberspace.” The goal is to account for the disparities in the uses of these terms and to wrangle over the extent

to which any “cyberspace” can be considered a meaningful “place.” What helps to resolve the issue is the notion of contingency: that, while cyberspaces are unstable and open to reinterpretation, they can still serve as temporary places-where-I-happen-to-be. The thesis then looks at theories of subject formation, and how we can look at various ideas, especially “cyborg theory,” as a way of anticipating the subject of electracy. Again, the notion of contingency helps me to argue that, although fractured and dispersed, critical consciousness is a real possibility for students and teachers alike working in this technology.

The remainder of the thesis argues for a new kind of resistance theory, which I call “quantum resistance.” Quantum resistance is inherently contingent and unstable, based upon the experience of multiple spaces and voices. While linear reading gets abandoned in cyberspace, I propose a model by which resistance can continue to function by casting it in the form of a temporary, subjective performance. Like space, and like the subject, performance is contingent, but carries with it the possibility for meaningful resistance to the ideological values of electracy, even if the resistance takes a new and unexpected form. The thesis concludes by tying “quantum resistance” back into the ecological model of discourse, in order to provide a comprehensive model for considering the dynamic interactions of discourse.

## WEBS OF RESISTANCE: NEW MEDIA, ECOCOMPOSITION, AND RESISTANCE THEORY

The purpose of this thesis is to strike up a conversation. The achievement of discourse theory over the last quarter of a century has been to demonstrate that all knowledge and understanding proceeds out of conversations, out of interactions between disparate positions, approaches, and ideas. What I propose here is one such conversation, linking a trio of strange participants within the discipline of Rhetoric and Composition studies: New Media, Ecocomposition, and Resistance Theory. The combination of Ecocomposition and Resistance Theory is not terribly surprising; both follow out of disciplinary attempts at situating writers and their writing within social contexts and, in the case of Ecocomposition, extended material and semiotic frameworks. What is novel, and certainly deserves bearing out, is the introduction into the fold of a strange conversational perspective, that of New Media studies. Many New Media theorists (prominently Stuart Moulthrop, whom I will be discussing at greater length later on) have already been skeptical of the capacity of New Media technologies to allow for meaningful resistant behavior. What is even more unusual about this conversational match-up is the seeming disparity between the green, earthy, locally-situated discourse(s) of Ecocomposition and the (stereotypically) sleek, digital, globally-situated discourse(s) of New Media theory. New Media and Ecocomposition share important affinities, despite their important differences, and our understanding of the potential of New Media, particularly towards the ends discussed in Resistance Theory, can be enhanced by



bringing conversations about hypertextuality into contact with the discursive models and methods proposed by the Ecomposition endeavor.

### **“Ground”-ings: Ecology, Resistance, Media**

This project starts with the endeavor of Ecomposition. What Ecomposition starts me with is a set of ideas and practices for launching an inquiry into New Media studies. This may seem a strange move; as a discipline, Ecomposition is founded upon an ongoing investigation into the relationships between writers and natural, physical environments. It provides a move that supercedes social-constructivist views of language and discourse by incorporating into the fold the concerns of the physical, material, “natural” world. Ecology, in this sense, is (still) a matter of investigating material environments and the interactions of the matter there, but it also concerns the semiotic construction of that space. Dobrin and Weisser offer this definition:

Ecomposition is the study of the relationships between environments (and by that we mean natural, constructed, and even imagined places) and discourse (speaking, writing, and thinking). Ecomposition draws primarily from disciplines that study discourse (chiefly composition, but also including literary studies, communications, cultural studies, linguistics, and philosophy) and merges the perspectives of them with work in the disciplines that examine environment (these include ecology, environmental studies, sociobiology, and other “hard” sciences). As a result, ecomposition attempts to provide a more holistic, encompassing framework for studies of the relationship between discourse and environment. (6)

This move is certainly sensible. Indeed, the wisdom of social-constructivist views lies in its having situated individual writers within greater social contexts, to situate the role of writing in greater frameworks: of academic discourse, of alternative and home discourses, of the structure of the academy itself, of the very ideological structures that inform work in the academy. Hardly limited to the world of “natural environments,” Ecomposition sets out to investigate the relationships between many discourses (not just environmental discourse) and “*all environments*: classroom environments, political

environments, electronic environments, ideological environments, historical environments, economic environments, and natural environments” (9, authors’ emphasis). Ecocomposition provides a model that, at its base, serves as a heuristic for investigating “the diversity of writing and the patterns that emerge across different discursive systems,” and it is just that notion of diversity across different systems that I hope to investigate further here (Dobrin, “Writing” 23).

What Ecocomposition centrally foregrounds is the importance of “place” in the composition endeavor. Every space (and I switch terms deliberately here, needing to maintain a distinction between “space” and “place”) is multiply constructed by the force(s) of language and discourse and by the force(s) of its material physical presence. Spatiality, a concept which I will be dealing with later on in more significant depth, is foundational to most of the conversation on the practices of composition. Writing “takes place” in the class-“room,” in cyber-“space,” in “writing environments” (Dobrin, “Writing” 11). Writing, in its early rhetorical conception, was described in terms of *topoi*, of topics, of the places where writing “happens.” Crucially, these places/*topoi* are not static; to write from *topoi* is to always be reinscribing those *topoi*. Volumes of theory devote themselves to conversations about “reproductive” theories of writing, writing that spawns more writing, that self-propagates. Some writing alters the course of the environment; it challenges and competes with those *topoi*, eventually altering the shape and course of the environment. Some changes have been good, some have not, but the observation stands up. The strength of “place”-ment in the ecological model of writing is that it offers some sort of concrete foundations: the interactivity of discourse can be seen, studied, measured. An ecological approach to writing understands, for example, the

relationship between racialist discourses and real-life colonial practices; and it also understands that this relationship has real “place”-ment in the world:

In a sense, humans occupy two spaces: a biosphere, consisting of the earth and its atmosphere, which supports our physical existence, and a semiosphere, consisting of discourse, which shapes our existence and allows us to make sense of it. We see these two central spheres of human life – the biosphere and the semiosphere – as mutually dependent upon one another. Where a healthy biosphere is one that supports a variety of symbiotic life forms, a healthy semiosphere is one that enables differences to coexist and to be articulated. (Dobrin and Weisser 13)

One only need look as far as the Native American reservations of the Midwest to understand that writing is intrinsically linked to a real political place, the semiosphere is inherently yoked to the biosphere. This is the “nature” of writing. Writing is, in this sense, “natural.” Writing is *from* a place. Writing is *for* a place. Writing is *of* a place.

The capacity of Ecocomposition to sustain a conversation about the dynamic, interlocked nature of discourses and composition practices is what, in my opinion, makes it indispensable as a tool for studying the emergence of a new set of “systems” on the scene. New Media, defined very broadly, represents the emergence not of a single, new “place,” but of an entirely new ecosystem: a set of multiple interlocking concerns involving the material presence of digital technologies in the physical environment and the ways in which meaning is constructed in those environments. As Dobrin says, “writing takes place.” The digital turn now means that there are more “places” than ever before, and the role of any ecologist of writing is to study and attempt to understand the forms and functions of these new places. “Ecocomposition,” as Dobrin says, “must grow,” and it must grow to include the concerns raised by the new places of digital discourse (“Writing” 14). For the purposes of my discussion, I will try as consistently as possible to use Greg Ulmer’s term “electracy” as the label for this emerging bio/semiotic “ecosystem,” using “literacy” as the counter-point term for the apparatus of print-based

culture and institutions. Apparatus theory provides an interesting frame for the discussion; the term itself defines “an interactive matrix of technology, institutional practices, and ideological subject formation” (Ulmer, *Heuretics* 17). “Place” is a natural and necessary facet of the apparatus, existing interactively with the technologies of writing. Apparatus theory is ecological, insofar as it is concerned with addressing the dynamic relationships between, on one hand, the material “spaces” in which writing occurs (i.e., the inhabited “biosphere”) and the ideological institutions and subject formations which both sustain and are created by those “spaces” (i.e., the “semiosphere” of ideological systems).

The founding moment for Ecocomposition is in Marilyn Cooper’s “The Ecology of Writing,” where she proposes a model for writing that seeks to take into account not just the relationship of the individual writer to his/her social environment, but also the entire range of interactions that exist to structure, effect, and to be structured by that writer’s work. Her model for writing is the “web”:

One can abstractly distinguish different systems that operate in writing, just as one can distinguish investment patterns from consumer spending patterns from hiring patterns in a nation’s economy. But in the actual activity of writing—as in the economy—the systems are entirely interwoven in their effects and manner of operation. The systems reflect the various ways writers connect with one another through writing: through systems of ideas, of purposes, of interpersonal interactions, of cultural norms, of textual forms.... The metaphor suggested by the ecological model is that of a web, in which anything that affects one strand of the web vibrates throughout the whole. (7-9)

Cooper’s Web<sup>1</sup> is a dynamic system. It does not dogmatically insist on any one single dominating factor that influences the ways in which writers produce writing; webs are constructed of various strands. Even more important, though, is the process by which the individual writer comes into contact with the web, the process by which “vibration” occurs. To paraphrase Dobrin, vibration is the force of change; any writer (ideally, as

Cooper is also quick to note) can affect any strand of the web, producing discourse that alters cultural norms, or textual forms, or both, or more. The writer enters the web, and the web “shakes,” which hopefully produces some sort of change in the web’s construction, moving a strand or two. Dobrin continues:

However, more often than not, as Cooper notes, writers do not create enough motion to vibrate the web. Often, the web doesn’t shake, but it always accepts the new writer into the web. Context seems passive at times, a backdrop to the writing. Thinking of context from an ecological point of view, we are never separate from context: it reverberates within us and we reverberate in it. There is no way to not affect the environment and be affected by it, though such effects are not always evident. Writers become a part of the web, just as organisms become part of an ecosystem. (“Writing” 21)

The ecology of the “web” contains within it the potential for change. In this theory, change is an inherent possibility in writing, although the metaphor expands easily to include an understanding of hegemony as a counter-vibration. The web is large, loud, and messy. It is the field across which writers, discourses, and ideals act, transact, and counter-act. Ecomposition provides a foundation precisely because of this sense of dynamism rooted in the handy image of the “web”—an image both rich in discursive theory and “grounded” in the very stuff of our human biosphere.

The turn to the digital, though, casts some substantial doubt on the continuing applicability of this model. While Ecomposition does provide an inclusive model indeed for thinking about the various operations of discourse, the “web” it proposes can seem like a rather empty idea, a mere ideal that does not reflect the material realities of other discourses. This is certainly a valid argument. When Cooper discusses “writing,” she is referring to a very specific kind of writing; her “ecology” is the ecology of literate, written, academic discourse. While Dobrin has argued at length for the benefits in pursuing Ecomposition, he has also addressed the problems that are likely to come up

when trying to address the efficacy of what could be called “alternative” or “hybrid” discourses. Applying Cooper’s Web to the issue of alternative and hybrid discourses in the academy, and with the contribution of Thomas Kent’s work in paralogic rhetoric, Dobrin concludes that most forms of hybrid discourse interact differently with the web: they don’t shake it so much as they add to it:

[A]n academic discourse allows for – in fact, invites (“come sit by me,” said the spider to the fly)—other “parent” languages to enter the web; it will absorb those discourses into what is and can be called academic discourse. In doing so, those parent discourses become lost in the web, no longer identifiable as having originated outside the web; they are merely a part of what the web has become. (“Problem” 47)

Traditional academic discourse is capable of getting to the center of things, of producing shakes, ruptures, change. What this addition to the Ecomposition lexicon points out, however, is the manner in which alternative, mixed, hybrid, and all forms of non-official discourse stand to be neutralized and appropriated by contact with the apparatus of the academy. Dobrin illustrates, using Hélène Cixous’s *écriture féminine* as a model of a truly alternative discourse: “It cannot, that is, exist as an alternative to academic discourse because it cannot be represented in relationship with or to academic discourse, yet at the same time, it serves as an example of a truly alternative discourse because it resists and refuses such a relationship” (“Problem” 49). This is the ecology of academic discourse, of scholarly work in the university setting. As valorous as the project of hybrid discourse is, in its desire to bring to the table various unheard voices, its good is ultimately neutralized once it is mainstreamed into the University system, once it is given an official “stamp of approval.” This is the “nature” of written discourse(s) in the academy: official discourse can shake the structure somewhat, but other voices, while accepted, tend to be absorbed and co-opted by the “web” as a whole.

Where does this put the matter of electracy, and the range of hypertextual and multimedia forms that we call New Media? Viewed from this angle, “hypertext”<sup>2</sup> seems to function most often as a hybrid discourse. Most forms of online writing, whether a MOO conversation or an HTML page, are based in the grammatical and semantic rules of written language. From this angle, hypertextuality could be viewed as a mere alteration to the existing rules, or, as Jerome McGann and others suggest, a reaffirmation of the hypertextual quality of print itself.<sup>3</sup> The mixing-in of images and icons, the novel methods for distributing textual “lexias,” and the frantic, collaborative pace of MOO conversations still suggest a place for “electra”-textuality that exists somewhere outside of the linear, print based, argumentative, and overwhelmingly verbal character of academic discourse. If, then, we seek to situate hypertext within the discursive model provided by Ecomposition, then we can see how the fundamental alterity of this new writing poses some problems for the project of resistance. As an alternative discourse, the incorporation of hypertext into the web is not likely to cause much of a shake; the hegemony of the academic discourse “environment” works here as a neutralizing force.

To situate the rhetoric of hypertext, to give it some sort of “place” in our conversations about academic discourse, I’ll be providing a more in-depth look at the features of New Media using the methodological outline provided so far, which means a dual emphasis on not only the semiotic and ideological (“semiospheric”) conditions of these media, but also a look towards the material (“biospheric”) conditions with which these other considerations must interact. I’ll start with a look towards the “spatiality” of web discourse, a consideration is usually relegated to the domain of simple semantic rhetoric.. Having considered the spatial “environment” of electrate discourse, I will

move towards a consideration of the “organisms” in play, by which I mean a consideration of subjectivity, and its (re)development in relation with the emerging New Media apparatus. By dealing with these various facets of the “ecology” of electrated discourse, I will develop a fuller ecological model, one that seems to both fracture and grow out of the established, literacy-based models, in the hopes of proposing a means to engage the concerns of all these varying discourses (to see the “patterns that emerge across [the] different discursive systems,” as Dobrin has put it). Finally, my discussion will return to the question of resistance, and whether a full-fledged resistant will come to inhabit the new spaces of electracy.

### **Problems in (Cyber)Space**

As Ecocomposition helps us see, space is a fundamental element in the composition equation. As important as race, class, and culture, the position of the writer in a specific place has meaningful consequences for the ways in which we consider the production and interpretation of discourse. The spaces of literacy, organized by Marilyn Cooper’s web metaphor, serve as much more than mere contextual backdrop: the spaces of discourse co-exist dynamically with the systems that produce, distribute, maintain, and interpret that discourse. The issue before us now is a matter of redefining and rethinking our notions of space in a hypertextual age. I have maintained so far that “writing takes place.” This is true; but how will the advent of a new writing apparatus change the shapes of those spaces? Will the changes in those spaces effectively nullify the project of resistant rhetoric? Arlene Plevin argues for the importance of place to the project of resistance; she quotes Freire, saying that the purpose of resistance is “reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it” (Freire 33). Place is the *sine qua non* of resistance, but without a sense of where the category of “place” exists among the



seemingly-disembodied networks of electrated writing, such a project is doomed. To help solve these problems, I point my discussion towards a consideration of the ways in which scholars and practitioners of hypertextual rhetoric have been (re)conceiving the idea of spaces and places, both on- and off-line.

From Jay David Bolter's breakthrough work on hypertextual theory *Writing Space* (1991) to the present, much of the critical conversation in New Media studies has been directed towards considering the new spatialities of electrated discourse. The space of the web site, with its combination and distribution of textual and visual elements; the conversational, text-based virtual spaces of the MOO; the nodal spaces of networks; even considerations of the flat space of the computer screen: all are important to our still-developing sense of electrated "space." What is a great deal more boggy, however, is the question of "place." Couched in spatiality though it may be, the work of Dobrin and others in the Ecomposition field tend to arrange their discussions not around the rather blank, conceptual domain of "space," but rather on the more vibrant and robust concept of "place." Nicholas Burbules is careful to distinguish the two ideas; "place" is a "socially or subjectively meaningful space" (78). This definition combines both the "navigational" (it exists at a specific location) and the "semantic" (meaningful, however subjectively). Burbules's distinction, it should be noted, resonates nicely with Dobrin's "spheric" concept of Ecomposition: that the world is composed of both material "biosphere" and discursive "semiosphere." Ecomposition bridges this definitional gap by an understanding of the dynamics of space, dynamics rooted in the scientific observations and investigations of ecology. The organisms in any given space shape and define that space to their own purposes; "space" becomes "place" by the operations of

writing itself (Dobrin and Weisser 1-13). Semiospherically, the issue of alternative discourses raises questions about the ecological role of electronic discourse; biospherically, we know that computers, telephones, and other technologies are composed of radically different material stuff than the human/embodied/biological subjects of academic discourse. The difference in the material composition of our biosphere resonates necessarily with the construction of the semiosphere. So what happens to place now?

The very subjectivity which necessarily structures place may fall casualty to the transition to a new writing apparatus. In a very persuasive argument, Pamela Gilbert argues for the abandonment of spatial metaphor all together in discussions of New Media in “Meditations Upon Hypertext: A Rhetorethics for Cyborgs.” Identifying space as a “dominant metaphor,” she faults the bootstrapping of electronic discourse in spatial terms, terms reminiscent of “colonial narrative” (258). The problem she sees in Bolter’s notion of “topographic” writing is the way in which that very topography is (over-)determined by the “global elite,” by the few of us in the world who have access to the technology and are beginning the process of defining the discursive practices of its space(s), a process of mapping “virgin territory,” to use (in)appropriately colonial phrasing. “The rhetoric of democracy and access often seems to be more about the future inclusion of Others in *a preexisting space already mapped* than about the inclusion of Others in a process of creation” (259, my emphasis). Space is political—political insofar as a certain injection (pardon the metaphor) of discourse is required to make the space into a meaningful “place.” Gilbert’s ultimate move is a move away from the category of space and place altogether, calling for a re-conception of hypertext where the user “must assume that s/he

is not moving through a space or across a unified topography, but between and through different voices” (263). This point is well and passionately argued; but is the post-literacy move, the move into a world of discourse not bound by the printed page or the institutionalized classroom, really and truly a move beyond space itself? The fear that the apparatus of electracy may recapitulate the phallogocentrism of the literate apparatus is well founded, but Gilbert’s move to disavow space itself seems to trip itself up. Defining the hypertextual self as “both internalized from the ‘outside’ social world of voices and narratives... and synthesized ‘within’,” Gilbert’s subject sounds distinctly like the variously-constructed subject hailed by *Ecocomposition* (266). Even her rhetoric cannot ultimately undo the inherent place-ness of discourse; to “move between and through voices” still denotes motion through a kind of space. This problem reveals a need for a redefinition of space, rather than simply dissolve the idea all together. The new machines of the new apparatus means a reconfiguration of ideology, but not the death of ideology all together (Ulmer, “*Grammatology*” p3). Space, *Ecocomposition* reminds us, remains part of our material and semiotic existence; so long as we are (em)bodied, we are in space. The death of space will no more mean the utter dissolution of space no more than the “death of the author” stopped people from writing. What any discursive move like this does is to shake that web, to hail a reconfiguration of the way in which we consider space.

The language of the Internet is already saturated with the language of placement, and Gilbert’s fears are certainly well-founded with regard to the emerging dominance of this rhetoric. Internet users initiate contact through “homepages,” they “bookmark” spaces, “surf” through web “rings.” Burbules points to these phenomena as the ways in

which users craft “subjectively meaningful” places out of the flat, uninteresting surfaces of the Internet (78). He calls for a rigorous emphasis on mapping and website architecture to create the foundations for a web-rhetoric grounded in place (79-80).

While his intentions are admirable, they are significantly bootstrapped by notions of space that prefer depth to surface and place to space. Gilbert traces this tendency to its primal source: “the cartological musings of those who would turn hyperspace into a landscape are precisely efforts to create an Edenic ‘garden’ within which reading moves, away from linear narratives of loss toward an oceanic polymorphous perversity” (265).

Is this the end of place? Gilbert’s argument adds this valuable contribution to the conversation; the creation of any sort of cyber-“place” and the very language we currently use to define, delimit, and structure those places all lead, naturally, back to a notion of a source. Burbules’s hypertextual subjects are not constructing their own spaces so much as they are transferring their language into a new environment, creating comfortable and familiar cyber-places through an injection of the same old discourse. Welcome to the new place; same as the old place, except with some neat new tricks. The language of mapping leads, almost invariably, to the creation of “unities and identities across space and time that are meaningful first of all *because they are mapped that way*” (Harpold, “Dark” p17, author’s emphasis). The discourses of space that have shaped the dominant popular and scientific models of the “spaces” of the New Media often naively recapitulate the spatial regimes of the oldest narratives of person and place. Unity and identity, no matter where crafted, lead back to Eden.

I suggest an alteration to this strategy of placement, a sort of pedagogical imperative that would move the language of placement away from phallogocentrism to a

vocabulary that embraces the evolving material and semiotic conditions of cyberspace. Rather than attempting to build deep structures onto flat discursive spaces, we can “grow” a discourse that accepts the flatness without disavowing the capacity of the individual to be discursively linked to that space. This is the doctrine of Ecocomposition, that all spaces are variously constructed by their material (biological, physical) properties but also by the presence of discursive subjects, who (variously) construct those spaces (Dobrin and Weisser 13). A redevelopment of our spatial vocabulary based on a “sustained engagement” with the material properties of the medium can help us not to simply “place” ourselves in cyberspace, but to, “grow” new places in the gap between the fragmented experience of hypertext and our experience of placement in the real world. In cyberspace, “place” is the space of the isolated lexia, of the place-where-I-happen-to-be. What needs to happen is an evolution of the discourse that brings about change in the phallogocentric discourse of placement by bringing it into contact with the emerging discourse of electracy. After all, a great deal of already-established New Media discourse would love to do without place; theorists like Brenda Laurel and Janet Murray have devoted much of their attention to theorizing the move beyond the “body,” beyond the material constraints of place. The great phantasy of digitality is the move beyond the body into the realm of pure signification, into the unproblematic and flawless “holodeck” of simulation. The rhetoric of the all-inclusive, seamless, hypertextual global community “openly acknowledges faults of distribution and access within the current state of the global network, but only as engineering problems—‘bugs’—which will one day be corrected by technical mastery and/or entrepreneurial initiative” (Harpold and Philip p2). Terry Harpold and Kavita Philip, in analyzing the prevailing popular discourses of

“cyber-cleanliness and cyber-squalor” see shades in discursive practice of what Gilbert glimpses in theory:

Within the imaginary of the cleanroom-as-technologically-perfect-*cordon sanitaire*, subjectivity is constructed by occluding and repelling barriers, and human agency is confined to a definite idealized space of production, from which every trace of abject materiality—literally, the unproductive leavings of organic life—is excluded. (p34)

The move towards the (essentially Edenic) conception of cyberspace in the popular imaginary is also a move away from the messy, biotic “embodiedness” of the subject. My goal is to suggest a process by which our discursive practices can come into a more profitable kind of symbiosis with cyberspace, not in an attempt to dominate or assign language to the space itself, but to allow for the growth of practices that acknowledge the material, embodied placement of the subject. The way to do this is to suggest an engagement with the various contingencies of electrated text, to consider an electrated ecology based on the contingent place-where-I-happen-to-be. Contingency is not dissolution, but rather an unfamiliar pattern of discursive growth.

The critical piece of vocabulary which can help us sustain this move is that of the rhizome. Literally referring to a “creeping, horizonally-growing underground root,” the rhizome provides an (appropriately ecological) model for (re)defining the spatialized movement of hypertextual discourse. Stuart Moulthrop, working from Deleuze and Guattari, defines the rhizome discursively as a “chaotically distributed network” in his essay “Rhizome and Resistance” (301). Far from making a move towards the placeless subject, rhizomatic culture “proceeds not from *logos*, the law of substances, but rather from *nomos*, the designation of places or occasions” (300). The rhizome is centerless and horizontal, more a “grass than a tree,” to use Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of the function of the brain. Rather than a vertical, tree-like structure (with Edenic,

metanarrativized roots), the rhizome spreads tropically, a sort of “textual promiscuity,” “creat[ing] linkages not sanctioned by the culture and discipline—idiosyncratic ‘mystories’” (304). I like Mouthrop’s example here, which invokes Greg Ulmer’s neologistic notion of “mystory,” the pedagogical use of personal websites. What Ulmer’s mystories allow this model to do is to allow the individual composing subject to “designate” his/her own “places or occasions,” not through the use of tortuous mapping or architecture, but rather by engagement with (and, in Ulmer’s view, “invention of”) the image-oriented and modular materiality of the Internet itself (*Heuretics* xii). This is a perhaps-too-subtle designation, but, rather than engineering online “places” (same as the old places), rhizomatic “mystories” create something different by engaging the material structure of electracy: spaces that are flat and contingent, but still “fleshed out” by the constrained subject. We should consider the “mystory” technique as the first wave of electracy Ecocomposition, a way of getting neophyte electracy subjects a chance to consider their own “placement,” not through a critical analysis of other online places (an attempt to build understanding hierarchically through engagement with a “master” text), but through the discursive creation of limited, bound, but still proliferating rhizomatic spaces.

The rhizome works as an appropriate model for describing the “ecology” of electracy discourse, for producing a way in which we can engage the new-ness of New Media without abandoning our messy, biological selves at the door. This is a powerful dual move, both rhetorical and ethical in nature. While I have suggested an alternative to some of her ideas about space, Pamela Gilbert has already anticipated this hybridization, calling for an “electronically literate” (I’ve been saying “electracy”) “rhetorics” (263).

A rhetorethical stance would, in my analysis, come to an understanding of the rhetorical necessity of place, while maintaining a “constant discursive critique,” which is the very essence of postmodern ethics (Hardin 67). Greg Ulmer proposes the notion of the “relay” as a way of helping students “invent” the practices of electracy as they go, to communicate across the crucial gap between embodied place and cyber-space. Seeing, as Gilbert and Harpold also do, a connection between “the destroyed and dispersed scenario of Internet design and the [colonial] conditions of the slave trade,” Ulmer uses the resulting cultural discourse, creole, as a “relay,” not as a re-planting of the hierarchical ideology, but as a way of projecting its rhetorical results (*Internet* 157-8). If colonialism problematizes placement, Ulmer responds not by getting rid of “place,” but by re-creating it through a conscious engagement with previous history, an understanding of its faults and results, through an ethical engagement with place itself. Within the process of an ongoing reflexive critique, we see gaps form in the promises of electracy. Between the ecstatic fantasies of the loss-of-body, and the pessimistic retreat-from-space, there is a fissure, an opening where we might create an alternative. To explore cyberspace rhetorethically is to maintain a constant awareness of the gaps across which one must operate, to neither elide the material difference of surface-ness nor to be seduced by the horizontal fluidity of the rhizome.

### **Cyborg Eco-Subjects**

The move towards a new understanding of rhetorical space necessarily calls for a new sort of subject for composition theory. “Subject formation is as much a part of an apparatus as are technology and institutions,” so it is certainly necessary to give some attention to the “rhetorethical” subject being hailed by this ecological approach to discourse (Ulmer, *Internet* 7). The gap in discourse and discursive formations that seem



to result from our ongoing transition between grammatological apparatuses have been anticipated by scholars in composition studies for quite some time. Lester Faigley's *Fragments of Rationality* devotes a good deal of discussion to the varying ideas of subjectivity advanced by theorists, and their formative roots in the debate between Jean-Francois Lyotard and Jurgen Habermas. Their discussion set the stage for a battle royal of theory over the relationship of rhetoric to the individual. While not advocating a return to Enlightenment rationality, Habermas favored a discursive model based on "communication... movement towards consensus." Lyotard countered by questioning Habermas's desire for a unified, homogenous discourse ("a grand unified theory of human experience") that would injure the homogeneity of language games blurring the "multiplicity of differences" (41). This makes sense—Habermas's "universal consensus in a dialogue of argumentation" seems to endorse academic discourse, the "ideal" discourse of Cooper's web that would enable all participants to be accepted into and effect their environment. Lyotard places his faith in "the inventor's parology," the process of preserving autonomous, heterogenous discourses; in other words, creating a range of hybrid, mixed, and alternative discourses with the goal of expanding the web rather than creating change through it. Both theories, crucially, are ways of resisting hegemony. Habermas wants to resist postmodernity's nihilism, which he fears will recapitulate fascism, while Lyotard wants to resist the exclusion that results from the standardization of discourse (Faigley 41). In this gap, situated between rigor and multiplicity, between utopia and parologia, sits the subject of cyber-ecology.

Nearly all the wonderful and varied attempts at theorizing what you could call the "electrate subject" deal in the currency of hybridity. Perhaps no theory does this more so

than Donna Haraway's notion of the cyborg: the political/technological/psychological being "resolutely committed to partiality, irony, intimacy, and perversity [wherein] nature and culture are re-worked; the one can no longer be the resource for appropriation by the other" (175). The cyborg, whom Gilbert identifies as the "ideal hypertext narratee," is a living anti-hegemonic force, a creature who, in her "irony [and] perversity" does not merely embrace the "gaps" between the biological and the semiotic; she seeks to actively inhabit them. It is not my intention here to analyze Haraway's work, nor to provide a summary of the interesting "informatics of domination" that accompany the development of a cyber-culture. I will be using the figure of the cyborg as a jumping off point, looking at it as an attempt to hybridize (and thereby neutralize) the disparate positions cited above. My goal in doing this is to produce a re-reading of the cyborg in a way that makes sense for the Ecomposition project, a reading based not only around place-ment, but also around the centrally-important gaps figured by the discourse of placement.

The cyborg-figure incorporates many of the gestures I would make towards developing the model of what I might call an "eco-subject." One of the reasons for making these clarifications is that I want this project to maintain a working focus on pedagogy. When we are theorizing about "subject positions," we are talking equally about "student positions," about the habitats which we see our students, well, inhabiting. After all, when we talk about "resistance" theory, we are talking about a domain of discourse whose object it is to discuss methodologies for encouraging resistance, not in ourselves really, but in others. To understand subject position, then, is to come closer to understanding the full ramifications of the "habitats" within the ecosystem as a whole; there's no ecology without accounting somehow for the organisms inside.

The resistant subjects of Freirean discourse achieve resistance (in whatever form) by “discovering themselves as reality’s re-creators” (51). Pamela Gilbert, writing in a different context, posits the notion of a “wreader,” a composite reader-writer responsible for a fluid shuffle between heretofore segregated textual processes (262). Michael Joyce, writing in yet another different context, addresses the electrated subject as a “corporate being... composite or composed” (“Then” 86). What all these perspectives have in common is a notion, a possibility embedded already in the late age of print but rising into view thanks to the perceptual filter of electracy, of the subject as variously and multiply constructed. The electrated subject, scanned across these various conversations, seems engineered for the purpose of resisting logical taxonomy, in the Kantian sense of categorization. The cyborg subject is a consciously *ecological* subject, existing symbiotically in both the biospheric and semiospheric senses. “Symbiosis,” here, seems to be a less threatening way of describing the aggressive and ironic transgressions of the cyborg subject. Biospherically, the cyborg originates from Clynes and Kline’s 1960 article, “Cyborgs and Space,” in which a rat was fused with a “clumsy device attached to its hindquarters” (Harpold and Philip p11). Donna Haraway hails this moment for its revolutionary potential, and looks to the growth of the biomedical field as sure proof of the increasing symbiotic relationship being struck between the organic and the cybernetic. While the technologizing of the body may have questionable ramifications, it is in the complementary field of discourse that the advent of the cyborg becomes perhaps more apparent. Seizing upon hypertext’s capacity to realize the anti-taxonomical aims of deconstruction (Jay Bolter has been among the many to claim this), both Gilbert and Joyce posit a new sort of subject; no longer relying on stable identities, but insisting

rather ethically on “multiplicity” of multiple rhetorical *topoi*. After all, when we point to the poststructural subject as being multiply and variously “composed,” who or what inhabits the active voice? Who or what does the “composing”? Unwilling (though, crucially, not unable) to commit the phallogocentric gaffe of returning to a central Eden, cyborg subjects construct themselves (and are constructed) *environmentally* through a sustained symbiotic conversation with their placement. Without a central place, the cyborg carries out multiple conversations with multiple dispersed spaces, being constructed by those *topoi* even in the act of re-writing those *topoi* (Dobrin “Writing” 19). In short, whatever resistance we hope to encourage develops *from* a conversation with place; cyborg theory, in this sense, seems to have proceeded out of an understanding of the experience of rhetorical multi-placement.<sup>4</sup>

To return to the last section of my discussion, we have to be careful not to literalize what I call the “multi-placement” of the subject. The “places” of cyberspace, after all, are not truly places at all; they inhere only as abstract fields of data. There is a natural sort of terminological sliding that goes on, and I take that to be a natural consequence of using Ecocomposition as a resource. Still, the multiple places of our discussion right now (the contested and nebulous online spaces of the Internet, MOOspace, television and video, etc.) do have a positive existence, insofar as they exist at the level of the text. The “textmass” (as Michael Joyce refers to it) imports a dual set of possibilities for reading, which Joyce distinguishes as “slideshow” and “accommodating multiplicity” (“Then” 88). Once again, a familiar semantic gap insinuates itself, a sort of rhetorical *différance*. The “slideshow,” while maintaining an awareness of electracy’s spatial flatness, nonetheless connotes a linear process, of one image building on another to create a

systematic narrative thread. “Accommodating multiplicity,” on the other hand, is the Lyotard to the Habermas-slideshow; the idea of the accommodation of difference is central to Lyotard’s desire to “wage war on totality” (qtd. in Faigley 39). In a crucial move, though, Joyce yokes both reading strategies together with one clarion call. The importance of this move, to reconceptualize reading and writing (or is it “wreading”?) strategies, has profound effects on how we can think about approaching the cyborg eco-subject of this discourse. “The call to post-hypertextual rhetoric,” Joyce says, “is a call to find purpose in surface” (“Then” 88). Part of my project to this point has been to do just that, to use Ecocomposition as a way of interrogating the surface-spaces of electracy, and not just the “deep” places of biological existence (the notion of “deep” borrowed largely here from Clifford Geertz – see Dobrin “Writing” 18).

A crucial move that Joyce makes though, and one central to our understanding of not only electracy textuality itself, but of its imbrication in the electracy cyborg-subject, is towards a balanced consideration of different ways of thinking (about) the “textmass.” After all, so much of this discussion has been about pointing to useful polarities, so it seems odd that a straight-forward sanctioning of one kind of reading would be contrary to the aims of producing a working cyber-eco-rhetoric. The notion of finding “purpose in surface” does not, and should not, do away with the idea of finding purpose in depth. Indeed, the postmodern “textmass” is about both association (parologia) and accumulation (an idea more in line with traditional, “banking” models of education) (Joyce “Then” 92). The notion of the cyborg as a dis-placed and radically dispersed body/consciousness may simply not inhere. Harpold and Philip find in cyborg rhetoric’s insistence on the transgression of “occluding and repelling barriers” a mere reversal of

the super-clean fantasies of global informatics. The desire of the cyborg to become a body of “irony [and] perversity” merely represents “cyber-squalor,” a messy spreading-out of the subject (p31-34). Crucially, we are positing a subject who inhabits both spaces, and, therefore, has to engage in both kinds of reading. Elsewhere, Joyce notes that the iterability of New Media<sup>5</sup> represents a move “beyond attention span,” but not in the Attention-Deficit-Disorder sense heralded by most neo-conservative critics. In calling for an emphasis on “expression and construction,” Joyce is calling for a new sort of pedagogical focus that addresses the student/subject by rejecting models of “banking” education, although his focus on Peter Elbow-like “expressivism” could problematize our attempts at theorizing resistance. Perhaps Greg Ulmer’s notion works better: remaining positioned in a more social arena, his pedagogy seeks to “move students from [being] consumers to practitioners of image discourse” (*Internet* 6). In either of these approaches, the difference boils down to rhetoric; both still posit strategies for thinking around the gap between placed subject and increasingly-displaced writing.

As we gear up to take on the problematic notion of resistance, it helps to have set up this discussion of how we go about thinking of the hypertextual subject. The cyborg is a useful start, at least insofar as it suggests a kind of pleasure involved in exploring previously abjected realms, such as human/machine interface and thinking in the kind of cross-gendered, cross-racialized terms available through New Media. Despite its attempts at thinking in terms of collapse, of transgressions and heterogeneity, cyborg theory does seem prone to a totalizing power of its own, providing a narrative of pure, undiluted anti-hegemonic force, which seems to reinstate and repolarize the very boundaries it speaks against. However, I am keen to point out that this is not a project in

cyborg or posthuman theory; the compromise suggested in my theoretical reading here is designed to point to the development of a more fully ecological theory regarding the discourses of electracy. Primarily, I maintain the preservation of the “asignifying gap” that seems to continuously insinuate itself at the heart of electronic composition, in order that we preserve the possibility of movement around it. Our discourse must “grow,” rhizomatically if you will, around the gap: not to colonize it or theorize it out of existence, but rather to define it in greater detail. In doing so, we can come to a better grasp of the *nomos* of electracy, the one who is “always between two points, but [for whom] the in-between has taken on all the consistency and enjoys both an autonomy and direction all its own” (Deleuze and Guattari 383).

The transactions (we must parse “transaction”—it is always a “trans” movement, a movement “across”) that occur over this gap are the transactions we want to be watching, the patterns we see emerging there will define the ecology of electracy. What Killingsworth and Krajicek say about the *ethos* of environmental literature applies still to the *ethos* of the nomad: to think ecologically is to go “from solitude to society and back again” (54). I see Michael Joyce picking up this strain of thought: “in this suffusive gap both mind and age, both body and electron, feed each other” (*Othermindedness* 70). Like most ecological systems, our study here can focus on a subject who is neither separate from physical environment, nor from discursive environment(s); the nomadic subject lives in *symbiosis* with both. What is the result? The goal now is to point the way towards the kind of dual, complementary reading and writing strategies that affirm the sense I have of cyborg eco-subjects. They can find in the fragmented surfaces spaces of electronic text a space for reflection back onto the “deep” world that surrounds them.

They can draw on both the material apparatus of literacy and the somewhat more immaterial domain of hypertext, remaining aware of the discursive “gaps” that structure the interface between them. Cyberspaces are in flux and contingent, but the multiple-yet-literate cyborg-subject understands that they (both themselves and their places) are *always-already contingent*. The coincidence of placement is precisely a co-incident WITH place(ment).

### **Performing Resistance in *n*-Dimensional Space**

To define resistance in the context of electracy is to always be embarking on an ecological process. For me, a large part of that process has to be found in reconciling the material spaces of these apparatuses with the writing practices and subjects they construct. What’s left is to come to some adequate sense of “resistance” itself. As a term marked by political and institutional valences, resistance seems to belong to the classroom, the *sine qua non* space of the literate apparatus. In Rhetoric and Composition studies, at least, resistance theory is a matter of interrogating the various discourses of exclusion and oppression coded into the practices of literacy—resistance is done from within. Stuart Moulthrop, though, famously decrees that practicing resistance within hypertext is a matter of futility. To couch his conclusions in my own terms, practicing resistance would be a matter of closing off the fluid, extended, contingent nature of hypertextual space. After all, the purpose of resistance in the traditional sense is to resist the kinds of (colonial, racist, sexist, etc.) written discourses that promote what you could call closure: closing people off from access to wealth and opportunity. Since hypertext exists as a structure of openness, resistance becomes impossible: “in this medium, there is no way to resist multiplicity by imposing a univocal and definitive discourse. Hypertext frustrates this resistance because, paradoxically, it *offers* no resistance to the intrusion”



(Moulthrop and Kaplan 235, authors' emphasis). This is the inverse of the complaint that Lyotard levels at Habermas—to create a unified, rational discourse would have meant invariably a kind of exclusion, against the “heterogeneity of language games” (qtd. in Faigley 41). Why? Because that's the nature of the apparatus; that's literacy. This is how resistance theory comes so often under attack—there's the sense that teaching resistance is simply to be teaching another kind of discourse of mastery; a dogma of non-obedience is still a dogma. Since the material nature of hypertext as seen by Moulthrop is such that it offers no form of definitive “closure,” finding a target for resistance in the traditional sense becomes difficult.

What, then, are we hoping to resist? First and foremost, it would still be ideal to use the tools of New Media to think our way back across the gap that divides literacy and electracy, *logos* and *nomos*, argument and association. Nicholas Burbules, despite his aforementioned attempt at injecting “place” into cyberspace, still desires to use those spaces to encourage a kind of “critical hyperreading” that moves towards “recognizing the interpretive framework of ideology inherent in a literary work” (83). Moulthrop and Kaplan conclude that “our resistance may come to focus not on prior texts or creative precursors but rather on the literary institutions we have inherited... The subject of our resistance may be print culture itself” (236). I'm not sure how they plan on divorcing institutions from their textual instantiations, but that's a quibble for another time; either way, the flow of resistant movement seems oddly linear: from electracy to literacy. Resistance, in this sense, could also be directed against attempts by others to infiltrate the “openness” of cyberspace in the name of closure. This is certainly a knotty suggestion, closing off those who would champion closure, but the pedagogical efficacy of such a

move could open up a sustained conversation on the very idea of closure itself. This move could furnish a space to consider, for example, the breakdown of “the classical liberal firewall of word and deed” that occurs in a case like that reported in Dibbel’s “A Rape in Cyberspace” (Cooper “Postmodern” 154). Perhaps a more contemporary possibility would be a discussion of the file sharing debate in relation to copyright law. Either way, literacy is bringing its share of baggage into the digital world, which could keep media students and theorists busy for quite some time.

Still, I have not answered the question. Despite suggesting ways of doing resistance in cyberspace, what has remained largely unaddressed thus far is the concept of resistance itself. Resistance, as it is, marks a particular form of textual closure, a way of saying: “I see the ideology you’re trying to foist on me, I know what you’re doing, and I am hereby resisting it.” Theorist John Schilb notes: “true literacy means examining one’s society, not simply manipulating surface features of text” (187). If resistance-as-literacy has no real need for surface features, then what good are the surface spaces of New Media? Perhaps this calls for a revision of a previous formula. Resistance, as I’ve had it, is not so much about a linear movement from electracy to literacy; instead, resistance seems to be like bouncing a ball off a wall. Originating with literacy-minded goals towards a literacy-minded end, using New Media as only a convenient “bouncing-off” point. I could achieve the same overall effect by tossing a ball in the air to myself. It’s the *new* game; same as the old game. What I would theorize is a different sort of resistance all together; a new kind of game that interrogates the ideology of electracy. Joe Hardin establishes a foundation, working with Eric Miraglia’s definition of resistance: “This concept of *resistance* is usually taken to signify behaviors that contest

the acculturative forces of the academy and that ‘interrogate dominant ideologies with self-aware logic and creativity’” (37). “Self-aware logic and creativity” are the bread and butter of our new media, and I will certainly not be so hamfistedly Utopian as to argue that the coming apparatus will not be without its share of pernicious ideologies. The very fact that electracy is bound up in what Moulthrop calls “the military-entertainment-informational culture” should be enough to raise some suspicion. However, it does no better to go after all popular entertainment than it does to go after the entire academy; perhaps entertainment’s increasing reliance on advertising represents an ideological move ripe for critique, representing as it does the apotheosis of the multinational corporation. (An interesting equation: the multinational Corporation is to electracy what the secular State is to literacy, or what the Church is to orality.) Perhaps Moulthrop and Kaplan’s move to disavow resistance was a tad narrow-minded; the subject of our resistance is not the open and varied material construction of electracy itself, but rather the range of associative ideologies that would seek to exploit it, sap its potential, and, in a sense, “close” off the range of options. Responding to the oft-debated condition of “secondary orality” commenced by electronic media, Greg Ulmer’s move is to transform students “from consumers to practitioners of image discourse” (*Internet* 6). His move is to “resist” what we increasingly perceive to be the artificial “closures” of media practices. This strategy can at least serve as a generative model for teacher/practitioners of New Media writing: resistance in our context can function not as a critical stab *at* literacy *by way of* New Media, but rather an open-ended conversation that proceeds *through* argument back towards the ideological conditions of electracy (an inversion of the

previous model). In either formulation, resistance stays true to a central idea: it's a way of circling the "gap" between literacy and electracy.

Marilyn Cooper, writing in a different context, sees the potential of networked writing conversations for resisting the traditionally univocal structure of the classroom, and, in doing so, she furnishes me with a crucial piece of vocabulary that I would like to use to solidify my position on the operations of resistance theory in electracy. Looking at the tradition of networked collaborative conversations (the subject of much of Lester Faigley's discussion in *Fragments of Rationality*), Cooper posits that the teacher going through this kind of interaction is "is not giving or sharing power with students, but rather is *performing* an action that sets up a range of possibilities for actions" ("Postmodern" 146, my emphasis). The more I consider bringing the literary practice of resistance into contact with the material construction of hypertext, the more I find value in what Cooper calls performance. The value of a performance lies in its action; it is fixed in space but fluctuates with time. (Consider the brief life spans of many websites; the im-material ecology of the media is that they can be razed and rebuilt without noticeable impact—their comings and goings do not shake the web.) Writing in this manner allows individual subjects (teachers *and* students) to "take up or refuse" a range of responses; like proliferating spaces, writing-as-performance seems to reproduce by spore: producing yet more writing. I will make more of this claim by looking at the example Stuart Moulthrop uses to build his case against resistance, recasting it in terms of what I call the performative resistant potential of electrate writing.

What Moulthrop's student Karl Crary does in his hypertext critique is to mount a critical taxonomy: he tries to define the bounds of hypertext in an effort to resist the

power of its expansiveness. In a sense, Crary stages a semantic raid: critiquing hypertextuality from inside what he perceives to be a stable rhetorical “place,” but which is, in my vocabulary, a contingent place-where-he-happens-to-be (the eco-based image I used previously as a way of describing the gap-crossing behavior of writers). In doing so, he falls prey to a “fatal recursion: his taxonomy includes itself within one of its own categories” (“Rhizome” 314). Crary-as-modernist-critic performs the discursive equivalent of falling into a black hole; he starts by assuming the *ethos* (and, indeed, the *topos*) of the critic, by assuming a kind of place-ment which falls out from under him in the very act of speaking. Hypertext’s lack of closure represents the event horizon from which Crary’s sure-footed criticism will not escape, despite his straightforward confidence in the place-he-happens-to-be. Moulthrop states that Crary’s move could be just another “paralogical move”—since no screened space is deeper than any other, they ought to maintain the same status. Instead, Moulthrop sees this event as a “metalepsis, or jump outside the game, which allows us to perceive the constraints our writing systems impose on us” (“Rhizome” 315). This is the vantage point from which I would reformulate my idea of resistance. The rhetorical constructs of Ecocomposition return here to remind us to pay attention to the “place” where Crary is writing; given the contingent place-ment of hypertextual writing, it seems to me that Crary is very much doing a kind of resistance, even if his attempt at doing so falls short to a logical pitfall. Resistance takes on value in the form of “metalepsis, the jump outside the game” (“Rhizome” 315). When Crary *performs* his jump, he demonstrates the limits of hypertext as a writing system; he tests the limits of the ideology of expansiveness that is endemic to New Media theory.

It is a moment of much potential, but Moulthrop and Kaplan dismiss it, seeming to believe that the poor, essay-bound Crary could not have known what he was doing. They may be right, but let's assume that he did: the gesture outside the game becomes a way of pointing to the construction of the apparatus itself, both for himself and for the person reading his gesture. Let's assume that he, or another student like him, could make such a leaping gesture, but while maintaining a certain awareness of the contingency of their own move. We could readjust ourselves to see all hypertextual writing as "metaleptic," always a matter of jumping around, of moving rhizomatically across/through/around spaces. This is not necessarily a smooth motion, but a sudden jumping off and a sometimes traumatic crashing down. Crary's example is limiting here: his "metalepsis" is a leap "outside" the game than it is a jumping-in-place. He jumps up enough for us to see the contingent placement that underlies his discourse (the delicate *topos* underlying and undermining his determined *ethos*), and lands back in the same supposedly-firm place. Still, I propose a model for thinking about hyper-resistance that takes into account first the jumping-across of multiple contingent places, and brings that model into contact with the notion of the apparatus. Resistance is a matter of always going back; resistance is always recursive because it, as a discipline, seeks to investigate place as the place-already-constructed, constructed by the previous apparatus. We could re-read Freire here—his move towards critical thinking was a move against the position of the subject of oral discourse, a subject dominated by the monolithic state. Freire's workers brought literacy as a way of re-evaluating locality, of placement. It is not readily apparent in the logocentric spaces of the codex, but resistance in this sense still implies a "jumping across" ideological boundaries. In our electronic context, performance is the formula

which allows a “deeper” understanding of one’s “environment” precisely because performance is a matter of understanding surface; performance may be to electracy what sustained critique is to literacy. This approach does not necessarily translate into direct political action, which becomes here another possibility that the individual may take up or refuse. It does, however, set up a possibility for new ways of thinking, a possibility for producing that precious Freirean commodity: “critical consciousness,” an alive, performed awareness of one’s situation within hegemonic structures (Villaneuva 635).

Moulthrop’s insistence that “hypertext leads back into the logocentric matrix” seem to be working under the assumption that hypertext itself is following a linear trajectory (“Rhizome” 312). The “linearity and multilinearity” that create variable possibilities for reading and interpretation are ideologically the same. “Lines are lines, *logos* and not *nomos*, even when they are embedded in a hypertextual matrix” (310). Linearity itself, remember, is the quality that electracy cyborgs resist, insofar as linearity is the strict ideological norm of print culture. I retort by saying that practicing electracy is to be performing it, to create it as you go. The idea of an inevitable falling-back-into the age of print is simply the negative side-effect of bootstrapping our understanding of hypertext.<sup>6</sup> (Perhaps the problem is that we move too fast by considering hypertext as simply another form of written text, instead of considering, as Greg Ulmer does, the insistent importance of *imaging* in this new medium.) We cannot go around assuming that hypertext will inevitably *do* anything by itself—wouldn’t that be just another way of (trying to) throw a fence up around it, a way of trying to enforce an artificial constraint on its placement? The contingent spaces of electracy are not so easily nailed down; indeed, Moulthrop’s entire argument points in this direction, which makes it even stranger to me that he

should try to make such a direct pessimistic gesture towards the end. Thinking about written poetic texts while seeming to incorporate the “perceptual filter” of post-World Wide Web textuality, Jerome McGann offers some perspectives on how to approach the structures of variability and contingency in (hyper)text without simply giving a relativist, postmodern shrug at it all. As we engage, critique, and resist texts:

[Our] objects themselves shapeshift continually and the points move, drift, shiver, and even dissolve away. Those transfers occur because ‘the text’ is always a negotiated text.... Aesthetic space is organized like quantum space... the identity of the elements making up the space are perceived to shift and change. (181-3)

The alternative to a starkly linear conception of text is this move, a move towards a “quantum space,” a space of contingency. The alternative to a rigorous study of stable textual bodies is to recognize their changing-ness, and to make the jump along with them. My proposal, then, is a resistance based on metalepsis, a resistance of contingency structured in unstable, “n-dimensional” space: a quantum resistance.

Quantum resistance is a matter of staging explorations into Other spaces, a matter of “enjoying” (there’s that interesting-yet-problematic cyborg term) the fluidity of boundaries in order to pass freely among them. Quantum resistance is a performative act, an exploration into other spaces, a process of accumulating awareness of the place-where-I-happen-to-be, not because it has particular meaning in-itself, but because it exists as part of a network. To engage in resistance is to be thinking about cyber-ecology. Characterizing the act itself as a series of self-aware metaleptic leaps in n-dimensional space, resistance is resistance only insofar as it is about a leaping over into different spaces and discourses. Gilbert enacts a resistance by using her space to resist definitions of “space;” hers is a series of jumps across the borders of the apparatus. Ulmer’s “Grammatology Hypermedia” enacts a resistance by spreading across multiple lexias a



variety of ideas about space itself; his is a series of jumps through multiple speakers and perspectives. Quantum resistance is not about critiquing, but rather *performing* the language of New Media. If I gain nothing else by performance, then I have used hypermedia as a way of dissolving the hierarchical structures that tend to bind my placement in the world. Performance runs that risk, of being only about “my” place, and therefore becoming a recursion into solipsism; but it also connotes the (never guaranteed, because it is never authorized) possibility of re-creating and re-evaluating multiple *topoi*. Making these “quantum” leaps through the “textmass” foments a dual sense of development: both association and accumulation, to return to Joyce’s phrase, which itself presents the possibility for a kind of critical consciousness (“Then” 92).

This development transforms the process of resistance from passive (the idea of “learning” to resist), and makes it, much more problematically, a process of active engagement. That active process may become a mere jumping up-and-down exercise; still, in our moment, there may be an element of victory in itself of getting students to start thinking in terms beyond their “home” apparatus, of getting them to consider the “gap” between ideologies and forms of writing.<sup>7</sup> The crucial idea of “empowerment” in resistant discourse will fracture and disperse as it attempts to cross the gap into hypertext. It will only be reassembled by traversing the gap back again. Resistance becomes the quantum of energy released by jumping between energy levels (“Energy”). Resistance-as-performance entails first, a new kind of subject, one emerging into being but threatened by its precarious placement at the gap between the structured space of the school-as-institution and the open-but-solipsistic space of entertainment (the institutional formation of electracy).

Moreover, resistance requires an aware act of *deformation*; as McGann points out, “a true critical representation does not accurately (so to speak) mirror its object, it consciously (so to speak) deforms its object” (173). Resistance-as-performance occurs as a socially-situated process (no need to return to a completely process-dominated model of composition) of *negotiation*: “every document, every moment in every document, reveals an indeterminate set of interfaces that open into alternative spaces and temporal relations” (McGann 181). Negotiation is a matter of jumping through socially-situated spaces and not just performing critical acts of reading-and-writing, but also finding spaces to listen. The potential results of this strategy are nebulous, and rightly so, but this quantum model provides a sound, ecological perspective that will allow us to re-think electronic composition in ways that interrogate its ideologies without losing ourselves (and our students) in its daunting spaces of postmodern contingency.

### **Niche@Ideology.Writing.Web**

I conclude my discussion with a return to the beginning, a return to the ecological “web” that helped spawn (or is it spore?) this discussion on places, subjects, and the weird jumping-around that I propose should go on there. To return to Ecocomposition is to propose an expansion to the way that spaces and places get discussed and analyzed. I have maintained throughout that placement is still crucial to the endeavor of New Media studies, although I have proposed a sort of dynamic growth in what was heretofore a solid notion, so that the idea of place may include a consideration of the materiality of electronic and networked writing environments. Despite their seeming incommensurability, Ecocomposition provides a vocabulary for aligning these spaces and for developing discursive models that account for a writer’s place-ment within them.

A notion I have found interesting throughout my research is the difference between what Moulthrop, following Deleuze and Guattari, calls “smooth” and “striated” spaces. Striated spaces are the domain of “routine, specification, sequence, and causality,” the world of the coordinate grid, and of geometry; McLuhan and Ong associate these spaces with conceptual breaks marked by the age of print. Smooth spaces subordinate points to trajectory. They are spaces for “ad hoc political movements,” constituted by “parataxis and bricolage” of images in broadcasting. Smooth space is “mediated by discontinuities... an occasion; Deleuze and Guattari call it a ‘becoming’” (“Rhizome” 303). Despite their explicit differences, though, Deleuze and Guattari insist that these two kinds of spaces exist not in isolation but always in “mixture” (474). Ulmer has nearly the same stance: “it is important to remember, at the same time, that all three dimensions of discourse [orality, literacy, and electracy] exist together interactively” (“Grammatology” p4). Cooper also agrees: “there is no reason not to oscillate between the various media that operate to structure our transitional society” (“Postmodern” 142). Mixture, hybridity, symbiosis: these are contingent properties that point towards the potential efficacy of Ecocomposition for construct composite theories and pedagogies; Ecocomposition is the “method that effectively constructs” the multiplicity of discourse (Deleuze and Guattari 22).

The emerging apparatus of new writing practices and pedagogies is “regular and reliable even in its vastness and randomness” (Moulthrop, “Rhizome” 310). The only thing we know is that knowledge is always shifting, but that can be the beginning of an effort that I’ve only sketched in this context, attempting to pin down and describe the phenomena that are occurring in these gaps where our current apparatus cannot (and

shouldn't) take us, because they haven't been invented yet. Ulmer: "Electracy does not exist as such, but names an apparatus that we are inventing 'as we speak'" (7). Some New Media theorists take the path of ecstatic optimism about the Utopian dissolution of hierarchy. Some, like Moulthrop, express a healthy skepticism about these claims, saying that hypertext will not produce "liberated autonomous zones" or "pirate utopias" ("Rhizome" 317). This is partially right. Hypertext can produce such zones, but the very idea of contingent space reminds us that zones exist only in contact with other zones. Hypertext, and all the emerging writing practices of digital culture, may function rhizomatically, like grass, and written discourse may function logocentrically, like a tree. Ecology, however, accounts for all the formations within its habitats, including the sizeable and persistent gaps across which our differences can synapse.

When we think in terms of gaps, we would want to address and offer critical investigations of New Media rhetorics and the often-idealistic "gaps" they create between theory and classroom practice. Another critical gap is the materiality of New Media itself, and the extent to which our experience of its "new"-ness is mediated by hegemonic notions of progress and change. Part of thinking ecologically is to be thinking in terms of growth, change, and evolution; there's a powerful kind of revisionist history that we can be encouraging at our unique moment of development by offering critical reckoning of how technological rhetoric matches up to the realities of practice. Another goal necessitated by the notion of this gap is the development of New Media pedagogies that speak to the constructive processes that occur due to the advent of new writing technologies. Some theory has already heralded the death of hierarchy and the dissolution of racial and gender norms as we move increasingly towards a disembodied

conversational space; the contribution is valid, but we also see new kinds of hegemonies emerging onto the scene, emerging out of the old institutional spaces and colonizing the new ones. While we discuss pedagogy, we need to continue discussing resistance, how to orient our classroom practices towards a more incisive conversation about the new hegemonies being created by these new media. What does quantum resistance pedagogy look like? The continuing challenge for composition theorists and practitioners alike will be to consider the specific phenomenon that occur in the *movements* we and our students make within, among, and around the coexistent spaces of discourse, and the conversational processes of constructing and being-constructed that will continue to go on there.

### Notes

1. Clarification: Cooper's "Web" is a label for this discursive model, and is not intended as a reference to the World Wide "Web."
2. Throughout the text, I will use "hypertext" to refer to the entire range of "electrate," digitally-based writing systems, including hypertext and other computer-based communication regimes: HTML, MOOs and MUDs, chat interfaces, etc.
3. McGann advances this argument throughout *Radiant Textuality*, see specifically pp. 167-72, where he notes the "fundamental misconception" that "a digital field is prima facie more complex and powerful than a bibliographic one." Terry Harpold's "Hypertext" has also addressed the issue, emphasizing limitations of descriptions of print commonly promoted by enthusiasts of hypertext in support of digital writing's "revolutionary" innovations.
4. D. Diane Davis provides an interesting formula for this experience in her article "(Non)Fiction('s) Addiction(s)." Drawing on Derrida's notion of language as an "excentric drug," she approaches the new subject as a "narcological" Being, "under-the-influence-of-language" (273). The influence of language-technology causes "Being [to go] rhizomatic in the cyburbs" (279). As a drug, electracy causes a certain kind of perceptual "breakdown" in the "fluidfying border" between flat screens and the spaces of "real-life homes and offices" (276). I am hesitant to expand further on her drug-based tropology, but its combination of bio- and semio-spheric terminology makes a useful addition to my discussion.

5. Much of Lev Manovich's discussion in *The Language of New Media* works towards defining the structures of hypermedia in terms of the modular construction of film. Two of his five "principles of New Media" are "modularity" and "variability," emphasizing the media's emphases on discrete objects which can often be repositioned and replayed at will (pages 30-2, 36-45).
6. From the materialist angle, perhaps the problem is that we move too fast in considering hypertext as only another form of written text, instead of taking into account, as Greg Ulmer proposes we do, the fundamental role of imaging in this new medium. Jerome McGann, Johanna Drucker, and other theorists of the spatiality and multilinearity of printed artifacts would also, I suspect, wish for a more forceful emphasis of the visual qualities of the printed mark, page, and codex.
7. This sets up an interesting multivariate sense of "home" discourses. I primarily mean "home" apparatus to refer to the hegemonic force of literacy. Multiple interesting gaps open up, not only when we consider the transition to hypertextual forms of writing, but also the "hypertextual" powers of print itself, and how both factors are exposed to co-optation by the hegemonic force(s) of the academy structure.

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## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

I was born in Virginia, but lived a somewhat itinerant existence. My childhood years were spent in El Paso, Texas, but I came to “maturity” in Jacksonville, Florida. I attended Stanton College Preparatory School, where my interests included theater, Latin, and Monty Python.

I came to the University of Florida in 1997, following an ill-formed idea of becoming a scholar/practitioner of dramatic literature. Two years later, I found myself outside the theater department, bobbing in the current without much direction. A course in Scottish literature helped me re-negotiate my focus towards the more theory-driven domain of Cultural Studies. Unfortunately, I knew nothing of theory, so my undergraduate thesis (a look at professional wrestling as postmodern text) was an interestingly fraught project from the start.

As a graduate student, I stayed at the University of Florida, hoping to continue my Cultural Studies curriculum. A first-year seminar in theories of writing, however, piqued my interest. I undertook to study the range of Rhetoric and Composition theories on my own, starting with the domain of resistance and discourse theory. With much effort, I parlayed my interests in New Media into the mix, producing a sustained focus on various areas of composition theory and pedagogy. After completing my master’s thesis, I will be pursuing a PhD at the University of Georgia.