

Mystory

from *Text Book: An Introduction to Literary Language* Second Edition.
Gregory L. Ulmer, Robert Scholes, and Nancy R. Comley. (St. Martin's Press, 1995)

The point of departure for our research experiment is Roland Barthes' definition of "text" as being constituted by the work (object of study) plus the reader. Textual meaning concerns the relationship of the reader to the work. To do textual research is to write from this position or experience of the affected reader. A research paper as text, then, is a kind of autobiography, in that the purpose of the research is to explore and discover one's own (the reader's) relationship to the traditions, institutions, and discourses that have provided the contexts and tools the reader uses to understand not just a given work, but the self, the world, and everything in the world. (275)

Rather than imitating the attempt of conventional research in the natural and social sciences to attain impersonal objectivity, with the aim of establishing consensus that is collective and universal, text research is a methodology for the humanities designed to take responsibility for knowledge that is individual, particular, singular, idiomatic.

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In the same way that the institution of the family assigns individuals their places in society by means of the proper name, so do other institutions (school, business, government) contribute to the formation of identity by supplying names or titles for practices and positions internalized by participants. The same sort of identification with parents, and then with celebrities that occurs in popular culture [...] also operates in the learned setting of high culture. Scholars not only know about their object of study—they *identify* with them (thus collapsing the distinction between subjective and objective writing). (276)

Text research, then, complements traditional argumentative research in that while the latter concentrates on the knowledge about the object of study, the former foregrounds the "subject" of knowledge (the person who wants to know). The act of research presumes a desire—the desire to know something. It turns out that the object of study often serves as a metaphor for the subject of the researcher, as a vehicle that, read in the right way, offers a reflection or figure of the desire motivating the researcher. As a research method, text is a way to investigate one's own style of thought. This autobiographical approach to research has much to learn from the analytical approach of critique that uses the abstract categories of ideology to locate the way a given work carries the values, beliefs, and mythologies of the culture that produced it. [...] these ideological categories of identity include race, ethnicity, sexuality, gender, religion, class, age, nationality. Having seen how works of popular culture [...] support ideological identity, we now want to explore how these same processes are at work in the materials of the learned disciplines.

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a new genre for academic research called the *mystory*. Mystory is a neologism formed by analogy with the generation of the term “herstory” out of “history,” to name the collective story of women within the patriarchal story of Western civilization. Mystory extends this revision of history to represent the development of any individual’s education: changes reflected in a collective story such as the story of the American nation. Indeed, “nation” is one of the few categories of ideology all the citizens of a state supposedly have in common. As Benedict Anderson noted in *Imagined Communities*, a nation is an “idea” that exists only so long as people believe in it and act upon that belief. He also demonstrates that print literacy in both its popular and high culture forms is essential to the establishment and maintenance of nationality. The creators of great literature in a national language contribute in an essential and necessary way to our experience of belonging to a specific nation. To find out exactly *what* we are part of—to gain access to this collectively maintained idea—requires that we exercise one of the basic skills associated with literacy: research.

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In short, this project is an experiment. What are the goals of the experiment exactly? The first is to compose an intellectual self-portrait as a way to discover the resources available for personal use within the archives of literacy. The second is to test the value of the learning experience that comes from including within research writing the making of images, metaphors, and narratives (to add to the arguments and interpretations we have come to expect).

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“One goal of mystory as an experiment is to learn how to replace argumentation with mood as a way to guide research.”

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Mystory

from *Teletheory* Revised Second Edition. Gregory L. Ulmer. (Atropos Press, 2004)

“Assignment”

Write a mystory bringing into relation your experience with three levels of discourse—personal (autobiography), popular (community stories, oral history or popular culture), expert (disciplines of knowledge). In each case use the *punctum* or sting of memory to locate items significant to you; once located, research the representations of the popular and expert items in the collective archive or encyclopedia (thus mixing living and artificial memory). Select for inclusion in your text fragments of this information relevant to the items in your oral life story. Arrange the entries to highlight the chance associations that appear among the three levels. Organize the fragments by means of one or the other (or both) of the following formats:

1) *vita minor*: a resume including entries representing the sources of your [emblem] in your personal and community background. The *vita minor* lists those aspects of your experience that tend to be excluded from the conventional resume presented to employers or granting agencies.

2) *puncts*: sets of the fragments collected on the basis of a single shared feature.

In both orders the disciplinary discourse may be drawn from your major, or from a discipline in which you have a potential career interest. You may substitute for, or intermix with, this disciplinary discourse fragments on the topic of a major catastrophe (which may or may not be *the* catastrophes of Auschwitz or Hiroshima). If you are making the mystory not simply to represent to yourself the generalization of your signature into an *invention*, but to discover new points of entry into a specific problem, replace the catastrophic materials with information on that problem. The same format may be used to translate between expert and popular discourses.

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