

# Teaching Conductivity in FYHC: How to Improve the World

## A Review and Application of Gregory L. Ulmer's *Internet Invention: from Literacy to Electracy*

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v. **felt**, (fɛlt): to undergo the experience of..  
n. **felt**: a. fabric of matted, compressed fibers b. something made of this fabric<sup>1</sup>

### Setting the Mood

If you have seen Sofia Coppola's film *Lost in Translation*, you have already taken lessons in conductivity. In it, two Americans, played by Bill Murray and Scarlett Johansen, meet in Tokyo and form a bond that is not simple to describe. It is sexual, though there is no sex, and it is serious, but in a funny, wistful sort of way. Like this movie, Greg Ulmer's textbook *Internet Invention: from literacy to electracy* (2003) does not tell you what to think; it performs what a "felt" is. Not woven cloth but an entanglement of fibers, a felt is also exactly what the word play suggests. It is about what is felt, not just what is thought.

These introductory remarks may seem obtuse if you regularly use conventional textbooks in your classroom, or if you haven't seen *Lost in Translation*, or saw Coppola's movie but didn't get it, or don't know how "the felt" (material, psychic, social) is made—so please bear with me. It might help if I explain *Internet Invention* as an anti-textbook that follows and encourages a logic of conductivity—the associative, lateral reasoning often attributed to artists, inventors, and small children. Ulmer does not write his book from a Western position of mastery to explain what electracy is, but rather writes from the position of an artist/inventor who wants to encourage and enable teachers and students to get out on the web and invent it.

I was challenged in my first efforts to understand Ulmer's thesis and his book because of its concept and also because of its suggestive and allusive presentation. It is not an easy book to read, and it is like no textbook that I have ever read, but then I thought of Coppola's wonderful film and its West meets East trope, a trope which visually depicts what Ulmer's hybrid philosophy describes. And I thought of the way the film, much like Ulmer's book, insists that we consider what it means to be "lost in translation," whether we are with strangers in another country, at home in our own communities with people we know and love, or alone, anywhere, with ourselves. In fact, for Ulmer, images, with their potential to convey states of being through immediate emotional resonance, are often more readily shareable than abstract concepts which only state what we *think we know*. Ontology, for both writer and filmmaker, trumps epistemology.

Ulmer's thesis insists on the importance of performativity to learning, on the value of showing rather than telling, much like the research that guides Honors teaching in a hands-on approach to learning. Bear with me, then, one more time, as I ask Coppola's film to perform the thesis of Ulmer's text.

*Lost in Translation* depicts two people who find each other in the midst of a culture that is at once alien and frenetic, introspective and contemplative. A shared hotel, the lure of its western bar, and the absence of their spouses sparks a relationship between a middle-aged Hollywood movie star and a twenty-something newly-wed and student of philosophy. First filmed in their solitary pastimes, brought to life against the backdrop of Tokyo, the scenes of their meeting and impossible intimacy haunt the viewer. The camera plays over the surfaces of their bodies and faces; little is said but everything is seen, captured for the viewer through the camera's lens.

The conversations they do share are brief, intellectual yet personal, and go to the heart of what it means to be married, to love, to risk the abyss that exists between all human beings—even the others within our selves. But mostly the filmic images simply picture the two together, doing, without ever saying so, what people who love each other do. While there is no sex between them, there is betrayal and reconciliation.

In the closing scene, the man gets out of his departing taxi when he sees the girl in the crowded street. Catching up to her, they kiss for the first time, and an admission of *something* is whispered by the man to the girl. The smiles of relief and quiet joy on their faces provide the audience with the only evidence they will receive that something significant has been shared, some critical recognition has taken place.

Why this digression, this seeming postponement of my review? Coppola's film serves as my relay, my metaphor to describe the workings of Ulmer's text, not only because the film is composed of electronic images but because its plotline and camera shots attune themselves to the disparities and harmonies between the Western and Eastern worlds. For Ulmer as for Coppola, "Western logic . . . transcends appearance to locate essence (concept)" while "Eastern reason stays with surface, appearance, accident, and names the attributes that evoke a moment of experience (a mood)" (48). Ulmer brings these disparate modes (and moods) together in his text's—and potentially the film's—guiding epigraph: "Not to follow in the footsteps of the masters, but to seek what they sought"—Basho (a 17<sup>th</sup> century Japanese poet). *Internet Invention* does not dispense with western reason, but supplements it with electracy "put[ing] into logic the aesthetic operations of images (word and picture)" (10).

Using this film as a relay, the means of associative linkage Ulmer likens to dreamwork, can help clarify the philosophy underlying his text. For Ulmer, "Literacy support[s] abstract categories . . . [while] electracy supports emotional embodiments" (52). Indeed the creation of a field called electracy brings the body and feeling back into the realm of logic where they can be studied further. While this critical realm of emotion and the body has been previously marginalized, it has nonetheless been present in Western thinking from the beginning, embodied in Diogenes, the Greek philosopher who disrupts Aristotelian genus species analytics by performing his philosophy through the way he lives his life. To illustrate this point, Ulmer shares the anecdote that pictures Aristotle and his students trying to formulate a definition of man through an analysis of his basic features. Their logically derived formulation is "'featherless bi-ped'" (Ulmer 38). In reply to this description, Diogenes holds up a plucked chicken and cries, 'Behold, your man" (38). Centuries

later, Ulmer tells us, in a similar disruption of received norms, "19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century artists opposed conceptual abstraction and sought direct access to a supposed immediate flow of experience" (38). We see these performative modes of reasoning at work in the visual artistry of Coppola's film. Although she's a Western artist, this film demonstrates an Eastern preoccupation with surfaces and reveals the power of the image to evoke mood and tell us something about life and love and longing that often cannot easily be articulated in words.

For Ulmer, images (whether by word or picture) create relays that do not describe what a thing *is* (the Western concept) but perform what it *does* and how it *feels*, capturing the Eastern mood of poignancy in loss. Ulmer calls this feeling *wabi-sabi*, and describes it as the default mood of Japan. Just as the West has a default mood of "harmony and proportion" passed down largely through the art of the Greeks, so the Japanese culture has a mood or "decision about the nature of the world" that has been passed down from Chinese cosmology, with its complementary forces of Yin and Yang. For Ulmer, the *wabi-sabi* mood is best illustrated by the haiku poem form created by Japanese poets, because images, like the haiku, bypass description and meaning and insist instead on "surface, appearance, accident" to create a mood or a feeling. To return to the word, "feeling" and the connotative word play of the words "feeling" and "felt" that I mentioned in my opening paragraph, I can now better explain how Ulmer's textbook "performs what a felt is."

The making of felt is a metaphor/relay that reoccurs throughout Ulmer's text because it is his way of describing how images hook together. Images are not woven together as texts may be said to be woven in a manner analogous to textiles. Instead, the hooking together of images may be likened to the making of felt. Felt is made from wool fibers that are pressed together, whose barblike nature, when wet, causes each fiber to hook on to the other ones in a hook and eye fashion. Felt, then, serves as Ulmer's metaphor for electracy, in which images hook on to one another and are felt in the double sense of fabric and feeling.

Just as Coppola's film hooks the fabric of her character's lives to any darkly woven memories of loneliness or separation that may lie within the experiences of its

viewers, so does the introspective mood created by the exercises in Ulmer's textbook encourage its readers to take the book's premise seriously. I spoke of "word play" earlier, but Ulmer's work should not be mistaken for play. The introduction of his book leads off with a serious question, "How to Improve the World?" and his book is an effort to answer it.

### **Ulmer's Mystory**

After more than 30 years as grammatologist, student of Derrida and poststructuralist theory, and author of books like *Applied Grammatology* (1985), *Teleteory* (1989), and *Heuretics* (1994), Ulmer has created a textbook that brings theory to bear on practice in relation to electronic literacy. While different from textual literacy, electracy is still related to it, yet as the first section of this article has demonstrated, it has a different point of emphasis or mood. Put in other words, electracy privileges images (digital media) and emotion or feeling, while literacy privileges the written word and the move to conceptual thinking that took place when words could be retraced and a text examined.

Ulmer explains electracy by way of its difference from literacy, arguing that literacy pushes us to privilege the hard edged concept, while electracy privileges the "formless intuitions" (89) of the endocept, a term best represented, perhaps, by way of childhood memories. In similar fashion, literacy privileges deduction, induction, and abduction (or reasoning from the end result), while electracy reasons through the image logic Ulmer calls conduction or relays. His theory is that just as the technology of writing made new literate patterns discernable through the written word, and film made new patterns visible through image, analogously, new electrate patterns should be discernable in web technology and writing on the web as well.

Ulmer does not presume to know what these electrate patterns are, but he does believe that the series of exercises his textbook provides may enable students to tap into an already existent but perhaps undiscovered resource, their own mystory—a key to their untapped creativity. To conductively move his argument along, Ulmer tells his own mystory, offering the reader an image of a boy from Miles City, Montana, who grew up in a pragmatic culture that

believed a person should be of use. With a civil engineer father who was an elected member of Montana's state legislature, Ulmer dutifully attended the University of Montana to major in Economics and Political Science. But under the influence of poetry in a creative writing class taught by Richard Hugo, whose own instructor had been Theodore Roethke, Ulmer switches majors to English, much to his father's dismay. From then to now, he has vowed to prove that images, like those inspired by poetry, do have a pragmatic use, that they could, in fact, improve the world.

To further support his claim for image logic, Ulmer offers the example of Albert Einstein's mystory as well as the mystories of a number of creative thinkers who are key to modern and postmodern art, science, and critical and social theory to demonstrate the conclusions of science historians who claim that an "image of wide scope" . . . exist[s] as a pattern in the careers of the most productive people in our civilization" (xiii).

Let me briefly lay out Einstein's mystory as a relay to take us into my application of Ulmer's theory to the teaching of FYHC--a course that arguably has our future civilization's most productive people as its audience.

When Einstein was a little boy his father gave him a compass. Later in his life, Einstein identified the memory of receiving that gift as a key moment that focused his sight and became the image of wide scope that determined the trajectory of his career. A compass works as it does due to unseen but powerful forces, forces that Einstein spent the rest of his life working to explain.

Ulmer's theory is that by the time a person is 17-18 years old and a freshman in college, they, too, have their own compass. Like Einstein, their sight has been focused similarly by images and objects of which they may be unaware. Ulmer believes that if they can determine what he calls their widesite image, they will have a chance of tapping into their own creativity and the forces that move them along in the world. Operating out of his own poetic yet pragmatic mystory, Ulmer basically asks, Why wait till the end of your career to determine what your guiding image was? Why not determine it now and put it to use?

For Ulmer, the construction of the widesite image is an apprenticeship to prepare students to be part of what he

calls the EmerAgency, a public, web-based consultancy comprised of students who are actively working on issues of public policy. Indeed it is their very involvement in this "virtual civic sphere" (xiii)—the very kind of hands-on learning advocated in honors practice--that helps lead to the discovery of their wide images in the first place.

To figure out your wide site image is not something you can get to directly, so Ulmer, basing his exercises on textual relays liked those I described above, provides assignments and exercises to help the student develop a repertoire of images that may reveal a pattern leading to *their* image of wide scope. Citing postmodern theorists from Derrida to Giorgio Agamben and writers from Frederick Douglas to Virginia Woolf, Ulmer's text and its assignments are designed to be taught to students ranging from freshmen to graduate students, with different points of emphasis depending on the audience, but the book is particularly well-suited to honors students because of the dazzling number of engaging examples, exercises, and thought problems Ulmer uses to illustrate his points. The multiple relays these examples spark then allow students with various learning styles and varying abilities to respond to the assignments on their own terms.

Moving from Career to Family to Entertainment, to community History discourses, Ulmer's exercises take us through what he calls the popcycle—all the discourses that formulate subjectivity. His hope—and his method—is that by looking at the quarters of the popcycle to see how each one formulates human beings, his students will see who and what they are thus far and have an opportunity to intervene in their popcycle should they decide to change what they see. Further, since the images, descriptions, and discussions of the popcycle take place through exercises that are then posted on the web, the students automatically begin formulating a very different notion of audience than they do in the traditional classroom.

The rest of this article details several of Ulmer's exercises and provides as well some of my FYHC student's responses to his assignments—along with my own.

### **Application**

I taught Ulmer's book for the first time in spring 2005, using it as a supplement to my FYHC II course in

argumentation. Since I was unsure of how the text would work for the class, I was more comfortable letting it supplement my primary texts, but during the course of the semester *Internet Invention* became more and more central to the class, and the personal nature of Ulmer's pedagogy changed me and unstuck something for me and my students in a way that I would like to try to describe.

To explain how I became unstuck requires me first to explain who the students are in my course. Since the most common denominator among honors students may well be the honors designation, here are some particulars about the students I teach and the role that first year honors composition plays in our program.

The students in FYHC II are second semester freshmen (average ACT 27), who have received renewable four year scholarships to Southeastern, a small regional university in southern Oklahoma. The Honors Program requires a total of 26 hours in honors, including 6 hours in Honors English. They take FYHC with their cohort group, usually with the same professor, in the fall and spring of their freshmen year. While many are valedictorians of their senior classes, their range of experience and world view have been shaped by the geographical horizons of the small towns in Oklahoma and North Texas that they typically hail from. I offer this information to add another dimension to what may constitute a given body of honors students and to explain that when I began this course using Ulmer's book, I already had a history with these students.

While this history usually consists of the students learning what college writing requires in FYHC I and refining those lessons in FYHC II, last spring it was different. Rather than continuing in my class in the spring, six young men switched honors sections to avoid my class altogether (perhaps in response to the gender issues unit in FYHC I and the rather frustrating challenge of reading writers like Simone de Beauvoir and Virginia Woolf). I was somewhat chagrined and surprised, but as I thought about it, I had noticed a general lack of engagement on the part of the entire class, a lack I thought I would be able to address the next semester. When the "next" semester did not come for some of them, however, I rethought *not* what I wanted to accomplish for the class but the means to get there, and Ulmer's text showed me a way.

First of all, Ulmer tells us that we do not know yet what electracy looks like, so to teach it involves us in an experiment. I approached the semester and this class with eyes open to this experiment in teaching as a possible way to bridge the divide between me and the students. To teach mystery is to share mystories, so I began thinking about the images and stories that I would share with them, taking my cue from Ulmer. But this sort of sharing is not something I do as a matter of course, and I wondered how desirable it might be to reveal "truths" about myself to a group who already seemed to be somewhat alienated. But I decided to risk it and began working my way through Ulmer's assignments on my own, curious to discover my own mystery and my own widesite image.

As to experimenting with technology, while I am well-versed in teaching with Blackboard, teaching online, and constructing websites using FrontPage, I don't know html, and I certainly wouldn't consider myself a techie. But Ulmer insists that his assignments can be brought in in hard copy just as easily as they may be posted on the web, so I took the plunge, knowing we could post images to Blackboard which would, in some measure, give my students the feel of electracy.

But I wondered how I would give them a sense of global audience if we didn't do web postings, so the week-end before school started I read an e-mail about blogs on the tech-rhet listserv that described a free blog hosting service at blogger.com. I went there and made a (very bad ) blog. It was hard to post pictures but not impossible, so I thought we could at least try it.

When the semester started I had my usual syllabus from the year before, one tied to the Toulmin model of argumentation. I also had my usual class texts that range from Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech, to Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, to Virginia Woolf's anti-war treatise, *Three Guineas*. Ulmer's mystery assignments were added as a supplement to the regular course work. On the first class day we read parts of chapter one in *Internet Invention* that spoke in previously unheard of words like "mystery," the "popcycle" and the "widesite," and I involved my students in a contest to see which group could go to the board first and explicate Toulmin's model and Ulmer's relays. They had an easier job with Toulmin as

his model was more familiar, tied conceptually as it is to the Aristotelian *topoi* we studied in FYHC I, but they had more fun with Ulmer's obtuse words, and the general tenor of the class began to change that very day. I told them Einstein's mystory and Ulmer's theory that at their age they too already had a widesite image that it would be our project to figure out. They were immediately intrigued and finally, and perhaps for the first time all year, engaged in what was going on in the class.

It would be hard to say if Ulmer's text made all the difference since the departure of my six students made room for some highly motivated folks who had placed out of FYHC I to join the class. But the atmosphere, the mood, the feeling of the class, was immediately transformed--a kind of boredom or lethargy lifted, and it did not return. Was it my lethargy or theirs? That also would be hard to say.

Ulmer begins looking at the popcycle from the perspective of Career, so it was good we started working with the text in FYHC II since a number of the students had come to have a better sense of what they wanted to major in over the first semester. Here are some exercises from the Career and Family discourses of the popcycle and their results.

The first exercise in Career discourse asks the students to locate an image of a founding discovery or invention in their career field. Among others, their images included:

- a computer--from Justin, a Computer Science major
- ink pen and paper--from Cory, an English major
- a scalpel--from Jon, a Pre-Med major
- an inkblot--from Alicia, a Psychology major
- and an x-ray--from Jessica, a Pre-Science-Technology major

My image was a printing press.

In the second exercise, the students were asked to use the word culture as a relay (culture meaning to cultivate) and then to explain their career field in terms of a craft, a metaphor image that would help them depict how knowledge is developed in their field. With this assignment their mystories took off, and since Madison already had a blog site on xanga.com where she posted *her* assignment (and I showed them my blog), one by one the other students began creating blogs on xanga for themselves and posting their url's on blackboard.

Here are the images they created for this assignment along with their respective career fields:

A tool box—from Jessika, a Nursing major

Painting—from Kimberly, a Graphic Design major

A chess set—from Chad, a HYPER major and would-be football coach

The tap dancing lawyer in the musical *Chicago*—from Karl, a political science major and would-be politician

A puzzle—from Lauren, a Psychology major

An artistic rendering of air—from Christina, a saxophone player and Music Education major

Cooking—from Madison, an Art Major

My image was weaving—academic writer.

Turning to Family discourse, one of the first exercises asked them to compose anti-definitions for Bataille's *Critical Dictionary* following his exemplar, "factory chimney"-- a sight that struck fear into Bataille when he was a child, an image he only later saw as revelatory of certain cultural change when his home community shifted from an agrarian to an industrial economy. My students' anti-definitions involved seeing clowns and *Alice in Wonderland* characters as demons, all figures seemingly from other worlds, who hailed the students in their childhood years to nightmare realms where they did not want to go. Interestingly, what frightened them were images from films rather than any thing or real object in the world. My image was vampires—monsters made more monstrous because they appear to be human.

The last two mystery assignments I will describe in detail are inspired by Roland Barthes and concern Family discourse once again. The first assignment uses a Barthes excerpt on third meanings or obtuse words as a relay to remember words the students had invested with their own private meanings, and the second asks the students to find pictures that demonstrate the distinction Barthes makes between *studium*, or everyday meaning, and *punctum*, the sting that private memory brings to photographs. Here are some examples of obtuse words or expressions:

Candy sandwiches--peanut butter and jelly sandwiches because they tasted like candy--Jessika

Meticulous—a word that a really cute boy babysitter used to describe Madison when she was little—at the time, she hoped it meant beautiful

Love—characterized by Cory as one of the most obtuse of words

My word was "chum," a word the Hardy boys used to describe their plump friend Chet in the *Hardy Boys* mystery books. When we were children, my brother called me his chum to aggravate and shame me because I thought it meant fat friend.

The pictures they chose to illustrate the memory sting ranged from outdoor scenes of quiet or intense beauty, to pictures of a child with cancer, to ground zero post 9/11, to iconic pictures of killing in Vietnam—the last from Jessica, a current war protester. My first picture was from the recent past, an empty gurney on 9/11, empty because there were so few to save. But my second called up my childhood. It was a picture of a young black girl, Elizabeth Eckford, walking toward Central High School in Little Rock in 1957—a court-mandated walk toward integration that she took along with 8 others, sparking riots and the closing of my brother's public school.

The other two categories of the popcycle, Entertainment and community History discourses, provided fun exercises that included remembering your favorite cartoon or storybook character and mapping all the places that you had ever lived to see if the lines connecting the dots on a map resulted in some kind of discernable shape. Everyone, including me, had fun reminiscing about the good old days of childhood, when the *Ninja Turtles* (for many of them) and the wonderful drawings in the children's book, *Eloise* (for me), inspired us to behaviors we would otherwise never have imagined.

How then does electracy meet literacy? While my students have not yet moved to turning papers in online with pictures and graphics, there is no doubt that the mystery exercises began impinging in productive ways on the arguments that my students composed. Cory wrote explicitly about the value of composing mystories, Jessika analyzed *The Scarlet Letter* by way of Hawthorne's mystory, while others thought about their self-chosen topics in new ways, imagining relays between and among our texts that took them to places they had not known they needed to go.

When we came to the rather rushed end of the semester (there was no way to do all Ulmer's assignments in half a year), the students looked for repeated patterns in the

visual and word images they had composed through their exercises in order to finally determine their widesite image. The images the students composed include:

- A snapdragon, with petals in the shape of a saxophone, nature and harmony in one—from Christina, the Music Education major
- A cross—from Lauren, the Psychology major interested in mission work
- Endlessly tall skyscrapers—from Drew, our Business major
- The Presidential seal—from Karl, Political Science major and staunch Republican
- My image—Diego Velázquez's *Las Meninas*, (*The Maids of Honor*) a painting within a painting, an image of thresholds, passageways, and questions as to what lies inside and outside the frame.

### **Lessons to Ponder**

So how do mystories and the widesite images they engender improve the world?

Here is an excerpt from Cory's paper entitled, "How to cure that lonely feeling":

Mystory is simply defined as anything that describes everything about you. It is your definition. It isn't, however, just a definition of yourself or a picture that shows you in your everyday setting. Ulmer said it best when he wrote, "Mystory is not a text but a 'felt'" (37). You need to feel who you are in order to be able to do a proper mystory, and that is where people go wrong, they think too much instead of relying on feeling." (Jackson)

When I read these words in Cory's paper, I realized that perhaps the person who learned the most in the class this semester was me--the teacher, the person who needed, perhaps more than anyone, to remember how to feel who I am, to remember why I became a teacher in the first place.

I had spent the fall semester stuck, frustrated at my inability to reach the young men and even some of the young women in the class as we discussed gender issues, read Beauvoir and Woolf, and talked about roles that sex and gender play in shaping our lives and our world. Despite my efforts, I could not cross the gulf created by-- I wasn't

sure what—the subject matter, our differences in age, experience, gender? But teaching by way of mystory, and thinking of the way that the exercises in Career, Family, Entertainment, and community History discourses reveal the very different shape of their lives and mine, reminded me that even before Ulmer wrote his textbook, the best teaching has always been about sharing mystories. Yet, I realized, despite my “age” and “experience” I have been reluctant till this semester to tell mine. There are real events—a failed marriage, raising a daughter as a single parent, realizing at age five that schools could close because of race—that have urged me to create assignments that teach lessons about gender and race relations, but I had neither told nor depicted those reasons to my students, relying instead upon our class texts and heuristics to provide the students with the ideas and the concepts I thought they needed. Yet just as my mystory has shaped who I am, so I realized the mystories my students were telling me depicted real and compelling reasons why some of them would resist—and even evade—those lessons.

Ulmer’s exercises took me back into my past, to my childhood, and to some of the foundational moments that helped to fix what I would aspire to become: a public school teacher who, at the age of 21, taught in an all Black middle school in Ft. Worth, Texas; a professor of English and Humanities, currently teaching in a small university in Oklahoma, only two hours away from friends and family in Ft. Worth; the Director of the Honors Program for the last eight years; and, perhaps, even more significant to me, a mother, and a wife—long divorced but now happily remarried—each of these roles framed by the others in infinite regress, much like the ostensible subject(s) of my widesite image, Velásquez’s painting.

In this painting of a painting, it is not at first clear what the subject of the painting could be. Is Velásquez depicting himself painting a portrait of the King and Queen of Spain, who are apparently standing outside the frame of the picture yet dimly reflected in the mirror in the upper center of the painting? Or is the subject their daughter, the Infanta, the brightly illuminated personage in the center of the canvas surrounded by her attendants? And what is Velásquez’s role, standing, paintbrush in hand, beside a huge canvas that presents its back to the audience? Who or what is being pictured here? And more importantly, what is felt by the viewer who contemplates this picture in the

comfort of her home or in the galleries of the Prado? How are we implicated in this portrait—as viewers, interpreters, students, and teachers, standing as we do in front of the portrait in the place of the king and queen? These are the sorts of questions that inform my research and my teaching, but they are also questions that have shaped my life.

To teach mystory required me to question the frames, barriers, and boundaries of my teaching, to go to class without knowing quite what might happen, to create an imperfect blog and show it, even though it was bad, and to make myself vulnerable to my students. But mostly, teaching mystory asked me to make myself and my role as a teacher questionable and humbling again after a very long time of accepting it as a matter of fact, of forgetting what it means to be smart and proud yet unsure and uncertain—a role that new teachers and—probably—first year honors students negotiate every day.

To return to Sofia Coppola's film, the title, itself composed of obtuse words, is a play on the saying "lost in translation," the knowledge we have that when we try to translate one language into another there is always something lost in the process. Just as we see the characters' fraught efforts to communicate their own mystories to each other, so we convey our mystories to our students, realizing along the way that it both is and isn't possible. A mystory is a mystery--what cannot be explained about any of us and yet what is very much worthy of explanation, of depiction. Just as *Lost in Translation* shows us people who are alone yet longing for some kind of connection, so Ulmer's text helps us learn how to connect to ourselves and others through exercises that help us focus on longing, on knowing and recognizing loss, and yet on trying to repair that separation—that gap.

Mystories are personal *and* political, and just as Ulmer exposes himself and his mystory to his students, so have I shared mystory with mine, not as a ploy but as an effort to close that gap, to be just as engaged in teaching a class as I ask my students to be who are taking it. Until I read Cory's paper, I still had not grasped the *feeling* in felt. Like the characters in the movie, I too was lost in translation. Framed by method, holding fast to my models, when what was needed was a relay, a lesson in conductivity that teaching Ulmer taught me.

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