Available online at www.sciencedirect.com
ScienceDirect
Computers and Composition 28 (2011) 145–159
Computers and Composition
www.elsevier.com/locate/compcom

The Author-Function, The Genre Function, and The Rhetoric of Scholarly Webtexts

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Abstract

In this article, I compare Michel Foucault's (1994) author-function and Anis Bawarshi's (2000) genre function as explanations for the use, categorization, and value of scholarly webtexts. I focus much of my analysis on Anne Frances Wysocki's (2002) "A Bookling Monument" because it is explicitly designed to destabilize our reading practices. I also situate Wysocki's webtext along a spectrum with Charles Lowe's (2004) "Copyright, Access, and Digital Texts" and Collin Gifford Brooke's (2002) "Perspective: Notes Toward the Remediation of Style." In using the author-function and the genre function as lenses on these pieces, I aim to articulate multiple possible modes of being for scholarly webtexts and their users. In the process, I illustrate the ways these concepts speak to the status and social function of authorial ownership and originality; multimodal complexity; and formal reflexivity. Ultimately, I argue that bringing traditional concepts like authorship and genre to bear on scholarly webtexts not only reveals the values of the Computers and Writing community but also presents a unique opportunity to continue testing the uses and limits of our rhetorical theories.
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Keywords: Genre; authorship; new media; scholarly webtexts; academic discourse

> *I think that, as our society changes, at the very moment when it is in the process of changing, the author-function will disappear, and in such a manner that fiction and its polysemic texts will once again function according to another mode, but still with a system of constraint—one which will no longer be the author, but which will have to be determined or, perhaps, experienced.*
>
> –Michel Foucault, "What Is an Author?"

Had Michel Foucault lived to see the vast changes in textual production and dissemination that were only beginning to manifest in the digital technologies at the time of his death, he might have returned to his prescient speculation at the end of "What is an Author?" (1994) about the possibility that "the author-function will disappear," that texts will "function according to another mode" (p. 353). Early theorists like George Landow (1992), Richard Lanham (1994), and Michael Joyce (1995), of course, were quick to pick up on such connections between electronic communication and critical theory and to explore the challenges these technologies make to traditional notions of writing. Today, many scholars continue to attend to the effects of digital, visual, and multimodal rhetorics on reading, writing, and teaching practices. Publishing in venues such as *Kairos*, *Computers and Composition*, *Across the Disciplines*, and *Enculturation*, some have also begun *producing* new media texts that invite us to rethink our disciplinary definitions of scholarship.

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doi:10.1016/j.compcom.2011.04.003

But what "system of constraint"—or, perhaps more accurately, *systems* of constraint—do these new media texts bring with them? How can we understand the "mode of being" (Foucault, 1994, p. 346) of scholarly webtexts[1] that range from recognizable academic arguments to unabashedly playful multimodal texts? In short, what functions bring these divergent texts together?[2]

In order to account for these functions, we might be tempted to turn to various conceptual systems that scholars have developed in recent years, such as *remediation* (Bolter & Grusin, 2000), *multimodality* (Kress, 2000), *design* (New London Group, 1996; George, 2002), or *circulation/rhetorical ecologies* (Trimbur, 2000; Queen, 2008; Edbauer, 2005). I do not want to contest the usefulness of these concepts, but if we rely too readily on their explanatory power, we risk prematurely divesting ourselves of more traditional theories that may still help us describe the rhetoric of scholarly webtexts—and, by extension, new media texts broadly conceived. In his introduction to a special issue of *Computers and Composition* on "media convergence," Jonathan Alexander (2008) argues that as new media proliferate, "more traditional definitions of composing, authoring, and ownership come under scrutiny, are challenged, and shift" (p. 4), especially when users create new genres and repurpose older ones (pp. 2-3). My goal in this essay is to engage in such scrutiny, to explore the challenges and shifts new media generally and scholarly webtexts specifically make to theories we have long utilized to analyze literary and rhetorical production. My strategy will be to compare the usefulness of Foucault's (1994) author-function and Anis Bawarshi's (2000) genre function as explanations for the use, categorization, and value of scholarly webtexts. My hope is that in turning from the author-function to the genre function, I can articulate multiple possible modes of being for scholarly webtexts and their users. In the process, I will illustrate the ways these concepts speak to the status and social function of authorial ownership and originality; multimodal complexity; and formal reflexivity. Ultimately, I argue that bringing traditional concepts like authorship and genre to bear on scholarly webtexts not only reveals the values of the Computers and Writing community but also presents a unique opportunity to continue testing the uses and limits of our rhetorical theories.

I will focus much of my analysis on Anne Frances Wysocki's (2002) "A Bookling Monument" because it is explicitly designed to destabilize our comfortable (print-based) reading practices. However, I will also situate Wysocki's webtext along a spectrum with Charles Lowe's (2004) "Copyright, Access, and Digital Texts" and Collin Gifford Brooke's (2002) "Perspective: Notes Toward the Remediation of Style." Lowe's piece, a more traditional scholarly argument, works at the opposite end of the spectrum from Wysocki's. Brooke's piece, meanwhile, comes somewhere in the middle as it mobilizes a linear argument even while it plays with form and structure in order to literalize questions of style and perspective, its operative terms. As *Kairos* award winners or finalists, all three webtexts, following the award criteria, "take advantage of the Web as a medium to present information in ways that traditional scholarly texts cannot" (Call for nominations, 2009) and thus reflect the Computers and Writing community's values.[3] In short, I argue, these pieces offer a representative range of approaches to new media and multimodal production and therefore will prove useful for exploring the functions of authorship and genre in scholarly webtexts.

1. Digitizing the Author-Function

In seeking to "locate the space left empty by the author's disappearance," or the "death of the author" posited by Roland Barthes and other structuralist and poststructuralist theorists, Foucault (1994) argues that a work is constituted

[1] In this article, I follow the editors of *Kairos* in using "scholarly webtext" to refer to the kinds of academic articles published natively on the World Wide Web, as opposed to articles that might appear in both print and digital publications.

[2] Some scholars have begun exploring ways of understanding and evaluating the common features of scholarly webtexts, especially in relation to print publications. Patricia Webb Peterson (2002) discusses *Kairos* (electronic only) and *Computers and Composition* (then print-only) as "creating a rubric/heuristic that we can use to evaluate the impact computer technologies are having on our conceptions of what scholarly publishing is and should be" based on the journals' histories, "rhetorical presentations," and peer review policies (Introduction section para. 2). However, Peterson's aim is to consider academic publishing as a (changing) practice tied to journals' publication guidelines and the values of the scholarly community, a project related to but also different from articulating the mode of being of scholarly webtexts themselves. Similarly, Allison Warner (2007) "deliver[s] a rubric as an instrument to facilitate the acceptance of online texts within English Studies as evidence of scholarship for professional advancement" (Abstract). Her rubric can get us further than Peterson's (2002) toward understanding the significant features of such texts, and indeed, I also discuss some of the conventions Warner (2007) outlines. However, her system cannot account for how we use, categorize, and value those texts and conventions.

[3] Wysocki's (2002) piece won the award in 2003; Lowe's (2004) piece was a runner up in 2004; and Brooke's (2002) piece was a runner up in 2002.

by the author-function, which refers to the author's name as it exists in relation to his or her works rather than simply to the individual named (p. 345). This link between the author's name and his or her texts plays "a classificatory function" of relating texts to one another, separating them from other texts, "marking off the edges of the text, revealing, or at least characterizing its mode of being" (p. 346). This mode of being reflects "the status of this discourse within a society and a culture" (p. 346). In short, through the author-function, both the author and the text receive the high status associated with our culture's most privileged discourses. Foucault (1994) identifies four primary characteristics of the author-function:

> (1) [T]he author-function is linked to the juridical and institutional system that encompasses, determines, and articulates the universe of discourses; (2) it does not affect all discourses in the same way at all times and in all types of civilization; (3) it is not defined by the spontaneous attribution of a discourse to its producer, but rather by a series of specific and complex operations; (4) it does not refer purely and simply to a real individual, since it can give rise simultaneously to several selves, to several subjects—positions that can be occupied by different classes of individuals. (p. 349)

I will take up the first, third, and fourth characteristics in my analysis of scholarly webtexts presently, but I want to isolate Foucault's (1994) second characteristic, that "[t]he author-function does not affect all discourses in a universal and constant way" (p. 347). Because different texts may manifest different degrees or even different kinds of the author-function, I take this characteristic as a given; put differently, as I assess the extent to which the other three aspects operate, I will discuss the variations of the author-function in Brooke's, Lowe's, and Wysocki's webtexts.

1.1. Ownership and Transgression

Foucault's (1994) first criterion has two aspects that, he maintains, operate in tandem with one another: first, that contemporary notions of the author arose in a cultural moment when writing became subject to conditions of ownership; and second, that "[t]exts, books, and discourses really began to have authors. ... to the extent that authors became subject to punishment, that is, to the extent that discourses could be transgressive" (p. 346). Of course, Brooke (2002), Lowe (2004), and Wysocki (2002) appear immediately endowed with the status accorded to textual ownership when their names appear along with the titles of their texts in the journals' tables of contents. As a general rule, just as "literary anonymity is not tolerable" (Foucault, 1994, p. 347), neither is scholarly anonymity[4] if the text is to be accorded the value of an academic publication.

In the cases of Brooke (2002) and Wysocki (2002), the front pages of their texts act much like the covers of books, where the title and author appear in stylized formats that signal the status of the text and the author. Wysocki's webtext is especially instructive in this regard: her front page depicts a note card with her name, the title, and the image of a monument, all indelibly attached to the content that is to come. Her piece itself runs in Macromedia (now Adobe) SHOCKWAVE, a multimedia player application, and as such appears in a separate window from the front page. While this may be an incidence of technical necessity, in effect the author-function always remains in the background (assuming the user does not close the first window). And although we might read this alternatively as separating the author from the text, thus problematizing the author-function of the webtext, the repetition of note cards and the visual and verbal metaphor of the monument within the text serve as reminders of the authorial attribution and ownership inscribed on the front page. This authorial attribution connects the webtext to its institutional place in academia, thus exemplifying the first aspect of the author-function.

In contrast, Lowe (2004) explicitly seeks to disrupt traditional practices of textual ownership by providing an open access license for his piece. In doing so, he participates in the Creative Commons' project to "allow content creators to extend additional rights to readers, listeners and viewers not normally allowed under copyright law" (Lowe, 2004, Sharing is Best section, para. 16). I do not want to dispute the power of such open-access approaches to intellectual property; I do, however, want to call attention to the possibility that such licenses nonetheless institute "rules concerning

[4] *Kairos*, among other journals, provides a few exceptions to this rule; for two such examples, see issue 12.3 (Summer 2008), which includes a manifesto by DigiRhet, an academic collective interested in issues of intellectual property; and issue 13.2 (Spring 2009), which includes a remixed video by "theamishaugur". It remains to be seen whether or not texts with collective authors or anonymous handles are subject to the author-function in the same way as more traditional scholarship.

author's rights, author-publisher relations, rights of reproduction, and related matters" (Foucault, 1994, p. 347). In other words, users' relationships with Lowe's (2004) webtext are still disciplined by legal contracts and, therefore, the logic of the author-function's first criterion. After all, Lowe (2004) writes, "This text may be redistributed, whether the original version or a derivative one created by you, as long as I am cited as the original author and the text is made available under the same license" (Sharing is Best section, para. 21). Both authorial attribution and licensing practices continue to govern the status of Lowe's (2004) webtext.

The difference, however, is that such a process mobilizes an author-function not simply tied to the text-as-property. According to Mickey Hess (2006), "Foucault's [1994]... concept of authorship has less to do with writing than with private property" (p. 288), but in contrast, Lowe's (2004) open access license elevates originality above ownership as a characteristic of the author-function. Of course, this shift in the author-function is neither universal nor even. Hess's (2006) own discussion of hip-hop sampling, for example, illustrates that the hip-hip community places less emphasis on authorial originality than on "finding unique sources, recombining unlikely sources, and putting recognizable material into new contexts," (p. 281), practices that he argues are also operative in academic citation. In other words, Hess (2006) suggests and Lowe (2004) demonstrates not the simple replacement of one author-function with another but the simultaneous existence of multiple author-functions, each with a different locus of value, as suggested by Foucault's second criterion. Indeed, Joan Latchaw and Jeffrey R. Galin (1998) argue that although "it is sometimes impossible to determine what is contributed by particular individuals" in new media texts, this does not yet mean that the author-function has disappeared (p. 152). What we are witnessing, instead, are new, varied author-functions. Rather than realizing the early utopian pronouncements of Landow (1992) and others about essentially "authorless" hypertexts, these scholarly webtexts illustrate the reality that shifts in authorial status are much more incremental and difficult to predict.

Perhaps that is why Foucault (1994) argues that the first element of the author function is bound up with the transgressive—as opposed to revolutionary—potential of writing: in seeking to subvert existing copyright practices, Lowe's open access license paradoxically reaffirms the value of the original author and hence the author-function, albeit a revised one. Wysocki (2002), too, explicitly resists our traditional print-based reading practices. Her project centers on the ways in which "the visual picture most of us have of books" acts as a commonplace "when we think of our bodies and our selves," and she wants to explore the conditions of "discomfort in certain circumstances onscreen" (n.p.). Key to her exploration is the visual structure of the webtext: "As you read here," she writes, "on the screens I have built for you, please attend to the words that signal how our relations to our selves and bodies are very much dependent on how we see in relation to books" (n.p.). In addition to invoking herself as author, Wysocki (2002) implies that to understand "how we see in relation to books," we must also experience the discomfort associated with reading the complex webtext that she has created.

Consider Fig. 1: On this screen, the user must experience the discomfort of rolling the mouse over invisible links in order to find the verbal text, much as one might "see" a dark room with her hands. At least three acts of transgression operate here: first, while in other sections fingertips clearly act as nodes that the user clicks to reveal text, here that is not the case. Instead, we must blindly seek them out, eventually finding them in the spaces between fingers, and thus reconsider our assumptions about textual consistency. Second, she amplifies this lack of consistency with the constant movement and flashing of the screen, which run counter to the stability of our experience with print-based texts. And third, rather than naturalize the textual conventions as a print-based scholarly essay might, she calls our attention to the textual conventions and subverts them. This purposeful transgression and discomfort may speak to the "experience" of a new system of constraint that Foucault (1994) considers at the end of his essay. But it also directs us back to the author-function's first criterion: as Gail Stygall (1994) argues, "the right to transgress conventions is reserved for authors" whose texts are published (p. 324).[5] In mobilizing discomfort, Wysocki "restor[es] danger to a writing which [is] now guaranteed the benefits of ownership" (Foucault, 1994, p. 347), using and subverting visual and textual tropes to do so.

1.2. Textual Complexity

Foucault (1994) himself calls transgression "an imperative peculiar to literature," tied as it is to the ideology of originality (which we have already glimpsed in Lowe's [2004] webtext); similarly, creativity is a component of his third

[5] Indeed, Stygall (1994) uses the author-function as a way of explaining the lack of value accorded to basic writers' compositions—that is, for her, basic writers especially are not accorded the status of authors in the ways that Foucault discusses.

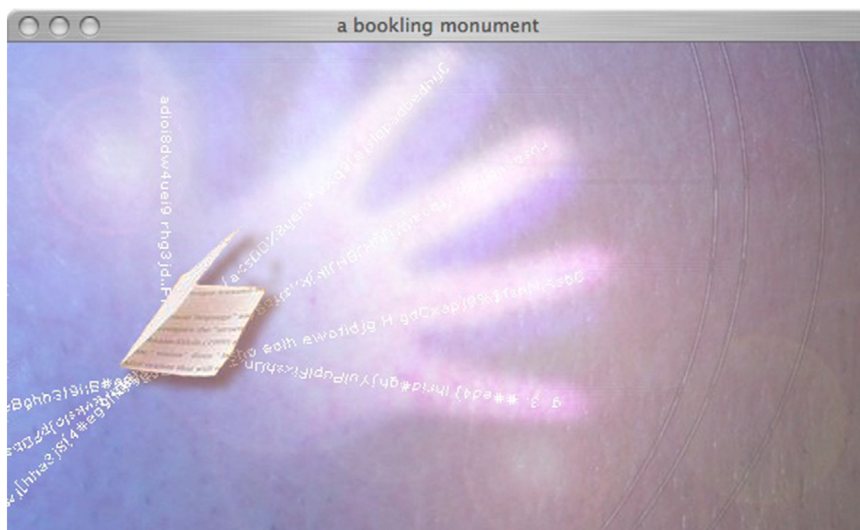

Fig. 1.

characteristic, “a complex operation which constructs a certain rational being that we call the ‘author”’ (p. 347). In this regard, Stygall (1994) writes, “If an author writes a passage that is unclear or that is not obviously related to what came before it, then readers assume there is a reason for it, embedded in the author’s intent or milieu” (p. 325). In other words, Foucault’s (1994) third criterion treats textual complexity as a valuable characteristic, pointing to an author who has “a ‘deep’ motive, a ‘creative’ power, or a ‘design”’ (p. 347). These values operate in English studies broadly conceived in what Craig Stroupe (2000) calls the “ideology of *elaborationism*, a set of cultural, pedagogical, and technical practices based on the idea that the formal composing or reading processes can produce more critical forms of consciousness” (p. 609; emphasis in original). For Stroupe (2000), hybrid visual and verbal webtexts manifest a dialogic function in the vein of Bakhtinan novelistic discourse, characterized by reflexivity, which “we English-department elaborationists would generally value as ‘literary,’ ‘critical,’ or ‘complex”’ (p. 620). In other words, via the reflexive juxtaposition of image and text, scholarly webtexts may participate in the literary practice of critical complexity that is tied to the “design” (in both senses) of the author as “a certain rational being.”

Lowe’s (2004) piece does not emphasize images in the sense that Stroupe (2000) explores and so does not participate in visual/verbal elaborationism to the extent that Brooke’s (2002) and Wysocki’s (2002) pieces do. Brooke (2002), for example, uses the visual metaphor of the elevator, shown in Fig. 2, with “attitudes” and “altitudes” as the elevator doors framing an anecdote about Michel de Certeau visiting “the top of the World Trade Center” (Style section). As we read the anecdote, the text scrolls up, mimicking the movement of an elevator (even accompanied by sounds), and Brooke (2002) concludes by writing that the trip “that de Certeau describes... is also replicated every time one picks up a book. Both physically and figuratively, to read a text is to place one’s self above it, to position one’s self outside of it” (Style section). In contrast, Brooke’s (2002) visual metaphor of the elevator invites us inside the text, at least temporarily, and the upward movement of the words takes us on the trip with de Certeau. The visual elements of Brooke’s (2002) webtext comment reflexively upon the words he writes and quotes in order to enable a more critical consciousness, as Stroupe (2000) might put it, about the ways books frame our perspectives. The textual complexity that manifests in the visual metaphor is reflective of the kind of depth of motive attributed to the third criterion of the author-function and valued by the literary community. As Foucault (1994) writes, “these aspects of an individual which we designate as making him an author are only a projection, in more or less psychologizing terms, of the operations that we force texts to undergo” (p. 347). In seeking out complex instances of multimodality, then, we may project their functions onto the author; valuing multimodality, in short, may actually serve to reinforce the third element of author-function in that the design becomes the product of the rational author endowed with creative abilities. Moreover, adding design to our definition of valuable textual complexity reaffirms the shift in the author-function implied in Foucault’s (1994) second criterion.

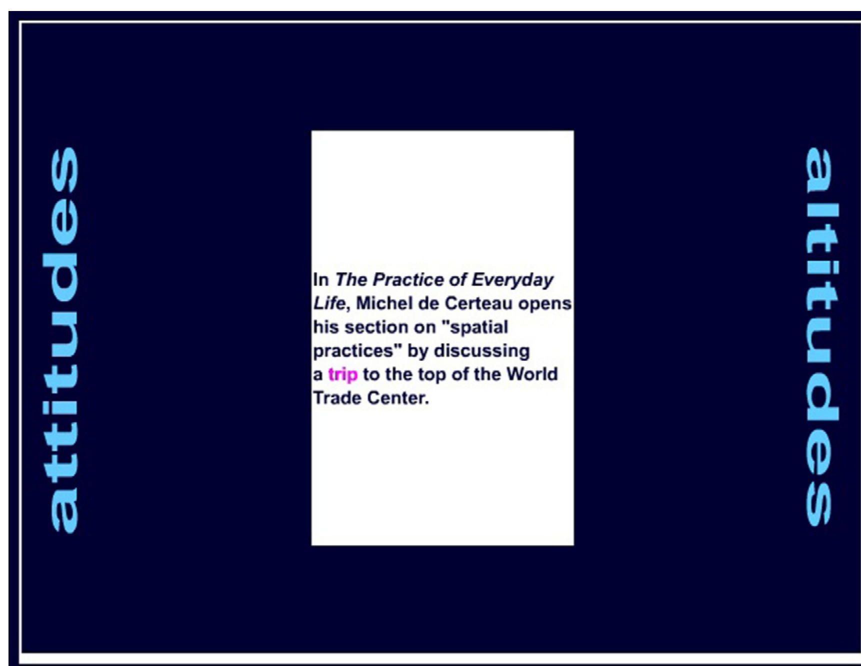

Fig. 2.

1.3. Plurality of Self

If multimodality is a textual feature that can be inscribed by the author-function, then so, too, is multivocality, or Foucault's (1994) final characteristic—the idea that "all discourses endowed with the author-function do possess [a] plurality of self" (p. 349). That is, in Foucault's (1994) formulation, the same author can manifest multiple voices tied to varying modes of existence and even varying ideologies, and "the author-function is carried out and operates in the scission itself, in this division and this distance" between the author, the real writer, and the speaker (p. 349). When Wysocki (2002) writes, "my touchstones in this composition are memory and discomfort" (n.p.), the first person pronoun refers to Wysocki-as-author/composer, as one who "in a determined time and place" (Foucault, 1994, p. 349) kept memory and discomfort in mind as she composed the webtext—although still this figure of the author is not equivalent to Anne Frances Wysocki, the real writer. Rather, this is the figure of an authorial persona that orchestrates her webtext around particular conceptual loci. This, too, is different from the Wysocki who writes that one reason she uses "monument" in her title "has to do with what I take to be our usual understandings of and associations with monuments: monuments are, generally, markers for our eyes that serve, upon our seeing them, to call to our minds—to define—fixed and discrete events or people from some past time we wish not to forget. ... or that our culture hopes will be fixed visibly in our minds" (2002, n.p.). In this passage, we get a version of Wysocki-as-author/scholar, a persona participating in the scholarly convention of defining key terms. The metaphor of the monument, also visually reproduced as nodes on this screen, is an apt description for our purposes. Whereas in the first case, the first-person and the term *monument* evoke "the circumstances of the [webtext's] composition" (Foucault, 1994, p. 349), in this second case, Wysocki's (2002) language creates of the scholarly persona a sort of monument, calling to our minds a "fixed or discrete" authorial figure "that our culture hopes will be fixed visibly in our minds." In explaining the term *monument*, Wysocki seems to monumentalize the author-function.

Plurality of self, Foucault's (1994) fourth criterion, also operates in quotation and citation practices. Although citation certainly serves the purposes of authentication, its effects are often much more varied and complex (cf. The (In)Citers, 1998; Hess, 2006), and indeed it can provide us with a more complex picture of the author-function of scholarly webtexts. Paul Amore (of The (In)Citers, 1998) argues that when one author cites another, complex "negotiations of power that contribute to the making of meaning" exist, particularly because "[t]he cited author then loses control of the meaning of her text, and the *ethos* that the readers attributed to her before will now change" (Acceptable Appropriation

section). Although Amore brings up these negotiations while discussing misinterpretation and misrepresentation, I would extend his argument to almost all instances of citation. This process, however temporarily, forces the author to appropriate the voice of other authors even as she uses them to further her own project. In part, then, the author-function exists in academic genres by virtue of one author's ability (indeed, requirement) to use the voice of another in a new context, thus changing both the meaning of the original text and the status accorded to both authors. Of course, this taking on of voice tends to be verbal, as when Wysocki (2002) takes on Mary Carruthers's definition of memory, or it can be visual, as when Brooke (2002) "quotes" Albrecht Dürer's *Unterweysung der Messung* to illustrate the disciplining of vision in Renaissance perspective paintings. But quotation and citation complicate the fourth aspect of the author-function when they are used via hyperlinks, as exemplified by Lowe's (2004) webtext, which he uses to practice open access.

In general, many scholars since Landow (1992) have tended to emphasize hypertext's potential for the construction of a larger text that exceeds the boundaries of an argument created by a single author-function. In this formulation, linking invites the user to participate in "authoring" the text. For example, Doug Brent (1997) writes, "Hypertext's mandate is to let the reader choose how much to read as well as the order in which he will read it" (A Way In section), which is exemplified the relative lack of textual direction in Wysocki's (2002) webtext. Elsewhere, Brent (1997) continues, "Form is written on the fly by the reader rather than coming from the writer who in turn received it from a discourse community" (Is Hypertext Formless? section). Here, according to these scholars, at the moment when the author seems to cede control to the user, the author-function may be subverted. Marcy Lassota Bauman (1999) argues, "Unlike texts that arise from other forms of collaboration, the final shape of texts that are instantiations of Internet genres cannot be explicitly determined by one person or even by several people who come to consensus: The shape of most generic Internet texts evolves, and finally organizes itself, without the omniscient knowing of a single author (or even a number of authors)" (p. 276). In other words, according the position advocated by Landow (1992), Brent (1997), and Bauman (1999), the practice of linked citations in hypertext allows users to negotiate multiple voices linked to multiple authors and multiple texts, none of which are determinant, thus subverting traditional notions of authorship and even readership.

However, I would argue that this subversion, while real, is far from complete. First, the figure of the author always looms in the background as the organizer of the links and the argument that surrounds them, especially if the author is named. Despite his arguments about users' control of their reading experience with hypertext, Brent (1997) concedes, "[T]he reader's choices, while highly varied, are far from infinite. They are constrained by the shape of the nodes and the links that the author has chosen" (Is Hypertext Formless? section). Second, as I indicated above, the act of linking still appeals to authority—the texts that are linked are also often endowed with the author-function. And finally, although linking does offer the reader some control over his experience of the text, generally he is not accorded the status of "author"; after all, no one can knowingly access "my" version of "A Bookling Monument." Only those whose names are attached to texts that mobilize *all* the aspects of the author-function, however they might manifest, maintain such a status. We might say, then, that the practice of linked citations not only reaffirms the multiple authorial personae implied in the fourth aspect of the author-function but also mobilizes a different kind of author-function wherein multiple voices exist but are always subject to the status of the original author who composed the links, thus again revealing the shifts described by the second characteristic of author-function.

1.4. A Changing Author-Function

As academic scholarship proliferates on the web, the author-function itself becomes digitized. Even as Lowe (2004), Brooke (2002), and Wysocki (2002) complicate our understanding and experience of academic writing, their webtexts are conditioned by the author-function. However, in returning to Foucault's (1994) second criterion, I believe my argument illustrates the ways in which the author-function is not an either/or proposition. Rather, in becoming digitized, the author function operates in multiple, sometimes uneven ways across texts. Differing practices of ownership, varying degrees of textual transgression and creativity, and the plurality of voices and selves in scholarly webtexts simultaneously reveal and complicate the author-function as a system of constraint. Already, we can see that it might be better to speak of *systems* of constraint, of multiple author-functions, even within a single webtext.

2. The Genre Function of Scholarly Webtexts

Although the author-function is still a significant system of constraint for scholarly webtexts, other traditional theoretical systems may be equally useful for describing their mode of being. A small but growing number of scholars have begun considering the way genre, for example, can help us understand digital, multimodal, and new media rhetorics. Rick Carpenter (2009) writes, “[W]e can use genre theory to define texts by what they *do* and how they are *used* rather than by what they *are*, a methodology that better accounts for the dialogic, collaborative, and interactive nature of electronic texts than do formulations based on features and forms” (p. 142). In other words, genre is a useful alternative because it allows us to move beyond the author-function’s focus on texts with a high cultural status in order to account for the rhetorical effects of formal, ideological, and verbal and visual elements in scholarly webtexts. As Bawarshi (2000) argues, “We need a concept that can account not only for how certain ‘privileged’ discourses function, but also for how all discourses function, an overarching concept that can explain the social roles we assign to various discourses and those who enact and are enacted by them. Genre *is* such a concept” (p. 338). With its emphasis on the “social role” of discourses, Bawarshi’s (2000) concept of the genre function will allow us to more precisely describe the rhetoric of scholarly webtexts. Following Carolyn Miller (1984), Bawarshi (2000) maintains that genres are sites of typified sociorhetorical actions that inflect our understanding of and responses to recurring situations; they are “environments wherein we recognize, enact, and consequently reproduce various situations, practices, relations, and identities” (p. 336). Just as Foucault’s (1994) four criteria served as focal point in my analysis of the author-function, so too will I use Bawarshi’s (2000) four categories—situations, practices, relations, and identities—to view the ways the genre function delimits scholarly webtexts’ mode of being.

2.1. Generic situations

The genre function both denies definitions of genre as neutral a priori categories and, in its first criterion, forces us to recognize that rhetorical situations do not exist outside of the genres that we use to respond to them.[6] Bawarshi (2000) writes, “as individuals’ rhetorical responses to recurrent situations become typified as genres, the genres in turn help structure the way these individuals conceptualize and experience these situations” (p. 340). We can see this epistemic function of genre at work in the scholarly webtexts we have been discussing. In all three webtexts, the authors respond to the complexities characteristic of the relationship between print-based and new media logics. In the process, however, the genre of the scholarly webtext helps to make this new—but recurring—situation recognizable and thus warranting a response. Extending Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin (2000), for example, Brooke (2002) worries that “we have wasted too much effort in the attempt to articulate distinctions among media” (Remediation section). Instead, he argues that the classical rhetorical canons, especially style, can help us “attend to the genetic (or mimetic) level of these technologies,” to see degrees of relationship and change both within and among media (Remediation section). This goal is typical of much new media scholarship (and indeed, much humanities scholarship in general): the author responds to what he sees as a troubling situation in the academic literature, arguing that in focusing on X, scholars have missed Y. In other words, the larger genre of the scholarly text (whether a print article, a monograph, or a webtext) will tend to construct the situation (Bawarshi’s [2000] first criterion) in this relatively typified way.

Two points here are worth making: first, Brooke’s (2002) response illustrates the relationship that all genres have to the antecedent genres (cf. Jamieson, 1975) on which they are based. That is, while I am designating scholarly webtexts as a different genre that extends and transforms the scholarly essay, that extension and transformation is only possible insofar as the new genre mobilizes and responds to a recognizable situation drawn from the very genre on which it is based. Scholarly texts miss a fundamental point and thus warrant a response from a subsequent scholarly (web)text. Second, as Bawarshi (2000) indicates, genres do this because of the “social motives” that “they carry with them—socially sanctioned ways of ‘appropriately’ recognizing and behaving within certain situations” (p. 341). In Brooke’s (2002) piece the trope of the scholarly conversation or the Burkean parlor becomes a social motive, one that continues to delimit the situation to which the webtext responds, which in turn reproduces the necessity of that very trope. In the process, too, the conversation itself—about “genetic” relationships among media—is reconstituted and made worthy of the very response Brooke gives it.

[6] See, for example, Carolyn Miller’s (1984) critique of Lloyd Bitzer’s “The Rhetorical Situation.”.

As Bawarshi (2000) indicates in the first category of the genre function, this act of recognizing and reproducing situations reveals the extent to which genre cannot be reduced to formal containers, as genres inherently exceed the forms they take. Lowe's (2004) webtext, for example, mixes traditional conventions of print scholarship with emerging conventions of scholarly webtexts. Structurally, his piece contains an introduction; a body subdivided into named sections, which serve to organize an otherwise linear argument; an afterword; and a references page. Allowing for some variation, all of these formal elements are typical of many scholarly articles, including my own. Lowe (2004) also utilizes the emerging conventions of scholarly webtexts that Warner (2007) notes, such as a nodal structure and linking strategies. As with Brooke's (2002) exigence, Lowe's (2004) form organizes and constitutes an "appropriate" response to the situation—namely, the fact that "education has had negligible impact on the evolution of intellectual property perceptions, legislation and practices; in some cases, even adverse effects" (Introduction, para. 14). Rather than let intellectual property rights remain the province of policy makers, lawyers, and the entertainment industry, he constructs the situation as a scholarly/pedagogical one, and he does so via a linear argumentative form recognizable to the very scholar/teachers he hopes to call to action. The nodal structure and the links, too, help constitute an ethos of open access, one he explicitly asks readers to take up when he implores them to "choose to share and/or use shared content" in their scholarship (Make a Choice section, para. 2). According to Bawarshi's (2000) first characteristic, then, the genre function both helps to reproduce existing situations and allows for the kind of generic change at work in the webtext conventions that Warner (2007) outlines, as those conventions represent new ways of constructing appropriate responses to typified rhetorical situations.

2.2. Generic Practices

The genre function also constitutes scholarly activity, the second element of Bawarshi's (2000) genre function: the practices or actions that genres help us (re)produce. The formal rhetorical conventions of Lowe's (2004) webtext make social activity possible to the extent that his article contains a linear argumentative structure and nodes/links that invite subsequent scholarly responses to the situation he has constructed. In turn, these subsequent responses may take up the rhetorical conventions—and hence the actions—he uses to structure his argument.[7] Interestingly, despite the multimodal rhetoric in Brooke's (2002) piece and dispersal of left-to-right textual blocks, he too explicitly utilizes a linear argumentative structure: in his "Notes" section; he writes, "this essay is composed of several sections that follow a single axis" (2002). Fig. 3 exemplifies this single axis: the reader first sees a chunk of text (Brooke's [2002] discussion connecting Panofsky and Ihde); then, she can click on a hyperlinked word or phrase, in this case "reading praxis"; Brooke then literally draws a line to the next chunk of text (a quote from Ihde), which has another hyperlinked word ("vision") that would lead to the next chunk of text. It is impossible to backtrack along this axis until the end of each section, where Brooke (2002) provides us with a back button that requires us to replay the entire section again. If anything, then, this linear structure seems *more* constraining than print-based articles—at least there we can flip back and forth between pages at will. Although Brent (1997) implies that hypertext inherently represents a "non-linear garden of forking paths" (Is Hypertext Formless? section), I argue that as new media solidify into genres like scholarly webtexts, composers such as Brooke (2002) and Lowe (2004) may in fact use linearity strategically to accomplish social action within the genre. Therefore, social action, the second element of Bawarshi's (2000) genre function, requires the interplay of generic stability and change.

Moreover, in using the term *axis*, Brooke (2002) reveals the extent to which his piece is implicated in our usual understanding of perspective, conditioned as it is by print-based reading practices. In other words, the form of his argument is intended to call attention to form itself, a social action that is becoming increasingly commonplace in scholarly webtexts. As Warner (2007) says of this emerging convention, "A formal or form-based enactment of the content occurs when the organizational structure of the web-based text demonstrates and/or reinforces the

[7] Here I deliberately mean to evoke the notion of "uptake," a concept from Austin's speech act theory that has been utilized by many working in rhetorical genre theory. Anne Freadman, 2002 most famously theorizes uptake to describe "the bidirectional relation that holds" between a pair of texts (p. 40). She uses the analogy of the tennis game, where the character of each shot "is determined by the shot to which it is a response" (Freadman, 1994, p. 44). Following this formulation, shots, and, by extension, genres, "work within certain clearly marked conventions, and *with the material at hand*. They are both enabled, and constrained, by" the genres they create and the genres to which they respond (1994, p. 44-45). Because this is an active process, when one takes up a genre, one does not necessarily reproduce its conventions, at least not in any simple way. Instead, uptake names a "process of exchange" whereby rhetors "make use of the speech acts to which they respond" (Kill, 2006, p. 219).

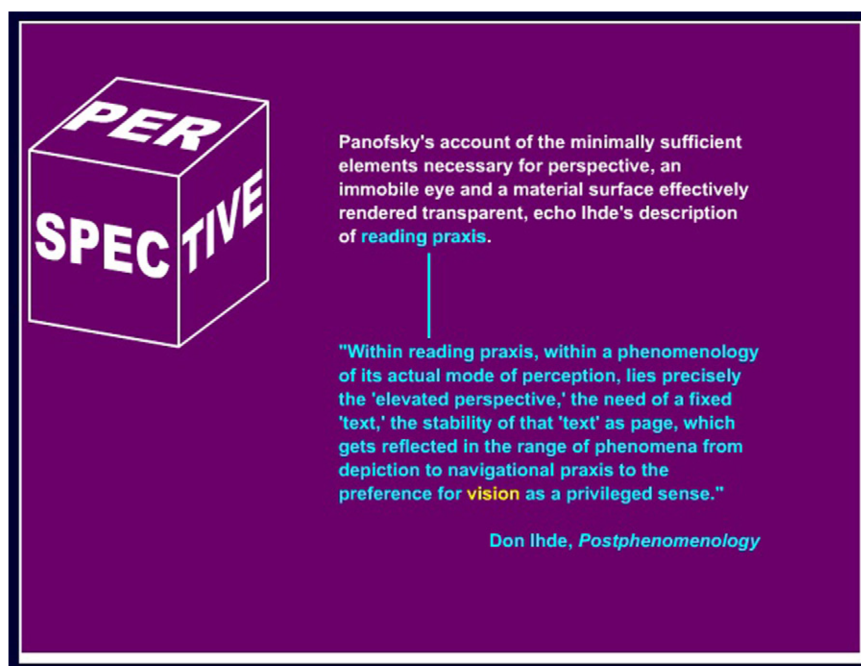

Fig. 3.

content of the text" (Web-Based Conventions section). In this sense, Brooke (2002) exaggerates a linear structure in order to call attention to linear perspective's constraints. This formal reflexivity highlights the extent to which ideological conventions help constitute scholarly activity. In this sense, the second aspect of the genre function also encompasses elaborationism, since "works that emerge from the culture of elaborationism typically value complexity, irony, connotation, and deferred meanings, achieved through awareness of the medium itself, whether visual or verbal" (Stroupe, 2000, p. 611). Whereas under the author-function elaborationism serves to emphasize the status of the author, the genre function mobilizes elaborationism as a social action—the texts reproduce the values of the scholarly community when they amplify our "awareness of the medium itself." But rather than reduce scholarly webtexts to a form of navel-gazing, I want to reiterate that in Stroupe's (2002) argument, elaborationism is also an *ideology*, not just a form—or even a goal—in and of itself. Therefore, the formal reflexivity characteristic of elaborationist texts and operative in scholarly webtexts becomes a means of recognizing and performing social actions (Bawarshi's [2000] second criterion) in the Computers and Writing community.

2.3. Generic Relations

We can also see the ways genre constitutes situations and practices in Wysocki's (2002) text, and in this capacity, I want to use her text to explore the genre function as a system that also conditions and reproduces what Bawarshi (2000) calls relations, the third characteristic of the genre function. Relations operate in two senses, first as relations among texts and second as relations among identities, the final characteristic that I will turn to below. On the textual level, we have already seen how genres—the scholarly webtext—establish relations with antecedent genres—the print-based scholarly article—through situations and practices, even as the newer genre remediates the older one. But beyond diachronic relations, the genre function also helps us see synchronic relations among texts. Following David Fishlove (1993) in *Metaphors of Genre*, Bawarshi calls genres "social institutions," and "[l]ike social institutions, genres constitute textual relations, organization, and change. In fact, like social institutions, genres also provide the conditions that make textual activity possible and even meaningful" (p. 345). Genres organize the textual features, situations, and social actions of particular texts into relations with other similar texts, and in the process those texts and their very features, situations, and actions are rendered intelligible and meaningful.

Fig. 4.

As an emerging genre in its own right, for example, the scholarly webtext mobilizes a series of discernible textual features that, as I indicated above, use not only existing scholarly conventions (content, arrangement, documentation, tone) but also new conventions (form/content relations, navigational orientation, links, nodes, design, and multimedia) (Warner, 2007). Under the third criterion of Bawarshi's (2000) genre function, these features are one level wherein relations among texts are established. A nodal structure, for instance, makes scholarly webtexts more readable through "the process of 'chunking' or separating content into small sections or nodes, which [...] provides a more reader-friendly experience within this medium" (Warner, 2007, Web-Based Conventions section). Lowe (2004) does this in such a way that he bridges the gap between old and new conventions: the titled sections that would otherwise appear in order in a print-based text become the nodes that allow us to navigate his webtext. Only in recognizing nodes as a convention (which is due in part to our familiarity with reading and navigating the web), however, does the complex nodal structure of Wysocki's (2002) text make sense. Fig. 4 is the central screen of "A Bookling Monument," the first screen we encounter when we enter the text, and certainly it does not appear to follow conventional textual forms; indeed, with its note cards inscribed with fragments of print, the image appears to visually fragment the unified text. Once we see that the note cards lead to different screens, however, they become recognizable as nodes; the fragments of print are actually reminiscent of the textual "chunking" Warner (2007) describes.

The third aspect of the genre function helps render Wysocki's (2002) nodes meaningful as they relate to other texts that we construct as generically similar through their own nodal structures, and it also explains relations among the texts' constructions of situation. For example, we have already seen how Brooke's (2002) text constructs the relationships among media as a situation worthy of response. But this situation becomes typified in the genre of scholarly webtexts; it becomes an exigence, "a situation or event that individuals recognize as requiring immediate attention or response" (Bawarshi, 2000, p. 354); in fact, "[g]enres constitute the very exigencies to which their users in turn rhetorically respond, so that the genre function does not simply precede independently of us but is rather something we reproduce as we function within it" (Bawarshi, 2000, p. 355). Wysocki (2002) argues, "[A]s we necessarily work out our relations with digital technologies—we cannot comfortably hold to this sense of sight and memorial relation" that stems from our relations with books (n.p.). In the process, she constructs the shift from print to digital visual practices as a situation even as she responds to it. In viewing Wysocki (2002) along with Brooke (2002), we can see that this situation is in fact typified by the genre of the scholarly webtext—it becomes an exigence that we can recognize and respond to appropriately precisely through the generic relations between the texts (Bawarshi's [2000] third criterion). Beyond being a mere formal feature, then, the nodes are a convention that in part enables social action—rethinking our scholarly and pedagogical practices given the challenges of new media.

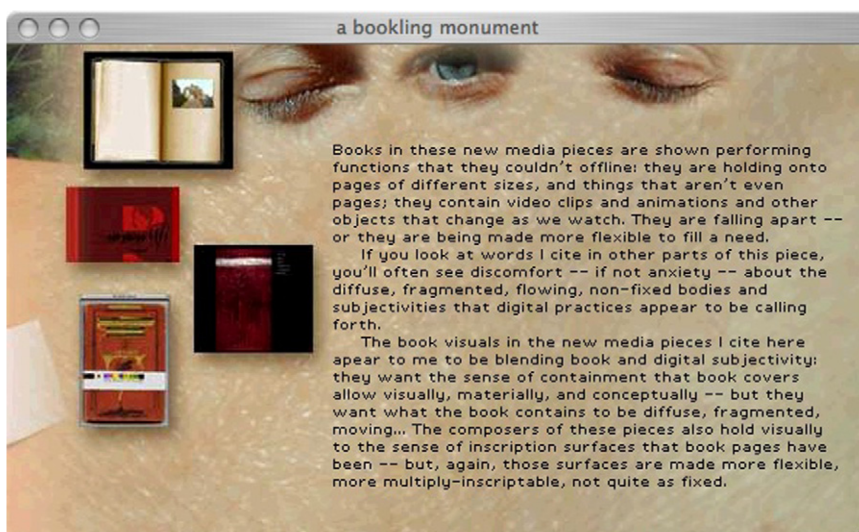

Fig. 5.

2.4. Generic Identities

As an emerging social institution, the scholarly webtext organizes these features and exigencies, and as social institutions, genres also help organize relations among users—in short, genres shape our social identities, which is Bawarshi's (2000) fourth element in the genre function. He says as much when he writes, "[J]ust as social institutions assign social roles, so genres assign genre roles, both to the characters who participate within them and to the writers and readers who interact with them" (Bawarshi, 2000, p. 347). When we use genre to recognize and respond to an exigence, not only do we reproduce the genre's necessity, but also we reproduce our own identities as "responders"—or any number of more specific roles. That is, "situations and their participants are always in the process of reproducing themselves within genre" (Bawarshi, 2000, p. 354). In her analysis of multilingual writers' PowerPoint presentations, for example, Christine Tardy (2005) writes, "As writers make verbal and visual choices, they invoke certain values and ideologies, presenting themselves simultaneously as members of disciplinary communities and as unique individuals" (p. 321). This aspect of the genre function actually helps explain the way genre encompasses the author-function: the genre of the scholarly webtext endows the author with status, and the author conversely endows the genre with status; both re-create each other. But authors are not the only participants in any genre. The fourth element of the genre function helps explain, better than the author-function, I think, the role that *readers* play within the genre of the scholarly webtext.

We can see Bawarshi's (2000) discussion of identities at work if we return to Wysocki's (2002) central screen (Fig. 4), where the nodes are arranged in a rough circle and in varying sizes, a design that invites the reader to begin where she chooses. Although, as I argued above, the reader's agency here does not endow her with the status of author, it does invite her to help in constructing the text. In terms of the genre role, to varying degrees scholarly webtexts position readers as, perhaps more accurately, *users*, as collaborators in the production of textual experience (and they may even suggest that readers have *always* taken part in such production). I recognize, of course, that this is not an entirely new observation: Lanham (1993) for example explored the collaborative, democratic potential of electronic communication early on in *The Electronic Word* (p. 20-26). On another related level, Andrea Lunsford, Rebecca Rickly, Michael Salvo, and Susan West (1995) posit "a set of 'reader functions"' to highlight the point that the reader "is as much a construct as the 'author"' (Postmodern (un)grounding section). The point I want to make is slightly different from either of these positions, though, and more specific to the rhetoric of scholarly webtexts: under the genre function, the scholarly webtext specifically *calls attention* to the collaborative relationship between author and user, a relationship that most print texts, and even some other new media genres, tend to render invisible.

Let us look at one final example. In Fig. 5, we see a total of seven nodes. The four books link to Wysocki's (2002) close readings of four new media texts that complicate the relationships among vision, bodies, and books; the three eyes

link to her larger theoretical discussion about these texts. Users are invited to navigate these nodes at will, especially in that we can either follow the eyes or read the books first. However, we do not have complete control here. Textually, of course, Wysocki (2002) designed both the analysis and the theoretical argument we encounter. Structurally, too, it makes sense to follow the eyes from left to right as we would in a print article—and indeed, each builds on the previous one in this order. But rather than a monolithic author who creates, drives, and limits textual experience, Wysocki's (2002) piece reveals that webtexts assign authors a genre role more akin to a coach or a guide, giving users strategies and paths to follow without fully controlling their experience of the text.

Although all webtexts might not afford such agency to users uniformly, they do all seem to remind users of their role and their relations to the author. Even Brooke's (2002) webtext, with its tight control of argumentative direction, nonetheless draws our attention to *our* responsibility for moving it forward. We have to click each link to get to the next screen, in much the same way readers of print texts are responsible for turning the page (or not); in so doing, we become aware of Brooke's (2002) role in determining out path. Lowe's (2002) webtext, too, while in most respects much more conventional, nonetheless brings to the forefront our ability to consult his linked references whenever we wish, to the point of immediacy. In looking at Bawarshi's (2000) fourth element, we can see that the genre function of the scholarly webtext, then, does not attempt to neutralize or naturalize the roles of its users in the way that print texts might when they position us simply as producers or consumers. Instead, scholarly webtexts work precisely to call our attention to genre roles and the relations among them.

3. Conclusion

In his recent book *Lingua fracta*, Brooke (2009) argues that we may have jumped the gun with our analytical approaches to new media: "Faced with the opportunity to develop new practices and/or rethink our current practices, too often our response has been to search for terms that can comfortably encompass them all" (p. 130). Instead, Brooke (2009) spends his book redefining and even renaming the classical rhetorical canons given the range of ways users engage with new media. I hope my essay has illustrated something similar: as we continue to figure out the new functions and the new modes of being in new media, we may be aided by older reading and writing practices that still act as systems of constraint, such as authorship and genre. In the pages of *Computers and Composition* and *Kairos*, authors like Alexander (2008), Brent (1997), Bauman (1999), Carpenter (2009), and Hess (2006), for example, have also been exploring the ways authorship and genre each offer useful frameworks for analyzing new media. I would simply add that we now have the opportunity to focus these lenses upon the work of our own colleagues as they (and, perhaps, we) publish scholarly webtexts.

And indeed, as Brooke (2009) reminds us, we need not decide on any one of these terms to do so: the author-function and the genre function, for example, each provide useful insights about the use, value, and rhetoric of scholarly webtexts. Viewed with the author-function, Lowe (2004), Brooke (2002), and Wysocki's (2002) webtexts together mobilize ownership and transgression, multimodal complexity, and multivocality as significant, valued practices in new media scholarship. Indeed, the author-function reminds us that questions of status and value always inflect our scholarly practices, especially when we consider originality, publication, and citation. These questions and practices also operate in genre-specific ways, hence the utility of the genre function. It helps explain not just the situation of the author but also how scholarly webtexts construct and respond to the very problems they themselves manifest: the relationships and differences between print and digital texts. In so doing, we can see that visual/verbal elaborationism is not only a way of describing the value we place on creative multimodal scholarship but also is itself a rhetorical action that the Computers and Writing community helps reproduce via the genres it produces.

Finally, the author-function and the genre function together help explain relations among texts, rendering formal and rhetorical features meaningful and assigning genre roles—social identities—to both authors and users. In scholarly webtexts, this allows us to see the extent to which they position users as collaborators without necessarily elevating them to the level of authors; moreover, a significant rhetorical motive of the genre function seems to be calling users' attention to their position vis-à-vis text and author. But neither are these positions, nor the practices described above, forever fixed: I believe my analysis of Lowe (2002), Brooke (2004), and Wysocki's (2002) webtexts reminds us that as new genres spin off from old ones, as they solidify into typified practices, they change and shift and accomplish different social actions based on myriad values. Turning the lens of more traditional theories like authorship and genre—and the rhetorical canons, for that matter—back upon our own genres, then, has a twofold benefit: not only can we see our

textual practices and their rhetorical and social consequences, but also, we have the opportunity to test the uses and limits of our theories precisely as the textual world around us evolves.

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I would like to thank John Schilb. My conversations with him provided the basis for this article, and I am grateful to him for pushing me to think about what systems of constraint I might apply to scholarly webtexts. I would also like to thank Tarez Graban: her guidance and patience as I explored the density of rhetorical genre theory has proven invaluable. Finally, I would like to thank the editors of *Computers and Composition* and the two anonymous reviewers for their valuable feedback on the early drafts of this article.

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