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PATCHWORK CULTURE:
QUILT TACTICS AND DIGITEXTUALITY

by

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ABSTRACT

Embedded in the quilt top, the fabric patches are relays, time pathways to stories and memories of their former owners. Through the quilts, the voices of the past survive. The stories trace a path of connection between oral traditions, storytelling, the invention of meaning, and the preservation of cultural memory.

The theory and method described herein use the quilt patchwork metaphor as the basis for a web interface for designing and modeling knowledge-based graphical, narrative, and multimedia data. More specifically, the method comprises a digital storytelling and knowledge management tool that allows one or more users to create, save, store, and visually map or model digital stories. The method creates a digital network of a community's stories for digital ethnography work. Digital patches that represent the gateway to the stories of an individual are pieced together into a larger quilt design, creating a visual space that yields the voices of its creators at the click of a mouse. Through this narrative mapping, users are able to deal with complexity, ambiguity, density, and information overload. The method takes the traditional quilt use and appropriates it into a digital apparatus so that the user is connected to multiple points of view that can be dynamically tried out and compared.

The hypertextual quilting method fulfills the definition of a deconstructive hypertext and emancipatory social science research methodologies by creating a collaborative, polyvocal interface where users have access to the code, content and conduits to rewrite culture's history with subaltern voices. In this digital place of

iii

intertextuality, stories are juxtaposed with images in a montage that denies the authority

of a single voice and refuses fixed meaning. In dialogue, contestation, and play, the

digitextuality of the Digital Story Quilt provides a praxis for critical theory. The Digital

Story Quilt method concerns itself with questions of identity, the processes through

which these identities are developed, the mechanics of processes of privilege and

marginalization and the possibility of political action through narrative performance

against these processes.

To my aunt, Dr. Barbara Robinson, M.D. who led the way.

To my children, Sierra, Austen, and Haile Ferrier

who make this work real and meaningful.

To my husband, Lester Ferrier, Jr.

for his unwavering support.

To my father Frederick Everald Barrett,

thank you for raising a rebel and for

encouraging my interest in technology.

And to my mother Betty Barrett Bruce,

thank you for nurturing the artist within me

as a means of expression, beauty and enduring grace.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF TABLES

CHAPTER 1   INTRODUCTION

Japanese Quilt

by Dina von Zweck

Thin strips of earth colors and
veiny prints. A frugal second

use for scraps, hanging on
the wall at Tokyo Bank. I catch

a glimpse of what it means to
live on, transformed…

(in Mitchell, Words and Quilts, p. 66)

I started quilting at first with words and the daily stories of my life in my weekly

columns in the local newspaper. I pieced together first one event, then a thought, then a

feeling, juxtaposing ideas and everyday stories to learn something new or to affirm and

name something existing. My columns often featured my family and our everyday

struggles. But that was the beauty of my subversive plan. As the only African-American

columnist at the newspaper, my stories provided a window into our lives. My goal was to

have my predominantly Caucasian audience see themselves in my stories, relate to my

pain, and challenge any preconceived notions of reality. The columns often sparked a

dialogue between me and my readers that transformed both of us through the exchange.

So my writings became a way to speak into the silence of the African-American presence

in my community and to give voice to my own struggles.

I've found that my questions of voice, identity, and community are the same issues called into question in this transition called postmodernism. This postmodernism is that of Jean-Francois Lyotard – "it is that moment of modernism that defines itself against an immediate past ("post") and that is skeptically inquisitive about all grounds of authority, assumption, or convention ("modernism")" (qtd. in Fischer 194).

As bell hooks suggests, the overall impact of postmodernism is that many other groups now share with blacks a sense of deep alienation, despair, uncertainty, loss of a sense of grounding even if it is not informed by shared circumstance (hooks "Postmodern Blackness" 2481). In *Methodology of the Oppressed*, Chela Sandoval suggests that the advent of postmodernism means that the first world citizen-subject has become caught in a strange, new, tragic anti-narrative, from which escape is possible only with fresh forms of perceiving and acting (18.9). So the task of my newspaper narratives was and continues to be to provide a space for those "shared sensibilities" that cut across gender, race, class, and sexuality. These narratives allowed me and my readers to develop new ways of perceiving and acting.

While I'd found a space for my own voice through a patchwork-type of narrative, I asked how I could create a similar space for others? I thought that by learning how to quilt, I could use this practice to discover tactics of resistance that would sustain my subversive narrative stitching. Could I translate these quilting tactics for storytelling, for challenging who gets to tell stories, to practices for everyday life? Could I develop a technology, as a tool of resistance, to provide a space for silenced voices to be heard?

2

And ultimately, could I describe a postmodern aesthetic – or tactics for being – in this postmodern age?

As the title of this work suggests, *Patchwork Culture: Quilt Tactics and Digitextuality* seeks to introduce a theory of digitextuality that allows for communal narrative performance in the digital realm. Anna Everett defines digitextuality as the blending of the signifier "digital" and Julia Kristeva's "intertextuality," a combination that denotes the transposition of one or several sign-systems into another (8). Digitextuality translates this absorption and transformation of texts into the construction of sense-making functions for digital technologies (8).

How could digital technologies be used to create an heirloom that could be passed from generation to generation and create a place of enduring knowledge long silenced by the passage of time? How could the metaphor of the quilt be used to bring a nurturing, sheltering, armoring aspect to the subject in a postmodern world? How might the meditative practices of ripping out fragments, patterning, and piecing – and its resulting aesthetic and textual qualities – be used to shift the geography of places, bodies, and identity to the digital realm?

What I seek is a postmodern intervention, a praxis within which citizen-subjects can use narrative as a tool to articulate, examine, and deconstruct the constructs of their lives, to determine the processes and language that define their identities. This new form of seeing is coupled with a new heightened sense of place as the citizen-subject navigates the narrative world constructed of his or her own story as well as the stories of others. The citizen-subject reconstructs his or her identity through narrative making and the re-

appropriation of cultural symbols and processes. The topography created of these

juxtaposed, intersecting, and mobile narrative fragments frees the postmodern subject to

map alternative pathways and meanings. Immersed in the digitextuality of this

metasignifying system, the subjects learn the logics of the language in which they live,

discovering the interrelatedness and repercussions of the stories we tell ourselves.

Patchwork Culture seeks to answer four propositions:

1. That the practice of quilting, both the quilts themselves and the discourse events that making the quilts entail, are an important part of rhetorical history, particularly women's rhetorical history;
2. That quilting can be used as a metaphor for characterizing the emerging practice of digital rhetoric or "hyperrhetoric" within a technologized environment;
3. That the quilt methodology can be translated to the digital realm as a social science research methodology that organizes discourse differently through a communal, polyvocal digital ethnography.
4. That the resulting Digital Story Quilt technology reestablishes the value of cultural memory as an alternate record of history itself by providing a space for situated knowledge to reinvest historical production.

These statements are used to design a Digital Story Quilt technology that denies

the seemingly cohesive text of discourse technologies and reinvests cultural memory and

history with subaltern voices.

Both the actions and the characteristics of the fabric quilt and its quilters are used

as tactics in creating the Digital Story Quilt technology and in the presentation of the

dissertation text. Using Kristeva's notions of intertextuality, the narrative of this

dissertation is interwoven with my own scholarly and narrative voices presented on the

same textual layer. In addition, the voices of other scholars are pieced together in this

layered patchwork fashion, where "original" voices are ripped from their primary source

4

and are quilted in – or "qtd. in" -- from secondary sources. The careful stitching of these patches is demonstrative of the writing style proposed as part of this communal scholarship.

Patchwork Culture seeks to define the agency within the quilting practice and its translation as a liberatory practice within the hypertextual environment. Using R. L. Rutsky and Michel Foucault's definitions of technology, *Patchwork Culture* creates a "poetic dwelling" between the juxtaposition of fragments and images within the Digital Story Quilt mosaic using Martin Heidegger as a foil to move beyond the mystical to the practical. Everyday narratives inhabit these dwellings as part of Michel de Certeau's "everyday practices." They become the focal practice that widens the interstitial spaces of the technology and the poetics that challenge the power of Foucault's technology.

George Landow speaks of the fertile field of inquiry at the crossroads of hypertext and various feminist perspectives on technology in *Hyper/Text/Theory*. The Digital Story Quilt project resides at this juncture of rhetorics and sociopoetics. Poststructuralist feminism is characterized here for its study of the discursive formations that shape social relations and knowledges (Ratliff). In *Patchwork Culture*, I examine historical production as a discourse and the language of everyday stories as a political challenge to objective reality. While the object of study is similar to feminist standpoint theory – the construction of power and knowledge – Ratliff says poststructuralists approach the object at the level of language. Wendy Morgan in "Electronic Tools for Dismantling the Master's House: Poststructuralist Feminist Research and Hypertext Poetics" sets an agenda for this future poetics of a poststructuralist feminist research hypertextuality and

5

steps into this void with a hypertext experiment that constructs an eccentric, provisional knowledge. Morgan suggests that no examples yet exist, in theory or in practice, of convergence between post-feminist research in the social sciences and a poststructuralist hypertextuality. Diane Greco examines hypertext theory in "Hypertext with Consequences: Recovering a Politics of Hypertext" and suggests "a radical poetics of hypertext that is also political – that is based on participation rather than triumphalistic rhetoric or abstract theorizing" (90). *Patchwork Culture* addresses this void in the literature by proposing a theory and praxis based on a quilt-like "hyperrhetoric" for the postmodern subject.

"Now that's my momma in that quilt there." She pointed to the woman in the bathing suit. "She was so beautiful, my Momma," she said, "the men used to just stop on the street and stare at her, she was so beautiful."

My daughters and I looked down at the black-and-white iron-fabric transfer among the vivid greens and blues, and back at this quilter woman. She stood before her story quilts, a study in textures from her smooth walnut colored skin to her matted waist-long dreadlocks to the multilayered tunics she wore that rippled like a mirage as she touched each of the quilts (Figure 1).

"They all have stories," she said as she glanced around the booth hung with the vibrant, textured quilts. "This one here is about civil rights. This lady is going to vote." She pointed to the quilt of a woman with a child bundled on her back. "I didn't know that my Momma was involved in those lunch-counter protests until after I was an adult."

6

I wondered at the silence between mother and daughter on what seemed like such an important topic. But perhaps it was just something you did, stand up for your rights.

Figure 1. Quilt artist Lauren Austin explains the power of her story quilts.

Why tell that story to a young child when it was just a part of your everyday life? Just something you did one day? But here was this quilt, honoring that heritage, that legacy, speaking power to the silence so that the story could be told over and over again to strangers as they passed by the booth. Those story quilts just kept telling stories whether you wanted them to or not, resisting the disciplining of history that discounts the everyday, lived experience.

"I've been taking classes," I said sheepishly. I had been frustrated in my first attempts at learning the exacting cutting and piecing of the quilt designs in class. While I admired the precision of some of the quilts, I saw fabric more like paints and less like cut stained glass. Lauren Austin used color, stitches, and appliqué in ways that I wanted my quilts to be, less restrictive, more expressive, as textured and varied as the stories I thought to tell my children (Figure 2).

Figure 2. "Lucy Goes to Vote" quilted by artist Lauren Austin. Austin explains, "Lucy Goes to Vote was inspired by the struggle against Apartheid in South Africa coming to fruition in the free election of Nelson Mandela as president. News reports of hundreds of thousands walking miles from their small villages to polling places to cast their votes made me wonder what women were thinking and feeling as they walked with their families and neighbors. My grandmother told me stories of lines of black people waiting to vote after universal sufferage in 1964. At the top left of the quilt are the words to the Negro National Anthem and South African National Anthem." Photographed by Michelle Ferrier.

"Where?" she asked.

"Just a basic quilting class," I shrugged, "cutting and piecing…" my voice trailed off.

"You can't learn like that," she scolded me as she shook her head to reinforce her point. "No, you sure can't learn like that. Do you have a church?"

"You ask around there and find someone who can teach you to quilt," she said. "We're quiet about who we tell about our quilting. People will steal your ideas and your designs," she warned, "so we stay real quiet."

"I know there are some quilters around here," I said, "but I never thought to ask around in the church."

"You ask them," she said, "and you find someone who'll really teach you to quilt, -- but don't say anything about your research, you keep quiet about that."

You tell them you want to learn to quilt to make something for your children. We all have different reasons why we quilt. Yes, say you're making something for your children. But don't say anything about the other."

Lauren Austin's work offered a quilting inheritance I could claim, a story quilting that recalls names, that tells stories, that reclaims a history with determined, strong hands. A quilting that provokes, that stirs, that haunts. I traced the stitching across the folds and curves of the quilt top. Perhaps, I thought, if I just follow the stitches, this zigzag, looping path before me just might hold.

I received my first and only quilt as a thank you from a graduate student and friend who I had helped develop a web site for her research – technology for textiles. My

first association between quilts and technology kept me warm during frigid Appalachian nights as I puzzled through my own dilemma. I wondered how best to represent diverse cultures, give voice to my community and preserve my own stories.

As my fingers traced the stitches between the triangular shaped patches, I warmed to the idea of a Digital Story Quilt, a technology that would be formed out of the quilt metaphor and embody many of its aesthetic attributes to create a space where memories could dwell. More importantly, anyone could take a stand from this place, this *lieux de memoire* or place of memory as Pierre Nora suggests, and challenge notions of who speaks a culture's history. The Digital Story Quilt project, developed from the quilt metaphor, is a constructive attempt to redesign the discipline of history through a hypertextual space to give voice to and provide a place for everyday stories, folklore, and situated knowledge to reinvest history.

A Quilting Heritage

For centuries, quilting has stitched cultural values and identity to the female body. In this private activity away from male eyes, women worked individually and together piecing patchwork and quilting to create an intimate connection to past, present, and future. Quilting made an ideal form of needlework that aided in fabricating the socially constructed ideal of femininity. While excluded from public discourse, women gathered in this domestic domain outside the knowledge and control of the patriarchy. Women carefully and patiently stitched a place and a voice for themselves, becoming advocates

11

for abolition, suffrage, and temperance. Through quilt texts, women used their constraints to create space that expanded their domestic rhetoric into a public realm.

Historically, men perceived quilting as a harmless and trivial way for women to pass time, decorate homes and care for families. Quilting also provided a nonthreatening medium for women's social commentary (Pershing 106). Quilts reflected every theme of everyday life – religion, family history, community setting, plant and animal life, children's toys and fairy tales, friendships and love, death and mourning, weddings and other celebrations, and all manner of work from the construction of log cabins to production in the cotton gins (Aptheker 68). In 1845, a Lowell, Massachusetts woman described quilts as '…the hieroglyphics of women's lives' (Aptheker 68).

A quilt, says Laura Fisher, is often described as a textile sandwich (15). It is composed of three layers: the top fabric; thick, inside, dense batting; and the bottom, backing, typically of a solid fabric. The quilting itself is actually the stitching that holds the three layers together and prevents them from shifting. Besides their functions as household bedding, quilts can be art. Pieced tops were often scrap bag creations, the components salvaged from remnants or worn-out garments, says Fisher (15). Fabric scraps, collected from friends or from a worn piece of favorite clothing were recycled into a larger mosaic. The quilt became a community "textile," its diverse fabric patches the mnemonic devices that reveal embedded memories of garments' former owners.

In the daily lives of nineteenth-century women, quilting served as an activity of solitude and creativity. Ozzie Mayers says we can view sewing as a kind of rootedness, a symbolic act of survival, which suggests "an urge not to flee but to pin oneself down in

order to discover the unconscious, unarticulated, and private modes of expression buried within." (Elsley 49). At the quilting stage, quilt-making served a social and political function, strengthening the "bonds of womanhood." Quilters, in solitary work and communal quilting bees, pieced together women's way of knowing. Within this community, women crafted a rhetoric of the quilt – a style and methodology of communicating distinct from patriarchal knowledge-making practices. The quilt-making activities gave space and voice to feminine knowledge, creating a space for women to *be* (Elsley 98). This quilting tradition is carried on today across the United States and in communities worldwide.

Through the quilts, the stories of these women survive. The stories trace a path of connection between oral traditions, storytelling, the invention of meaning, and the preservation of cultural identity. For the quilt appears, as Cheryl Torsney and Judy Elsley suggest, "as both itself – a covering, a pieced artifact, a family heirloom – and as a representation of something else – class and gender relations, aesthetic theories, readings of democracy – in much current intellectual discourse" (6). Kelley insists that the quilting aesthetic corresponds to postmodern practices in the ways in which both rethink the subject and grapple with the subject's relation to space and time, and in finding socially appropriate and viable forms of representation (Torsney and Elsley 66). Quilts endure today, binding textiles and history together in a monument to female rhetorical power.

The Quilt as a Technology

Technology is said to be an extension of the functions of the body. The quilt takes clothing as a second skin and refashions it as an heirloom for social memory. The structural characteristics of the quilt, the quilt-making ritual and the quilt metaphor all provide a conceptual framework for a collaborative communication technology. The quilt enhances the individual perspective by providing a space for the voice of the individual and allows for the storage, retrieval, and dissemination of personal narratives.

Van Hillard hints at the dialogic nature of the quilt, its method of production by individual and collective means, and its promise of establishing communication in the midst of fragmentation. Hillard also believes that quilts offer complex visual solutions for deriving unity from diversity; they represent the enactment of co-existence, the value of differences acting together to shape a new whole, greater than the sum of its parts (116). The quilt becomes an apparatus for organizing knowledge that provides a rich, visual display of narratives and imagery.

The traditional quilt brings together geometry, mathematics, and the precision of measurement. Neither the sum nor the parts are greater in the quilt creation. Each works together in "dialogue" – on different scales – to create a sense of connectedness. The quilt provides a framework that holds the personal narratives without forcing conformity among the parts. As a narrative mapping system, quilts have a distinct advantage over writing and numbers for conveying information. The quilt:

- Increases knowledge by reducing the image of the world to patterns and textures.

- Increases information density by precisely filling in the blanks with local knowledge.
- Increases the accuracy of the historical record by closely representing important, individualized, narrative elements.

The quilt acts as a mnemonic device for recall and memory and offers a counter to historical narratives that shun the everyday. Walter Benjamin's idea of history is one of a constant state of emergency where "those without a name" work the scenes of fragmentation and repression to reinvest history out of the debris and waste material of an epoch (qtd. in Lather "Multilayered Text" 237). Benjamin brings to mind the craft of quilting, used by centuries of women, to recycle intimate artifacts into whole cloth.

The Digital Story Quilt project, a progeny of this heritage, is a technology in development that uses the patchwork quilt as a metaphor for a hypertext interface. Writers/readers create a three-dimensional patch of narrative, images, sound, and video of their situated knowledge using deconstructive, montage-like practices. The Digital Story Quilt is designed to surface the underlying metaphors and iconography of a culture. It foregrounds the multiple contexts from which one speaks and writes that reminds us of the situated and partial nature of our knowledge. The technology keeps the binaries – of writer/reader, public/private, history/folklore – in play, contesting fixed notions of knowledge and truth. The Digital Story Quilt transforms thinking from inductive and deductive to associative and collaborative ways and allows the writer/reader to examine, in dialogue with others, their identity and ways of being in the world. It displaces boundaries by placing ideas of identity, community, representation, and knowledge in

motion, forcing the recognition of the individual existing in inescapable dialogue that continually shapes and reshapes subjectivity. The silenced thus are resituated within the larger narrative and participate in its re-creation.

Just like a fabric quilt, writer/readers use the Digital Story Quilt technology to select pieces of the stories and images of their life on six dimensions – family, discipline, ancestry, entertainment, nature, and community. Fragments of multimedia files such as text, sound, images, and video are layered under each of the themes. The multilayered, multimedia patch is composed into a three-dimensional object with each theme represented on one of the faces of the polygon. The faces of the gem-like patch represent code fragments that are keys to unlocking the individual's everyday memories. Like a Pandora's box, each face may be opened and clicked through to reveal the layers of stories and images that provide substance to the symbology on the gem face.

An individual's patch is then composed by the writer/reader into a quilt top – a larger mosaic topography made up of other individuals' patches. The writer/reader may piece the quilt top by rotating and moving the patch objects so that one of six thematic dimensions is visible. Writer/readers may search the interface using search tools, such as keywords, random, audio tuning, and other analysis tools that change the ways of seeing and hearing the stories in the Digital Story Quilt top.

Using threads, hypertext links created by the writer/reader that stitch the readers' explorations from one patch through layers to others, the Digital Story Quilt provides a dialogic space that leads to more questions: What does this story say to me? How does this image relate to this other person's song? What are the underlying metaphors or

themes across the Digital Story Quilt top? Why is crimson the predominant color across this quadrant of the quilt? The interface creates a narrative mapping system that is "read" by the writer/reader who constructs meaning and knowledge either alone or in concert with others for personal or community action.

The quilt, and thus the Digital Story Quilt, is a text that puts into play questions of identity, community, and culture. The practice of creating the digital patch forces the writer/reader to continue to break down and synthesize the narrative of his or her own life – including questions of identity – then breaks it down again as their story fragments get juxtaposed in the community quilt top of dialogue and play. Juxtaposing one's personal story against those of others in this digitextual framework may provide new insights and understanding or prompt revisions to one's own patch. The quilt becomes a palimpsest – a writing material that has been used one or more times after earlier writing has been erased – that reveals the multilayered nature of our experience. In the performative act of enunciating one's beliefs and signifying one's identity, individuals may discover the guiding metaphors or symbology of their life. In one sense, there is a recovery of a sense of place, not in a nostalgic move to hide from the present, but in an imaginative leap of place, the promise of a place as yet unrecognized as possibility.

The Digital Story Quilt is not a utopian space where anything goes. Fragments of other stories interact with the writer/reader's personal stories. Individual stories are created then composed as part of the larger abstract mosaic and through the interaction the writer/reader recovers echoes of themselves in the larger community identity. The Digital Story Quilt is a sociopoetic technology, as described by Craig Saper that creates

"a space where aesthetic and poetic decisions in the artwork lead to a heightened or changed social situation (11). Reflecting on this type of work, Saper says, "this inherently social process of constructing texts is expanded to the point that the individual pages or poems mean less than the distribution and compilation machinery or social apparatus" (Saper 11).

The target of the Digital Story Quilt intervention is history. Through its sociopoetic processes, the project seeks to change the historical record. The codifying of history from media bias in newspaper reports to history textbooks that exclude contributions of marginalized populations results in the loss of cultural memory. In this critical historical sensibility, the quotidian, everyday memories are annihilated in a reconstruction of temporalities, places, and connections. This network -- the power technology of history -- perpetuates cultural dominations through the control of symbols and meanings. The Digital Story Quilt project addresses this rupture between history and memory by healing the interstices and bringing everyday practices and symbols back into play.

Patchwork Culture takes a critical perspective toward this power technology of history. As Andrew Feenberg describes, this perspective must begin by analyzing "the new forms of oppression associated with modern industrialism" and then "explain how modern technology can be redesigned to adapt it to the needs of a freer society" (qtd. in Sullivan and Porter 19). This approach, Feenberg suggests, requires the ability to critique in two senses:

1. Popular, negative sense of critique by examining the ways in which technology oppresses or a "postmodern critique."

2. Critical theory's constructive, proactive aim to redesign and readapt technologies. (qtd. in Sullivan and Porter 19)

Patchwork Culture examines the ways in which the historical production of narratives operates as an oppressive technology as defined by Foucault. It then turns to design a digital ethnographic methodology and an emancipatory, hypertextual interface that challenge this technological domination. The ideas in *Patchwork Culture* are situated at the intersection of poststructuralist feminist research and hypertext theory. On the one hand, *Patchwork Culture* will describe how the Digital Story Quilt project addresses the politics of hypertext theory with praxis for agency in a postmodern, technologized environment. On the other, I will demonstrate how the Digital Story Quilt technology provides a practical metaphor for performing social science research that fulfills the demands of a poststructuralist feminist research agenda. According to *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought*, praxis is the self-creative activity through which we make the world (Bottomore). Patti Lather says that the requirements of praxis are theory both relevant to the world and nurtured by actions in it, and an action component in its own theorizing process that grows out of practical political grounding ("Getting Smart" 12). The Digital Story Quilt technology is a diffuse narrative power that as Lather suggests takes "advantage of the range of mobile and transitory points of resistance inherent in the network of power relations" ("Getting Smart" 39). In these openings, these cracks in the interstices of the power relations and historical processes, the Digital Story Quilt rediscovers everyday life and pieces together "the logic of stories told 'alongside' official histories" (Shields 158). Using the grounded theory approach espoused by Anselm

Strauss and reconstructive anthropology, I will develop a quilt methodology as a focal

practice that challenges history's processes with these everyday memories. Thus,

Patchwork Culture focuses on issues of knowledge and power in a technologized world

and answers the question "What is to be done?" with a methodology that assists

individuals to rethink the stories that shape their lives, redefine the symbology that shapes

their identity, and reshape the communities in which these stories circulate.

In addition, *Patchwork Culture* seeks to extend the work of poststructuralist

feminist researchers by providing a situated methodology that interrupts the reductiveness

of social science research and alters standard frames of reference. Its methods, grounded

in digital ethnography, speak to the challenge of developing an emancipatory social

science research methodology. *Patchwork Culture* also, as Lather suggests, seeks to work

against the concept of the researcher as "Great Liberator, origin of what can be known

and done," through a praxis of socially engaged knowledge construction ("Getting

Smart" 137).

While designed as play, the stakes in *Patchwork Culture* are high. In displacing

the "hazardous play" of "endlessly repeated dominations" in the power technology as

described by Foucault (qtd. in Blight 51), *Patchwork Culture* establishes the value of

cultural memory as an alternate record of history itself. At the intersection of hypertext,

writing, and the body, *Patchwork Culture* creates a liminal space for situated knowledge.

CHAPTER 2   LITERATURE REVIEW

KUJICHAGULIA: To define ourselves, name ourselves, create for ourselves, and speak for ourselves instead of being defined, named, created for, and spoken for by others.

-- Kwanzaa principle created in 1966 by Dr. Maulana Karenga

The idea for a Digital Story Quilt grew out of a lifetime of experiences and readings, more so than any particular graduate class or set of texts. As such, the project's development is intertextual and experiential, drawing on practices, knowledge, people, conversations, and lifelong questions of what it means to be an African American female.

As a child, I read science fiction and fantasy books, finding myself on the shores of faraway planets grappling with what it means to be human or exploring the what ifs of technology gone awry. From high school, I draw on readings of Albert Camus, other existentialist philosophies, and a deep connection to France and French culture. I also spent summers working at NASA Goddard Space Flight Center digitizing land satellite photographs, working with scientists on questions of the universe, cultivating an appreciation for exploration and the view from space of our tiny planet. At college, I deepened my writing skills, practicing different genres and developing a curiosity toward cultures and people. From my family, I developed a love of learning, a suspicion of authority and a survivalist's mentality toward a post-colonialist society that minimalizes and marginalizes those that threaten its sovereignty. From my children, I learned to play,

to love learning and reading, and to continue to re-create myself in my daily

performances as mother, wife, columnist, artist, and friend.

Thus, the texts presented here as the theoretical basis for the Digital Story Quilt

technology represent a fragment, a signpost pointing toward other texts and experiences

that extend their meaning. Those other silent texts and practices lay in the subterranean

pathways of any such literature review with strict formats, disciplinary ideas of structure,

and codified rules on how one must perform in order to be granted a doctoral degree. The

theorists outlined here provide the top quilt layer of my own research mental map. They

resonated with deeply held beliefs and ideas and half-formed thoughts to coalesce one

day in a graduate seminar around a Digital Story Quilt, a technology designed to create a

space for a multiplicity of voices.

The subconscious of subaltern voices made a way to be seen and heard.

This Digital Story Quilt technology also addresses cultural transitions as society

begins to learn and think differently in a technologized environment. Are there other

ways of knowing or perceiving the world, distinct from the Cartesian, ordered, efficient

environment of modernity? New media, multimedia, digitized materials are not just

remediated print or film technologies. As media theorists such as George Landow, Walter

Ong, Marshall McLuhan and others suggest, these technological shifts are changing how

we think and write, presaging a new linguistic turn. This way of writing and thinking is

one that has shifted from an oral to a print culture, then from a print culture to one that is

primarily televisual or image-centered. This shift, as Richard Lanham states, is "a

movement from the fixed and silent signal of the printed book to a richer but more

volatile signal, writing + voice + image, of digital display" (227). Lanham suggests that the rhetorics, or the "economics of human attention-structures" are changing, by getting people to look at things from a different point of view" (227). As Lanham and others propose, society is relearning ways to manipulate symbolic reality through a modified rhetoric. Thus, the Digital Story Quilt project challenges dominant rhetorical tropes to posit a digital rhetoric that takes a critical view of technology, defining tactics for thinking, writing, and perceiving the world differently. This digital rhetoric for a hypertext world defines operational tactics that allow for an expressive being in this new age.

As James Clifford paraphrases in *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography,* writers such as Foucault, de Certeau and Terry Eagleton have suggested that since the seventeenth century "Western science has excluded certain expressive modes from its legitimate repertoire: rhetoric (in the name of 'plain,' transparent signification), fiction (in the name of fact), and subjectivity (in the name of objectivity)" (5). Historical pressures and ideological shifts are now bringing these modes of expression to the fore of anthropological sciences, particularly in the production of historical texts.

In these postmodern times, we've reached a crisis of identity and representation, of who gets to define history, whose story gets heard, whose thoughts get lost to the future, and whose version informs our present. This crisis of representation reveals the partiality of historical and cultural narratives and the ways in which they are systematically exclusive. For what is postmodernism at its root, suggests Sven Birkerts,

"but an aesthetic that rebukes the idea of an historical time line, as well as previously uncontested assumptions of cultural hierarchy" ("Chapter 8").

The target of the Digital Story Quilt intervention is history. As the French remind us through their dual uses of the word *histoire,* history is a story, a fabrication of collected facts, with character, plot, and motive decided upon by the writer. History is the grand narrative, designed to dictate what is supposed to be significant or remembered by a culture. Feminists argue that history represents "his story," a tale of male-focused actions on a global stage. The production of history is also an exclusionary act, one that discounts some remembered experiences in lieu of others, with a frightening silencing of individual voices.

What happens to memory -- the folklore of a society -- in the disciplining, critical technology of history? Everyday microhistories and memories are lost to view, details are suppressed in a positivist machinery that writes a story of progress, of modernity, of Man. As long as a personal memory is controlled and suppressed, subject to the powerful forces of a cultural technology that defines meaning and significance, memory and remembering are abhorred as a challenge to the unifying social narrative. Memory, as the shadow of history, loses its ability to invest in the present.

The Digital Story Quilt, this technological intervention, is designed to reinvest that monolithic history, allowing a cultural subconscious to inform our present. Come whisper into culture's canyons and let your echoes bring down the walls.

The Power of Historical Imagination

For Foucault, the twentieth century society is experiencing a cultural shift away from history as a grand narrative to networked, juxtaposed experiences:

> The great obsession of the nineteenth century was, as we know, history with its themes of development and of suspension, of crisis and cycle, themes of the ever-accumulating past, with its great preponderance of dead men and the menacing glaciation of the world ….The present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space. We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed. We are at a moment, I believe, when our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing though time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein. (qtd. in Soja 10)

In *The Reality of the Historical Past*, Paul Ricoeur examines the notion of history as a construction, an interpretation of a historian's "*a priori* imagination" put to the re-enactment and construction of a coherent picture. The criterion for the historian's judgment, Ricoeur claims, is the coherence of his construction (9).

To R.G. Collingwood, "the historical process is a process in which man creates for himself this or that kind of human nature by re-creating in his own thought the past to which he is heir" (qtd. in Ricoeur 43). The historian's work is distinguished from the narrative work of the novelist in three ways according to Ricoeur:

1. Historical narratives are localized in the same space and the same time,
2. All historical narratives are related to a single historical world, and
3. The picture of the past is made to agree with the documents in their known state or as historians discover them. (9)

Collingwood suggests that "both novel and history are self-explanatory, self-justifying, the product of an autonomous or self-authorizing activity; and in both cases this activity is the *a priori* imagination" (qtd. in Ricoeur 42). The contrast to the novelist's work speaks to the authority afforded to each as a legitimate expressive mode of the historical past. While the novelist's work is scientifically condemned for its polyvocality, instability, and oscillations of meaning, the historian is afforded the authority to create historical knowledge that is considered scientific. As Hayden White has said, the historical work manifests itself as "a verbal structure in the form of a narrative prose discourse that purports to be a model, or icon, of past structures and processes in the interest of *explaining what they were by representing* them" (qtd. in Ricoeur 47).

What is problematic, as Ricoeur suggests, is not the *object* or the *method* of history, but the historian with regard to his operation (20). Historiography loses its scientific claim, because its author claims to be producing the historical text from no particular position, thus becoming an "arbiter of meaning" (21). Ricoeur and Heidegger posit a hermeneutic philosophy that reminds us that the simplest cultural accounts are intentional creations (10). These historical accounts speak of the politics of authority and power and of science as a socially constructed reality. The historian's task becomes one of creating coherent mental models of the past that, according to de Certeau, allows for the observation of deviation (qtd. in Ricoeur 22).

In order to re-create an ontology of the past that allows and accounts for deviation, we must recognize history as a technology, in Foucault's conception of the term. These technologies, according to Foucault, are a "systematic discourse" of complex institutions, apparatuses, and disciplines that produce a microphysics of power that in turn produces knowledge or "truth" about individuals ("Discipline and Punish" 28). Even the best ethnographic texts, admits Clifford, are "systems, or economies, of truth. Power and history work through them, in ways their authors cannot fully control (7).

These technologies of representation work to maintain a status quo by sustaining a grid of domination with normalizing effects over human behaviors, practices, and ways of knowing. Paul Veyne defines history as "the science of differences, of individualities" (qtd. in Ricoeur 46). This totalizing view of history can be disrupted by re-infusing history with narratives of deviance. This approach does not replace the technology of history with another, but re-infuses it with the representation dimension of de Certeau's everyday "microstories." History thus conceived becomes a dialectic between the abstract, seeming cohesiveness of the past, and situated knowledges of the past, present, and future.

As Raymond Aron and Henri Marrou argue, if the understanding of others remains the most powerful model of historical knowledge, then historical knowledge heretofore is revealed to be just as originary as knowledge of others and of self-knowledge (qtd. in Ricoeur 43). Marrou states, "It is the suspicious attitude of the positivist historian that prevents us from recognizing the identity of the tie of friendship

that exists between the self and the other today, and between the self and the other in the past" (qtd. in Ricoeur 44).

Memory and Place-Making Imagination

James Fentress and Chris Wickham claim that in Western society, "the history of memory is one of its steady devaluation as a source of knowledge – a devaluation which proceeds in step with the evolution, and increasing dominance, of the textual paradigm of knowledge" (8). Many personal experiences and the voices of great groups of people cannot be found in written texts. However, as this textual paradigm shifts and changes in this digital age, perhaps a new paradigm will allow for memory as a source of social and historical knowledge. In this new paradigm as described by Ong and Gregory Ulmer, the emphasis is on a return to the visual character of knowledge with its emphasis on space and place-making imagination. Like the memory theatres of ancient rhetoricians, we can inhabit these *lieux de memoire* or memory places of carefully constructed stories that map a culture's identity. With thoughtful movement through these *lieux de memoire,* our conscious reflection allows for the discovery of new knowledge through our conscious reflection. As Pierre Nora defines memory and history:

> Memory is life, borne by living societies founded in its name. It remains in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting, unconscious of its successive deformations, vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation, susceptible to being long dormant and periodically revived. History, on the other hand, is the reconstruction, always

problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer. Memory is a perpetually

actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present; history is a

representation of the past. Memory, insofar as it is affective and magical,

only accommodates those facts that suit it; it nourishes recollections that

may be out of focus or telescopic, global or detached, particular or

symbolic – responsive to each avenue of conveyance or phenomenal

screen, to every censorship or projection. History, because it is an

intellectual and secular production, calls for analysis and criticism.

Memory installs remembrance within the sacred; history, always prosaic,

releases it again. …Memory takes root in the concrete, in spaces, gestures,

images and objects; history binds itself strictly to temporal continuities, to

progressions and to relations between things. Memory is absolute, while

history can only conceive the relative. (286)

In this fast-paced contemporary life, we seek places where we can come to know who we

are and achieve a better sense of the past in the present. These places provide a

"homeplace" as described by hooks – from where we may continually re-create and

reshape our identity. And thus begins our obsession with saving memory – from

scrapbooking, to e-mail archiving, to camera phones, to bigger and safer storage devices

– to document the passage of everyday people through this modern life. This

hypervigilance recalls all, saves all, with no discrimination.

One friend tells of his elderly father, surrounded in his bedroom with boxes and

shelves of audio and video tapes, notebooks, scrapbooks and memorabilia who instructs

his son to take it and write the book of his life. The accumulated artifacts of his father's memories press insistently on my friend's mind. "There's a story there," his father urges him, "you've got to write it." What the fragments mean is lost in translation from father to son. At the end of a temporal march…that is when the story is supposed to make sense.

I catch fleeting glimpses, flashes of insight, that sometimes strike me at the oddest times – driving down the highway, watching television, cooking dinner. Like ghosts, I don't see anything definitive, but catch a shadowy trace of what has been, connected to another event in the past or the future. Sometimes I can see two or three events along that thread before it disappears in a mist of forgetting. I can see connections, how seemingly disparate events in my life relate, before the trail is lost, both backward and forward. That momentary excitement and anticipation give way to a profound sense of loss, as the clues revealed about my life quietly slip from my conscious mind.

I have a sense, as we all do, of some of the events of my life that have helped shape and define who I am. I also have experiences that while seemingly innocent, later reveal a clearer turning point in the shaping of my life and my reality. Moore suggests that these individual memories are not simply personal. These memories "constitute our identity and provide the context for every thought and actions." They are not only our own, "but are learned, borrowed, and inherited – in part, and part of, a common stock, constructed, sustained, and transmitted by the families, communities, and cultures to which we belong" (qtd. in Fentress and Wickham viii).

What if I could capture these pieces of story, turning them over in my mind at later times to perhaps reveal an insight? What if these fragments later reveal, not just my

story, but a meaning that helps inform others? Like Sigmund Freud's dreamwork, these fragments are metaphorical pathways to latent stories that shape and define my identity and tap the power of a cultural memory.

When we remember, suggest Fentress and Wickham, we represent ourselves to those around us: "The way we present ourselves in our memories, the way we define our personal and collective identities through our memories, the way we order and structure our ideas in our memories, and the way we transmit these memories to others – is a study of the way we are" (7).

What if my "microstory" was combined with others into a collective cultural memory that reclaimed these lost voices? This counterhistory would haunt history's narratives, telling tales and revealing secrets. These *lieux de memoire* or memory places, as Nora suggests "are fundamentally remains, the ultimate embodiments of a memorial consciousness that has barely survived in a historical age that calls out for memory because it has abandoned it" (Nora 289). But these remains have a power to resist fixed meanings and calcified interpretations. They taunt history's authority. These *lieux de memoire* provide a place, in the in-between of history, for subversive voices to bubble up through the cracks. As W.E.B. Du Bois suggests, it is only when "the marketplace for the construction of social memories becomes as free and open as possible, that the politics of remembering and forgetting might be, here and there, overcome" (qtd. in Fabre 65).

The silenced thus are resituated within the larger narrative and participate in its fuller re-creation.

31

So if history is a meaning-making technology, an apparatus that has produced a one-sided historicity, how does the technology work? How can we play it "on the flip side" to hear subaltern stories? How can we change the processes of historical production to pump up the volume of silenced voices? Our task, says Homi Bhabha, is to show how historical agency is transformed through the signifying process (12). Our tactics must deconstruct the totalizing effect of history as Eagleton suggests:

> To 'deconstruct,' then, is to reinscribe and resituate meanings, events, and objects within broader movements and structures; it is, so to speak, to reverse the imposing tapestry in order to expose in all its unglamorously disheveled tangle the threads constituting the well-heeled image it presents to the world. (qtd. in Soja 12)

In history, Michel-Rolph Trouillot suggests, this power begins at the source (29).

Poesis and the Source of Technological Production

For Foucault, power arises as a self-sustaining intelligence, created by humans but not in their control. Power is a technology that circulates and functions as a discipline that writes the laws of operation on the body of the subject. Technology's influence and value rest in its web of relations. It prescribes or orders the behavior and attitudes of its subjects and disciplines each subject as a unique part in the technology. Technology is a distributed force, seemingly cohesive, ever vigilant (Foucault, *Power*).

In "The Question Concerning Technology," Heidegger ponders the operations and essence of a technology. Oftentimes, discussions of technology center around its

32

instrumentality – how it operates as a function of human activity. The instrumentality of technology ushers forth a conversation of means and ends, of expediting the furthering of something else. And while I believe that this view of technology is correct, it is not all of what technology is. Heidegger examines the essence of technology as a "revealing" that sets forth a way of thinking of the world. The instrumental revealing of technology is a way that challenges forth, ordering and "enframing" our view of the world. In this standing reserve, says Heidegger, "everywhere, everything is ordered to stand by, to be immediately on hand, indeed to stand there just so that it may be on call for a further ordering" (322). In this standing reserve everything, everywhere is completely nonautonomous, waiting on the next order. Our current essential view of technology, according to Heidegger, rests in this enframing that sets humans as part of the standing reserve.

Heidegger challenges us to think of a second way in which technology reveals, that of poesis. Poesis is a revealing that brings forth rather than ordering into standing reserve. Heidegger explains that the technological revealing can proceed in two directions – either toward ordering or toward bringing forth. For example, our current cellular telephone technologies were designed to enhance communication across distances. In most cases, the phone tethers its owner to an "always on" positioning where the owner is ordered to perform whenever the phone sounds. While enhancing our ability to communicate across distances, however, our intimate spaces are constantly invaded by ringtones, distraction, and talking into our machines. Following Heidegger's poesis model, some people have used the cell phone to gather "smart mobs," people who gather

at a prearranged geographical spot for an intervention in the physical space of the here and now.

For the most part, however, our marvels at the instrumentality of technology have blinded us to the "essential unfolding of technology" onto one path of revealing or the other. Thus for Heidegger, the danger for humans lays at this point of revealing. The threat to humans comes not from the apparatus of technology, but from the abdication to technology of the power to choose the path of revealing. Humans are denied the ability to enter into a more original revealing, and become, by default, part of the standing reserve.

However, within this danger, Heidegger finds the saving power. What he calls for is vigilance at the boundary of revealing:

> The granting that sends one way or another into revealing is as such the saving power. For the saving power lets man see and enter into the highest dignity of his essence. This dignity lies in keeping watch over the unconcealment – and with it, from the first, the concealment – of all essential unfolding on this earth. It is precisely in ordering as the ostensibly sole way of revealing, and so thrusts man into the danger of the surrender of his free essence – it is precisely in this extreme danger that the innermost indestructible belongingness of man within granting may come to light, provided that we, for our part, begin to pay heed to the essence of technology. (337)

Thus, Heidegger finds that the poetic appears as the saving power to confront the essential unfolding of technology (310). Transformation work means mutating what exists, unrevealing, unsecuring the notions of "the truth." This transformation can only take place in movement, in the play of signs, in the shifting of the technology to allow for *poesis* to occur. Heidegger finds this type of revealing in artistic endeavors. He reminds us that the word "technology" stems from the Greek *tecknikon* and means that which belongs to *techne*. He further defines *techne* as the skills of the craftsman and the activities and skills of the arts of the mind and the fine arts. "*Techne* belongs to bringing-forth, to *poesis*; it is something poetic," says Heidegger (318).

R. L. Rutsky's definition of high techne involves a dynamic, ongoing process or movement that unsecures the ordering and discipline and brings them into play. "Thus, while enframing stresses setting in place, regulating, and securing, the emphasis in techne is on setting free, on unsecuring, on allowing the world to be 'brought forth' in noninstrumental terms" (Rutsky 7). High techne seems to call for this repressed aesthetic aspect within the concept of technology (Rutsky 4). Like Heidegger, Rutsky's high techne brings back possibility, putting meaning into play and allowing for possibilities to flourish. These mutations of identity, reality, and discourses are created from the clashing of possibilities. The juxtaposition of new ideas brings a blurring of the panoptic gaze and allows for a different way of seeing and knowing.

For Heidegger, agency lies within the poetic act. Freedom, says Heidegger, governs the free space in the sense of the cleared, that is to say, the revealed (330). The retrieval of *poesis* allows humans to focus beyond the patterning and ordering of

35

technology. Focal practices of *poesis* engage humans outside of mechanistic activity.
Focal practices – whether art, music, cooking, gardening, or quilting – allow for humans
to be resurrected from standing reserve.

Henri Lefebvre describes this technological system as not a single system, but
multiple power systems operating on various planes. In *Everyday Life in the Modern
World,* Lefebvre demonstrates that these subsystems are "separated by cracks, gaps and
lacunae; forms do not converge, they have no grip on the content and cannot reduce it
permanently; the *irreducible* crops up again after each reduction (188). These openings
exist and all that remains is to focus our poetic interventions at these interstices to resist
and disrupt this enframing. For Immanuel Kant and G.W.F. Hegel, the aesthetic realm is
defined in terms of mediation. It is that which, as Hegel puts it "stands in the *middle*.
Hegel suggests that the splitting of the modern, technologized world is to be mediated or
made whole through art or aesthetic judgment (qtd. in Rutsky, 65). This poetic mode or
aesthetic production, he says "continually breaks things free of a stable context or fixed
representation, representing them instead as part of an ongoing process or movement – as
part of a continual process of unsecuring" (105).

Albert Borgmann speaks to the power of such a focal practice. He suggests that a
focus "gathers the relations of its context and radiates into its surroundings and informs
them" (197). Focal practices allow us to peer at what is seemingly whole and tightly
patterned to find the space for a bringing forth: "… if we recognize the central vacuity of
advanced technology, that emptiness can become the opening for focal things,"
Borgmann says (199).

Borgmann suggests:

> …a reform of technology that issues from focal concerns will be radical, not in imposing a new and unified master plan on the technological universe, but in discovering those sources of strength that will nourish principled and confident beginnings, measures, i.e., which will neither rival nor deny technology. (200)

Thus, a focal practice displaces the cohesive and patterned nature of technology and leaves space for an opening within our lives.

Lefebvre, in "The Production of Space," states that space is a technology, mediated by language that constructs it. Lefebvre argues that space is never innocent; it is constituted by ontologies and epistemologies. As social space is thus produced in this semiotic domain, it assigns places to biological reproduction, reproduction of labor power, and reproduction of the social relations of production. History is one such reproduction of social relations.

Symbolic representation serves to maintain these social relations, says Lefebvre, "They make society into the 'object' of a systematization which must be 'closed' to be complete; they thus bestow a cohesiveness it utterly lacks upon a totality which is in fact decidedly open – so open that it must rely on violence to endure" (133).

We only preserve that which functions within the disciplining technology. When people lose touch with the ability to actively engage the semiotic domain, the social space becomes ossified, leaving little room for dialogue, for poetic dwelling. As social space is a human product, it may also be changed by human activity. How may we gain access to

this semiotic domain, to invent new ways of seeing and knowing, to resist closed forms

that deny possibilities? How might we, as Foucault and de Certeau suggest, open a space

for precisely those contents that have been disqualified and suppressed?

As hooks cautions, the work of subjugation "can be undone only by acts of

concrete reclamation" (xv). The work of subjugation, of colonization, is complete,

suggests hooks, when people lose touch with their capacity to create, lose sight of their

will and their power to make art. It is art – as "fully realized presence of a haunting" of

history – that takes responsibility as Toni Morrison and Bhabha suggest, for the

unspoken, unrepresented pasts that haunt the historical present (Bhabha 12). "Such art

does not merely recall the past as a social cause or aesthetic precedent; it renews the past,

refiguring it as a contingent 'in-between' space, that innovates and interrupts the

performance of the present," says Bhabha. "The 'past-present' becomes part of the

necessity, not the nostalgia of living," he says (7).

Signifying from this in-between, the interstices of the discourses defined by

history, we renegotiate the past and redefine subjectivities. To dwell in the interstices,

one creates the space to displace predefined boundaries of difference, experience, and

meaning. In this space, Bhabha claims:

> Social differences are not simply given to experience through an already
>
> authenticated cultural tradition; they are the signs of the emergence of a
>
> community envisaged as a project – at once a vision and a construction –
>
> that takes you 'beyond' yourself in order to return, in a spirit of revision
>
> and reconstruction, to the political conditions of the present (3).

The poetics of this interstitial community draws its agency from the in-between place, where narrative founds a 'locus of inscription,' another 'inappropriate enunciative site' (Bhabha 242). This site of survival and negotiation creates fissures in the narratives of modernity. Through narrative performance in the interstices, we are able to resist and map new historical realities.

Between these binaries of the cohesive narrative of history and the multiplicity of voices forcing reinterpretation, dialogue offers a middle ground. Identity and culture are created and negotiated in this dialectic. In the introduction to *The Digital Dialectic,* Peter Lunenfeld says dialectic is understood to be a dynamic process in which one proposition is matched against another (often its opposite) in order to bring a third, combinatory proposition into being (xvii). Theodor W. Adorno, a Frankfurt school theorist, sees the dialectic as a means to weld together identity and the contradiction of thought, unfolding "the difference between the particular and the universal" (qtd. in Lunenfeld xviii). Michael Heim says dialectic, rooted in the Greek *dia logou* "through words or argument" achieves "more than mutual recognition and shared feelings; dialogues also expose conceptual and attitudinal differences as they apply to the issues under consideration" ("Digital Dialectic" 40). Foucault seeks to open a space for those historical dialogues that have been suppressed by traditional discourses through the dialectic. If liberty is a practice, as Foucault suggests, its aim is to modify self constraints or to break with them. Through narrative performance, one forms a micropower – a practice drawn from *kairos,* where one creates and re-creates identity to break out of received categories. Not to

39

answer that old question of "Who are we?" but to answer the question of what we need to do or be in order to exist within these disciplining technologies.

Many diversions or revolutions can leave actual power structures untouched, such as those that write society's diachronic history. Narrative performance is not just a nostalgic recovery of the past that dredges discarded stories and subsequently becomes part of the homogenizing process. *Poesis* is a way of operating within a space to create a place, where fragments generate various interpretations in different readers. This poetic rhetoric, says Robert B. Ray, breaks from the traditional prison of sequential exposition and logical argument (82). Narrative performance is a move that reconfigures the symbolic structures, moving beyond the hermeneutics of Heidegger's poetic dwelling. By thoughtfully inscribing a *lieux de memoire*, we use a place-making imagination that interrupts, erupts, and disrupts the cohesive narratives of history. In this surrealist experiment to shift attentiveness within the oscillations of symbols and meaning, there is an opportunity for something else to be revealed. By keeping dynamic movement alive in the unsettled dialectic, the narrative performance becomes a place of possibility and representation. Through abstraction then recovery, writers/readers may take imaginative leaps of place that move beyond an authentic subjectivity to a performative self in constant negotiation.

Recycling the Remnants of Everyday Narratives

It is the desire for recognition that takes the experience of history beyond the instrumental hypothesis (Bhabha 9). "The scraps, patches, and rags of daily life," says Bhabha, "must be repeatedly turned into the signs of a coherent national culture" (145).

"It is not adequate simply to become aware of the semiotic systems that produce the signs of culture and their dissemination," says Bhabha (163). To participate more fully in semiotic domains, one must learn to produce, or write, meanings in the domain (Gee 22). Beyond this, it also requires "a radical revision of the social temporalities in which emergent histories may be written, the rearticulation of the 'sign' in which cultural identities may be inscribed" (Bhabha 171).

When I first came to work at a nonprofit educational organization, three other African American women were hired along with me in my department. We began meeting for tea to share of our experiences acclimating to the hierarchical structure of the organization and to celebrate our accomplishments. I named our group "The Power Watermelon Group," or PWG, symbolized by a small ceramic watermelon I placed on each member's desk.

That watermelon became the site of a cultural struggle in the workplace. As our group playfully redesigned our offices to add more watermelon memorabilia, we also transformed its meaning from an African American stereotype into a lush, fertile, creative ground for new life, and new power. The icon lost its traditional power to demean us. We reinscribed its meaning to something affirming, something powerful that propelled us to new professional heights in a collegial, supportive niche within the organization.

However, as the watermelons grew in size and prominence, our co-workers and the organization's leadership became uneasy. The icon retained much of its historic baggage for those who were not part of the tea group. It became a site of resistance to the organization and coworkers who insisted that we remove the fruit objects from our work spaces. The issue went beyond suppression of free speech to becoming a censorship of what could be displayed in the workplace. The PWG felt pressure to conform to the group norms being reasserted, but we resisted bending to the corporate will. We had not thought of ourselves as activists, but here we were, in the spaces of the in-between, challenging history and reinscribing our present with alternate meanings.

I often describe this struggle as if I was enveloped within a bubble, that I was continually reshaping and expanding with my words and struggles with the watermelon symbol and my ways of "performing" in the world. As I pushed against and expanded its boundaries, I created a place within which I could express myself, in contrast to the corporate machinery.

It is exactly this everyday life, suggests Lefebvre, that emerges as the ground of resistance and renewal. The richness of human activity and relationships, if revealed, might displace a conditioned docility by appropriating the spatial dialectic of representation (qtd. in Shields 160). Peak experiences, embedded within the everyday, affirm their own authority against the technological reworkings of the subject. "The answer is everyday life," suggests Lefebvre:

> …to rediscover everyday life – no longer to neglect and disown it, elude
> and evade it – but actively to rediscover it while contributing to its

transfiguration; this undertaking involves the invention of language – or, to be precise, an invention of language – for everyday life translated into language becomes a different everyday life by becoming clear; and the transfiguration of everyday life is the creation of something new, something that requires new words. ("Everyday Life" 202)

Foucault also provides a clue on how one can subvert disciplining technologies such as history. He writes:

Small acts of cunning, endowed with great power of diffusion, subtle arrangements, apparently innocent, but profoundly suspicious, mechanisms that obeyed economies too shameful to be acknowledged, or pursued petty forms of coercion – it was nevertheless they that brought about the mutation of the punitive system, at the threshold of the contemporary period. ("Discipline and Punish" 139)

In this contemporary period, the small narratives of everyday life, endowed with great power of diffusion and subtle arrangements, mutate – in quotidian, pedestrian ways – the oppressiveness of the historical field. Narrative is used to appropriate the space of representation, to create a place, a poetic dwelling, a *lieu de memoire.* This type of memoir or autobiography is an "act of memory and imagination" (Fabre 263). Albert Stone argues that the writing of autobiography is an "originating act of consciousness" in which the self seeks order and meaning in her or his past experiences (Fabre 263). And as James Olney suggests, "Memories [of one's past] and present reality [in the moment of

writing] bear a continuing, reciprocal relationship, influencing and determining one another ceaselessly…shaped by the present moment and by the specific psychic impress of the remembering individual." (qtd. in Fabre 264).

De Certeau uses narrative through the art of memory to manipulate space, implanting memory in place through poetic tactics: "Standing in the same relation to time that an 'art of war' has to manipulations of space, an 'art' of memory develops an aptitude for always being in the other's place without possessing it, and for profiting from this alteration without destroying itself through it" (87). Memory ties us to place, suggests de Certeau, and stories constantly transform places into space or spaces into place (117). By practicing memory through narrative, de Certeau argues that one can open a "legitimate theatre for practical actions" (125).

De Certeau offers an explanation of the uses and tactics of a specific type of intimate knowledge and its power to provide oneself with one's own place. His approach to remaking culture begins "when the ordinary man *becomes* the narrator, when it is he who defines the (common) place of discourse and the (anonymous) space of its development" (5). Thus, *poesis* forms "ways of operating" taken "by the dispersed, tactical, and makeshift creativity of groups or individuals already caught in the nets of 'discipline.' "(xiv). De Certeau establishes the means by which humans can set Heidegger's revealing onto the poetic path, rather than the instrumental one -- by performing the *fas* ritual or the foundation ritual through poetic social practices. This founding is a way of revealing that "provides space for the actions that will be undertaken; it 'creates a field' which serves as their 'base' and their 'theater' "(124). De

Certeau argues that the primary role of the story is this founding: "It opens a legitimate

theater for practical *actions*. It creates a field that authorizes dangerous and contingent

social actions" (125). This story founding is distinct from the Roman ritual he borrows in

three ways:

1. The story founds *fas* in a form that is fragmented (not unique and whole), "because of the diversification of social milieus, but especially because of the increasing heterogeneity of the authorizing 'references' ";
2. The story is miniaturized, not on a national scale, confined to the level of the family unit or the individual;
3. The story is polyvalent (not specialized), because the mixing together of so many microstories gives them functions that change according to the groups in which they circulate (125).

Stories put in action the *fas* that "authorizes" enterprises and precedes them, creating the

poetic dwelling of the *lieux de memoire*. *Poesis* operates through metaphor as a way of

pointing to meanings that can only be made clear by an act of interpretation. It acts

through displacement and condensing – to give the reader and writer an active role in

constructing meanings.

Lefebvre suggests the importance of the project at hand: "If the potentialities of

everyday life could be realized it would be possible for people to adapt to their existence

once again – such a possibility being one of the requirements of creative activity, by

which the products of nature and necessity are turned into creations and assets, into a

form of human freedom" ("Everyday Life" 23). Lefebvre challenges readers to formulate

"a revolutionary plan to recreate a style, resurrect the festival and gather together cultures

scattered fragments for transfiguration of everyday life" ("Everyday Life" 23). Like

Heidegger's revealing, Lefebvre leads us to the point of choosing and suggests that a

praxis of poesis subverts the terror of a logical, structured, over-repressive society. His

counter-terrorist intervention is situated in the cracks and gaps of a seemingly coherent

terrorism, within a city's revival of the Festival, its experiences of a place and time, and

everyday life as *experiential value*. Bhabha suggests that it is from such narrative

positions that the postcolonial prerogative seeks to affirm and extend a new collaborative

dimension (171).

These theorists suggest a way to create a spatial rupture through which to enter

the semiotic zone:

1. Recognize and seize the revealing of technology onto the path of poesis through narrative as a focal practice;
2. Use narrative to found a theater for action in the interstices.
3. Through a process of iterative "unpicking" and insurgent "relinking," displace and "seize the apparatus of value-coding" (Bhabha 184).

"What is crucial to such a vision of the future," suggests Bhabha, "is the belief

that we must not merely change the *narratives* of our histories, but transform our sense of

what it means to live, to be, in other times and different spaces, both human and

historical" (256). Such a poetic act might start with creating an alternate place for a

watermelon.

Digital Literacies and the Hypertextual Space

At the end of *Writing Space*, Jay David Bolter defines the space and time of this

postmodern moment:

46

Our late age of print is characterized by such struggles, as economically

dominant groups and forces attempt to define the new technology to their

advantage, usually by extending definitions appropriate to earlier

technologies that they already dominate. … On the other hand, other

constructions of new media are working subtly against the extension of

older models of economic and cultural control. Our culture continues to

find in these new forms, particularly in the Internet and on the World

Wide Web, qualities of decentralization, local autonomy and flexibility.

(211)

In the late age of print, hypertext has been hailed as a model for writing that

provides an access to the tools of coding and symbolization heretofore unavailable to

many. As the Internet is still being formed through laws and rules, common people have

the opportunity to extend its uses to create voice. Through web sites and personal web

logs or blogs, and even through more dialogic forms that capture the situated knowledge

of individuals like Wikipedia, the contours of this space continue to evolve. This

changing writing space affords an opportunity for the reader/writer to create a critical

voice that disturbs the contours themselves.

Ong describes this electronic culture as a "secondary orality," predicting the

return of the two modes that constituted pre-alphabetic culture: poetics and narration (qtd.

in Ray 201). As Michael Joyce suggests in this late age of print, readers are becoming

writers, able to manipulate the interstices of this hypertextual space to redefine boundaries:

> The evolving contour must be manifest for the reader so she can recognize, resist, appropriate, possess, replace, and deploy the existing contour not just in its logic and nuance, but in its plasticity. She should be able to mold and extend the existing structure at each point of replacement and to transform it to her own uses. (14)

Because the reader becomes a writer as he or she traverses the hypertext writing space, some theorists have argued that hypertext represents a shift in human consciousness comparable to the shift from orality to print (20). Bolter argues that electronic writing is "not the writing of a place, but rather a writing *with* places, spatially realized topics…signs and structures on the computer screen that have no easy equivalent in speech" (25). Hypertext is seen as part of the cultural shift of this digital age where society is questioning past epistemologies and who has the power to speak a culture's history. As Joyce posits, transformation of knowledge should be the litmus test in determining whether hypertexts live up to its promise (14).

Alan Kay poses the question:

> What kind of thinker would you become if you grew up with an active simulator connected, not to just one point of view, but to all the points of view of the ages represented so that they could be dynamically tried out and compared? (193)

Kay hints at the possibilities of hypertextual space as defining a different way of thinking and knowing. This place of knowing denies the either/or of positivist, social science thought and instead turns to the and/and/and of conductive, associative thinking.

George P. Landow likens hypertext writing to that of Cubist artworks in their collage-like structures. Both embody the characteristics of juxtaposition; appropriation; assemblage; concatenation; blurring limits, edges, borders; and blurring distinctions between border and ground (qtd. in Lunenfeld 158). The Cubist philosophy contrasts the real and the virtual by shaping and combining scraps of material that typically are "discards" in the world of art and giving them a representational meaning within the image and a presence as itself (qtd. in Lunenfeld 157). Digital works, in contrast, provide an entrance into a virtual realm, where the writer/reader may reconfigure, move, rewrite, and manipulate the words and images of the semiotic code.

Theorists that define hypertext have conflicting views of its qualities, functions, and its implications. George Landow defines hypertext as text composed of blocks of text and the electronic links that join them ("Hypertext 2.0" 3). Rand Spiro and Jihn-Chang Jehng define hypertext as nonlinearity based on an isolated reader-learner (qtd. in "Hyper/Text/Theory" 227). Bolter provides a broader concept of hypertext, calling this "writing space" one in which a continuum of representations exist (37). He likens this space to a "topography" with paths through a virtual space where a reader is a traveler in that space (29). Electronic texts, he argues, are characterized by "multiplicity, heterogeneity, and immediate, if temporary, connections" (204).

49

Michael Joyce has identified three types of hypertext structures: exploratory, constructive, and deconstructive. Each has specific functions and each further defines what is meant by hypertext and its operations (qtd. in Moulthrop 295):

- *Exploratory* – Represent closed systems in which users can follow various pathways through the network but cannot modify or expand the existing structure. Bolter conceives of the hypertext space as constructed by a single author, connecting texts, and images to external authors to be sure, but nevertheless suggesting and constraining the possibilities of the hypertextual readings.

- *Constructive* – Represents systems which are user-defined, freely revisable, protean, and indefinite and requires "a capability to act: to create, to change, and to recover particular encounters within the developing body of knowledge"; more complementary to print.

- *Deconstructive* – Represents systems that create dissonance with existing print functions. Often characterized as nihilistic, deconstruction is a critical practice that emphasizes the contingency or "iterability" of any discourse. Process is dynamic and self-modifying. Objects are "texts" which may exist in multiple media and whose meanings emerge from their relationship to other texts. This deconstructive practice opens the prior text to further reassemblies or acts of linkage.

Joyce suggests that the distinction between nodes and links is not always represented in hypertext programs as the interface metaphor or the way the program visually depicts its information will determine how they function (19).

These definitions seem to conflate what Lawrence Lessig describes as the "physical" layers across which communication travels, with the "code" layer that makes the hardware run, and the "content" layer or actual stuff that gets transmitted (23). Landow discusses how shifts in information technology are shifting writing from books to wide-band networks (the "physical" layer), how support for this environment will shift writing from books to digital media and "hyperlinks" (the "code" layer), and how one uses the digital word to reveal a different way of knowing (the "content" layer)

("Hyper/Text/Theory" 36). All three layers must be addressed to reveal the complexity of politics in a hypertextual space.

Many of the definitions of hypertext deal with the instrumentality of the technology, focusing on the physical and code layers. Greco asks a different question by examining all three layers of the hypertextual space. She sees technology as the site for either domination or for transformation and resistance. She seeks to answer how these systems and their users reciprocally constitute each other and questions what it means to be human and embodied, "questions that are both political and technical, and have been so from the beginning of hypertext development" (87).

According to Greco, hypertext theory must move toward a four-fold agenda (87):

1. *Participatory Action:* Hypertext theory should move toward a participatory action, one that "should help everyone who uses it to speak for themselves and thereby constitute their own subject position." (Physical Layer)

2. *Dismantling Genres:* Hypertext theory should dismantle genres and distinctions between "received categories" so they may be questioned and redefined. (Code Layer)

3. *Communal Authorship:* A politics of hypertext should be polyvocal, a "communal authorship" that overturns the dominant mythology of the solitary author. (Content Layer)

4. *Recombinant Materials:* Hypertext theorists should encourage the use of recombinant materials by "creatively appropriating" the symbology of culture as a stand against the sanctity of the author through copyright. (Content Layer)

Postmodern feminists describe the dual function of multivocal texts as in service to the writer to express silenced positions and as cultural interventions into the power relations embedded in knowledge technologies. Foregrounding the multiple contexts from which one speaks and writes becomes a form of intervention that reminds us of the

51

situated and partial nature of our knowledge. Hypertexts such as these can act to disrupt naturalized viewpoints, and provide agency for the reader to discover new knowledge.

Donna LeCourt and Luann Barnes posit that hypertext offers potential for feminist writing by differently ordering the reader/writer relationship and by allowing expression of multiple positions (56). They examine the power relationship in the production of knowledge and how multivocal texts become a form of intervention displacing a univocal truth.

From the mixed literacies and differential consciousness that comes from multiple positionings, Donna Haraway suggests that the body becomes the theater of the performative. She uses the term figuration "to make explicit and inescapable the tropic quality of all material-semiotic processes" (11). These performative images of figurations are "inhabited" spaces mutated by the processes of science, particularly technoscience. Haraway suggests that knowledge-making technologies must be made visible in how they craft subject position and the ways in which humans may inhabit such positions. She says that "embedded relationality is the prophylaxis for both relativism and transcendence." This "strong objectivity" uses situated knowledge as the basis for a praxis. She appropriates Susan Leigh Star's definition of the "cyborg" as the "relationship between standardized technologies and local experience" (11).

Lather suggests destabilizing, deconstructive practices that don't just exchange one hierarchy for another – feminism or androcentric, male-centered knowledge – but that provide for a relational, non-reductionist way of making sense of the world. In this

52

praxis-oriented approach to inquiry, focus shifts from knowledge as found truth to constructed knowledge as contested and partial. Says Lather:

> That is the territory that poststructuralism attempts to map with its thesis that the map precedes the territory, its foregrounding of the constitutive effects of our uses of language, its efforts to enable another logic in which structure and agency are not either-or but both-and and, simultaneously, neither-nor. (*Smart* 154)

Lather's situated methodology is a postsubjective, socially engaged form of thinking and writing or knowledge creation (238). The three stages of this creation process are:

1. Fragment material,
2. Brood over liberated fragments, and
3. Construct constellations of new meanings.

Lather says this process is an interruptive one that produces an image -- a mosaic, multilayered text that works as an "uninterpreted flash of recognition" designed to "interrupt the reductiveness of the restricted economies of representation" (234, 238). In the specific moment of its "legibility," the hypertext is able to presence the absence of truth.

Lather's guiding three principles are:

1. To instantiate a topology of excess that foregrounds the absence of truth and the loss of aura via a mode of representation that alters the standard frames of reference and visibility.
2. To effect an economy of the unconscious via juxtaposition, paradox, montage, and palimpsest in an effort to work the scene of fragmentation toward the construction of difference-aware subjectivities.

3. To work against the concept of the researcher as Great Liberator, origin of what can be known and done (251).

Morgan offers "a future poetics of a poststructuralist feminist research hypertextuality." She suggests that associative linking, intertextual and intratextual juxtapositions, the unfixing of textual hierarchies in a "rhizomatic" text, nonsequential polylogic, multigeneric collage and the reader as textual agent become the characteristics of a hypertextual space (211). This very space, Morgan argues, works against such "standing orders" of normative social science research and "whose openness permits crossings that would elsewhere be impermissible, whose directions in motion transform the striated texts it absorbs" (211). Morgan's reader is endowed with an agency – to argue her own meaning from and within the lexias – blocks of words, moving or static images, or sounds – she chooses. She re-assembles and constructs logic from available evidence within the lexias. This practice of agency is a performance of active intervention. From this hypertextual practice, the reader becomes an author – a "cyborgian hybrid" who is decentered, disunified, always in process (214). This hypertext, Morgan says, is overflowing with significance, not empty of it, and resembles conversation that is associative, additive, interruptive (212). Thus the hypertextual agency of this space provides a way of troubling knowledge production.

Lather suggests that empowerment comes from the politics of knowing and being known. She defines empowerment to mean "analyzing ideas about the causes of powerlessness, recognizing systemic oppressive forces, and acting both individually and collectively to change the conditions of our lives" ("Getting Smart" 4). Mike Fox

suggests "the heart of the idea of empowerment involves people coming into a sense of their own power, a new relationship with their own contexts" (qtd. in Lather, "Getting Smart" 4). It seems that hypertext provides a space that also troubles notions of author and reader and foregrounds the contingent nature of knowledge.

These theorists point to the urgency of creating such hypertextual theories and spaces to speak against existing technologies as they attempt to dominate within the hypertextual space. Moulthrop trumpets the value of the third type of hypertext in particular – deconstructive hypertext – as possibly the best tool for formulating a true post-print rhetoric. "Deconstructive hypertext might remind us that any system, even (or especially) one that advertises its own contingency, can have its authority called into question," says Moulthrop, allowing us to retain a capacity for independent judgement (296).

Within this dialogic, self-reflexive context, Lather's question becomes "What would a sociological project look like that was not a technology of regulation and surveillance?" ("Getting Smart" ix). The Digital Story Quilt technology denies the "comfort text" as Lather suggests. It opens up possibilities for displaying complexities respectful of its sources. It creates room for social difference and deviance, for local and situated knowledges.

Joyce describes the problem we face as learning to write in the interstices, where the writer/reader is given access to the code layer – to write and rewrite the structure of the hypertext document.

Whether we see a poetic of contours or a deconstructive rhetoric, we must

actively locate them at the interstices along the continuously replaced

contour. Locating here must be understood in the double sense of

interaction and enaction, i.e., we locate by inscription, forcing (or

enforcing) the coextensivity of the text. (242)

For Lather, deconstructive strategies are not instruments for self-mastery and/or

others, but an exploratory tool for how we might move beyond our present positions

("Getting Smart" 155). "A text that might help enable movement beyond received habits

of thought and practice is a form of political intervention, even given the (largely

unknowable) limits of discursive challenges" ("Getting Smart" 154). Addressing the

dominating forces of technology from the interstices or in between denies the unified,

cohesive surface technology and history.

Through marginalized voices bubbling up through the cracks of history, the

deconstructive hypertextual space displaces authority and foregrounds the construction of

new meanings. According to Joyce:

This is the language of sisters, of the betweenus at the end

of time, of hypertext pedagogy and/*as* poetics in the

process of re(de)fining each, of minds that dare to hope to

penetrate the dark edge of existence comforted by knowing

we are not lost to one another. (15)

The Quilter's Space

Women's traditional occupations, their arts and crafts and their literature and philosophies, says Paula Gunn Allen, are more often accretive than linear, more achronological than chronological, and more dependent on the harmonious relationships of all elements within a field of perception than western culture in general is thought to be (2125). Quilting as a practice moves toward this reflexive, interpretive perception that creates the poetic "becoming space" of Heidegger that both marks and loosens boundaries (102). Embedded in the quilt top, the fabric patches are relays, time pathways to stories and memories of their former owners. Intimate scraps, now in their second or third use, have made their way into an heirloom, passed down from generation to generation. The quilt becomes a community textile, the diverse fabric sources create connections to the past, present, and future. Through the quilts, the voices of the past survive. The stories trace a path of connection between oral traditions, storytelling, the invention of meaning, and the preservation of cultural memory.

For women of the 19th century for whom domestic life was their sphere of influence, the traditional definition of rhetoric does not apply. In the United States, says Aptheker, "conditions of slavery, of the special oppression of women, of the practical needs for warmth and beauty and for a cultural form that did not require literacy produced the quilting tradition" (68). Needlework, specifically quilt making, became one expressive medium through which women articulated their way of knowing.

As a text, the quilt and its maker speak across time and space to a reader who may or may not speak its language. Each fabric patch is ripped from its original intimate

garment or household context then carefully pieced back together. This frugal second use

for scraps carried with them stories of their owners – of everyday activities, of daily wear

and use – that were carefully witnessed, then pieced into a larger cloth narrative. The

quilt becomes a collage or a palimpsest – a writing material that has been used one or

more times after earlier writing has been erased – that reveals the multilayered nature of

our experience. Says Aptheker, "In this way women gave meaning to their daily lives, the

cumulative effects of their quilts finally transforming the ragged and the mundane into

discernible patterns, beautiful, sturdy, enduring" (69).

Text – the common name for written compositions – derives from "textile" and

includes in its etymology the craft of weaving. A quilt is a text, says Elsley. "It speaks its

maker's desires and beliefs, hopes and fears, sometimes in a language any reader can

understand, but often in an obscure language available only to the initiated" (1). Through

the use of symbols, colors, patterns, stitches, textures, and words, women's quilt texts

communicate in an intimate fashion across generations. Memory-laden textiles are

inscribed by the touch and the witness of the quilter, recovering nearly lost narratives in a

ritual that frames issues of identity, representation, and knowledge. Designed for

everyday use, these quilts have most recently revealed texts hidden in plain view,

intimate conversations with ghosts of the past, that reveal the textuality and

communicative practices of this women's tradition.

Perhaps the most metaphorically resonant quality of quilt making, suggests

Margot Anne Kelley, is a trait shared by European and African-American traditions – the

promise of creating unity among disparate elements, of establishing connections in the

midst of fragmentation (55). Anne Bower suggests that a poet like Joyce Carol Oates "motivates the quilt-illiterate by enthusiastically proclaiming the quilt-texts' readability, demonstrating how these previously ignored texts record and document important information about individuals and events, about the past and the present," while poet Marilyn Wanick shows that "claiming and reading a quilt can deepen positive ties to the past and strengthen one's belief in the future. (qtd. in Bower 34).

Many traditional quilts, says Hillard, are rhetorical both in messages they convey in response to social and political circumstances. The rhetoric of their making and use reveals relationships of power and contested meaning (113). Hillard attaches high value to quilts because of the act of creation and the beauty and utility combine to create an elegant visual metaphor for a feminist communication style:

> We can imagine, however, that for most women, quilting, needlework, and
> sewing went beyond both practical and aesthetic concerns; stitching
> became a habit of mind, a ritualized practice of connection-making,
> unification, and harmonizing. Many quilts – especially pieced and
> patchwork forms – are icons of a working community. (116)

Through a community of women, traditional notions of author are challenged, demonstrating a quilt "technology" that is collaborative and polyvocal. This is the language of the quilt … "to speak one's truth in ways that will be understood by those who choose to listen without being denounced by those who may oppose it" (Elsley 34). As Hillard suggests, "highly individualized personal symbology of one's life – sewn and appliquéd onto cloth – resonates with other individual symbolizing practices, allowing

59

the personal to regain and reclaim its public representation" (120). Elsley says, "Individual voices are heard in the context of community, not in competition with each other, not necessarily in harmonious concert, but jostling together in a celebration of separate voices" (Elsley 46).

The patchwork of the quilt is symbolic of a new method of communication that focuses on the feminine experience. Through a community of women, traditional notions of author are challenged, demonstrating a quilt technology that is collaborative and polyvocal. Open-ended, protean, populist, cultural critique -- the quilt most resembles the novel, says Elsley, reminiscent of Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of that genre. Both novel and quilt are characterized by deliberate and explicit autobiographical and memoir approaches that join individuality in community. Heteroglossic language, defined by Bakhtin as "a *system* of languages that mutually and ideologically interanimate each other" shifts the focus from the individual author to a concatenation of voices within and without the text(ile) (Elsley 46).

Walter Ong says that 'text,' from a root meaning 'to weave,' is more compatible etymologically with oral utterance than is 'literature,' which refers to letter etymologically of the alphabet (Ong 13). Oral discourse, he notes, has commonly been thought of even in oral milieus as weaving or stitching – *rhapsoidein*, to 'rhapsodize,' basically means in Greek 'to stitch songs together' (Ong 13). Thus the quilt, as a stitched composition of fabrics and thread, embodies the idea of orality. Embedded in the cloth of the quilt are stories of a people, voices pieced and connected to others in a dialogue.

60

The tactile and meditative work of the quilter, coupled with the drawing together of women in a quilting bee, parallels the discursive move from a female realm that must often have included discussions of issues literally unspeakable in the public arena to the world of "acceptable," public utterance (Elsley 53). Through the tactile acts of sorting, stitching, piecing and piercing, women digitally "worked the scenes of fragmentation to reinvest history out of the debris" as Walter Benjamin suggests (qtd. in Lather "Multilayered Text" 237). The traditional patchwork quilt operates as a technology with a structure similar to a hypertextual space. I suggest that these quilters' tactics provide a model for deconstructive hypertextual practices.

A quilt is a textile sandwich composed of three layers analogous to the layers of the hypertextual space (Table 1):

Table 1: Comparison of the hypertextual space to the quilt composition.

Layers	Hypertextual Space	Quilt Space
Physical	Computer networks, computer, wires, hardware of the Internet.	Fabric, thread, batting, quilting process, frame, quilting bees
Code	Software programs, digital manipulations, programming codes, browsers, hyperlinks	Colors, shapes, patterns, stitching techniques, aesthetic design of quilt tops.
Content	Text, images, sound, video embedded in code.	What the patches, shapes actually mean, stories embedded in clothing/fabric fragments.

Through the three layers of the quilt, women's quilt texts communicate in an intimate fashion across generations. Memory-laden textiles are digitized and linked by the touch and the witness of the quilter, recovering nearly lost narratives in an intertextual, nonlinear, polyvocal tradition. The quilt becomes the textual practice that

maps that which has been traditionally erased or hidden by stitching the personal to the cultural. The distinctive features of the quilt are due to the economy enforced on it by the constraints on its creators. The process of making fragments creates a necessary space, suggests Elsley, one that is disruptive and destabilizing, from which a woman can begin her task of self-creation. "Tearing fabric apart has the effect of creating space between the pieces," says Elsley. This place of liminality, this undefined space, becomes a place of creative freedom (10). In such a place, says Lather, "a methodology of the imaginary fosters writing that overflows the linguistic order, proceeding via figuration where the dialectical image is a fragment, a rune, a multiplicity of meaning" ("Multilayered Text" 239).

As Carolyn Guyer writes in her collaborative hypertext writing project for women Hi-Pitched:

> Our interest in disjuncture and convoluted detail is for us an aesthetic composing rich fields of complexity. We know that being denied personal authority inclines us to prefer…decentered contexts, and we have learned, especially from our mothers, that the woven practice of women's intuitive attention and reasoned care is a fuller, more balanced process than simple rational linearity. (qtd. in Joyce 89)

Guyer's aesthetic is that of the poetic that reveals a different way of knowing, one that is implicit in the quilter's tactics. In this multiplicity of meaning, flowing from polyvocal performance, the poetic dwells.

CHAPTER 3   QUILT METHODOLOGY

As I lay sleeping, the quilt text covers my body, sheltering me from the night air. I pull the folds of narrative under my chin, my hands inadvertently brushing the meme of a teddy bear patch from the baby quilt made for another professor's newborn. The text caresses the contours of my body, forming a protective armor over my fragile human skin. The text penetrates me, providing physical warmth deep into my soul. The text embraces me in the arms of my colleagues, friends, and neighbors. Stories, captured in each carefully shaped remnant of text rescued from intimate garments and scraps of past lives whisper memories to me as I lie sleeping.

The quilt text becomes an active cultural memory, animated by my touch and eyes as I travel across mountains and valleys of its folds. Its topography maps a route through a community, embedded in the patchwork, that yields a cryptic code to past lives.

I'd asked Jackie to include mountain colors, the greens and browns and purples I'd come to love in the fields and sky of rural Virginia. That was all the guidance she'd requested, as she crafted the quilt for me in return for helping her create a web site for her research. She filled the stitched squares with triangles in a pinwheel-type pattern, or a web, with the triangles radiating out from a center point. Striped fabrics of mint green and reds mingled with tiny florals and fruits, reminding me of the plowed fields and patches of unworked ground one could see from an airplane before one got above the clouds. The rugged, the delicate, the solid blocks of color and the intricate paisleys were juxtaposed on the quilt top. The plowed fields were bounded by a border of sea foam

green, a pattern of complex waves in one strip contained by a solid border of turquoise (Figure 3).

Figure 3. The Virginia Highlands quilt created by Jackie Graham of Emory, Va.

The quilt was machine crafted. By technical standards it is an amateurish work, with squares that don't meet and quilting that serves only to bind the top to the batting and backing in places. There's no intricate design revealed on the flip side, just intersecting lines, random tracks across a backing of muted, satiny plaid. A bit of hand stitching appears on the top in a bright, red thread against some solid-colored triangles, to give the quilt an enhanced air of "hand stitched." But to me, it didn't matter whether the quilt was stitched by machine or by hand. The quilt represented a gift of the heart, a tremendous labor that had been created just for me.

It was the first quilt I had ever received – an exchange of technology for textiles. Jackie told me that my quilt had pieces of quilts she'd made for neighbors and friends in the community. How odd that as I'd struggled to become part of this community in this rural, Southern region, Jackie had stitched a connection for me by creating this community quilt.

Postcards from the Edge: An Ethnographic Journey

When I first arrived in the Appalachian Highlands, I came as an outsider. Even as a visitor of more than 15 years, my husband's homeland was a foreign place in many ways. I was unaware of the cycle of the fields, of the planting and harvesting of the tobacco that is the livelihood of many in the region. I was ignorant of the livestock that grazed in the skirts of the mountains and the twisted paths that led through the hollers. Most of all, I was deaf to the people that I first came to live among. I could not hear the stories behind their nicknames, I could not abide their seemingly pointless pleasantries, I could not hear the music in their tongue.

"Small-town culture isn't easy," I warned a female doctor friend who had moved to the area about a year after we had arrived. Even though she moved in circles that were unknown to me, my mother-in-law knew everyone in town after having lived there all her life. And at least all the Democrats in town had dined on her fried chicken and famous cheese straws. And by virtue of being her daughter-in-law, and the wife of a former high school sports star and a professor at the local college to boot, I became almost native.

65

"Folks don't make friends easy around here," I cautioned my friend. Sure, that thing called Southern hospitality was in effect and you'd be allowed through the gate. But hospitality stopped at the porch. To be truly a part of the town took time – on the townspeople's part and mine.

My early ideas were to write my husband's story or at least a fictionalized account. I was fascinated by the stories of his aunts who owned their own home and lands in a time when only blacks lived on their side of the train tracks and a thriving black community flourished. Their acreage came to be known as Nicholastown and I imagined my husband as a child, dragged to his cousins' home by a momma who loved the streets. I imagined what the thickets of fruit trees and the family cemetery out back would have conjured in the mind of a small boy. I made up my own fantasies of his young life, determined to put them to paper. I couldn't presume to impose my own order to the plot, and so the project died.

And so the years passed as I watched, stayed silent, and learned to slow down and listen. The hurried lifestyle that I had acquired in the city fell away. I learned of the seasons, of harvests, the cycles of semesters and breaks, and the summer quiet of the college town. I began to appreciate the solitude of the hills on long, twisting drives, the subtle way the leaves turned over their silvery mossy sides to catch the drops of an approaching rain. I began to cultivate a deep listening not only of my environment, but its inhabitants… in all their differences.

The story I thought to tell then was of the people. Not the so-called country hicks that I had imagined them to be when I first arrived, but the folk, with all of their

complexities. Their struggles, their happiness, needed to be shared with a world that knows mostly of "Beverly Hillbillies" and "Hee Haw" portrayals. But I realized that I could be in no position to speak for them. I struggled with how to give voice to the community. And I finally realized that in my "giving," I was denying their authority. How can you give what is not yours to offer? I could not come to them as a journalist or researcher. I could not presume to tell their story with the honesty and intimacy that it deserved.

I could not offer them their voice, but they gave me the space and time to create mine. I began, slowly, to write of my own experiences living and being in the town. And in speaking myself, my own secrets, my own life – others opened up the door for an intimacy that helped me learn about them. In regular columns in the newspaper, I tapped out my life in words. My own fears led me to understand the challenge of creating a space for other voices. Not giving voice, but a profound listening for the other.

And so I sought a methodology to do just that – create a space for the listening for others. And in the listening, I hear echoes of myself returning to me.

My methodological journey has taken me through territories both familiar and new. With my journalistic toolbox, I found myself using ethnography as a guide in understanding my husband's hometown. The basic work of the ethnographer involves participation, either overtly or covertly, in people's and culture's daily workings, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions, in fact collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issues with which he or she is concerned (Hammersley 2).

Ethnography is the writing of culture, the thick description of a people, place, and the language. Ethnography traces its origins to the ancient Greeks and Herodotus who traveled from one culture to another documenting the traditions and sociopolitical practices among the people of the ancient world during the third century B.C. (Clair 3). Today, as in much of ethnography then, ethnography is viewed as a means of collecting not just the stories of other cultures, but of collecting ourselves to define who we are (Clair 4).

Linden Ball and Thomas Ormerod detail the qualities of what constitutes ethnographic research. While there is no one satisfactory definition, they say, there are a host of positions and practices that provide a socio-cultural frame of reference for study. These include, according to Ball and Ormerod:

1. *Situatedness* – Data are collected by a participant observer who is located within the everyday context of interest (e.g. a community of practitioners).

2. *Richness* – The observer studies behavior in all manifestations, such that data are gathered from a wide range of sources including interviews, team discussions, incidental conversations, documents, as well as non-verbal interactions.

3. *Participant autonomy* – The observees are not required to comply in any rigid, pre-determined study arrangements.

4. *Openness* – The observer remains open to discovery of novel or unexpected issues that may come to light as a study progresses.

5. *Personalization* – The observer makes a note of their own feelings in relation to situations encountered during data collection and analysis.

6. *Reflexivity* – The observer takes a reflective and empathetic stance in striving toward an understanding of the observee's point of view, the observer is taking account of, rather than striving to eliminate, their own effects upon the behavior of the observees.

7. *Self-reflection* – The observer must acknowledge that any interpretive act is influenced by the tradition from which they themselves belong.

8. *Intensity* – Observations must be intensive and long-term, such that the observer should become immersed in the ongoing culture of the observee's environment.

9. *Independence* – The observer must not be constrained by pre-determined goal-set, mind-set, or theory.

10. *Historicism* – The observer aims to connect observations to a backdrop of historical and cultural contingencies. (150)

What I found myself struggling against in the ethnographic methodology are the issues of the relationship between the "knower" and the "known," power, objectivity, and reflexivity.

In traditional forms of ethnography, there is a differential relationship between the researcher and the object of the research (Clair 30). As participant-observer, the researcher trades on the intimacy of the relationships for the sake of research efforts. Typically, there is a unidirectional flow from the object to the researcher. Reflexivity involves an explicit discussion of how the self affects and is affected by the research and writing process (Clair 137). In ethnographic research, researchers must admit the partiality of truth and tease out how they have been implicated in the research. While more feminist approaches to ethnography have taken a dialogic approach such as those suggested by Pamela Chapman Sanger, shifting from seeing and viewing to listening and understanding, the risk of exploitation and betrayal remain high (30). The researcher, in most instances, maintains authorial control over the final research product. Even in Lather's research texts on a community of women dealing with AIDS, her print text wrestles in form to visually parallel the researcher's voice with those of the women at the bottom of the page ("Multilayered Text"). The women are co-authors, in a sense, as their

69

stories are juxtaposed against the more "objective" text. The limits of the print

technology, however, challenge even Lather as she attempts to create a dialogic space.

In *Exploring Alternative Forms of Writing Ethnography,* editors Carolyn Ellis and

Arthur P. Bochner explore three different approaches to writing ethnography –

autoethnography, sociopoetics, and reflexive ethnography. Scholars explore the use of

these first-person narratives where feelings, emotions, personal experiences, and

evocative dialogues challenge the traditional "authorial voice" by acknowledging their

subjective involvement in the knowledge creation process.

All social research, including ethnography as historical knowledge, takes the form

of participant observation: it involves participating in the social world, in whatever role,

and reflecting on the products of that participation (Hammersley 16). As Heidegger notes,

the kind of thinking neglected in modernity is "meditative" (qtd. in Ulmer "Internet

Invention" 64). The consequence of this neglect and imbalance is the hypertrophy of the

"outside" existence and the atrophy of the "inside" of individual life (Ulmer "Internet

Invention" 64). What would a research methodology look like that eliminated the

position of the distant researcher? This research methodology would skirt the challenge

of the participant-observer relationship to become a meditative practice performed by an

individual that may or may not move from the private to the public realm. Could such a

methodology still be called research when the "object" of study is oneself in

performance?

As I learned through my own experiences in the Virginia Highlands, ethnography

could take me only so far. I resisted becoming the medium through which the community

speaks as any such text is partial and contested. I needed a research methodology to bring the community closer to me so that I could see my experiences in juxtaposition to those I walked among. I sought to find a methodology that honors situated knowledge of the individual and allows the individual to define, create, and speak. I sought, as Heidegger suggests, a meditative practice for a postmodern sensibility.

The Quilt as Method

The Digital Story Quilt technology is guided by three goals:

1. To identify the unique resistance tactics of quilt making
2. To identify how quilt making allows for a different way of knowing
3. To develop a quilt methodology for the digital realm that captures these tactics.

Quilting is emblematic "of clever frugality and is a metaphor for survival in the face of oppression and neglect," says Hillard (116). While Foucault delineates the methods of discipline on the body of the individual, the Digital Story Quilt technology is designed to articulate a set of everyday practices or tactics that displace this discipline for a time by inscribing a new knowledge economy. The locus of inscription, as Bhabha suggests, is the in-between, in the cracks and crevasses of the disciplining technology of history. The etymology for interstice is the root "inter" – between and "sistere" to set, stare, to stand. Thus, the Digital Story Quilt technology stands in the narrow crevice between waiting for the moment to displace the pressure of power. This shift in the power-knowledge grid is situated at the localized, individualized level – at the level of the subject. Here, in the in-between of the knowledge network, individuals, bodies, gestures, behaviors, and rituals may bubble up though the cracks using the interstitial methodology of the quilt.

De Certeau writes of his recipe for making a theory of everyday practices. He says that this theory consists of two movements:

> first, *cut* out: then turn over. The first move cuts out certain practices from
> an undefined fabric, in such a way as to treat them as a separate

population, forming a coherent whole but foreign to the place in which theory is produced. The second move turns over the unit thus cut out. At first obscure, silent, and remote, the unit is inverted to become the element that illuminates theory and sustains discourse. (62)

The Digital Story Quilt technology takes on de Certeau's means of making a theory of practices through its appropriation of the quilters' tactics and space of representation. In this newly inscribed space, the void is transformed into an established place. The quilt becomes the intertextual mapping of that which has been traditionally erased or hidden.

To develop this interstitial methodology requires stitching together a methodology of my own. The work at hand is defined by three distinct research stages. Strauss' methodology for grounded theory work informs the first stage of work. Using primary stories of female quilters, quilting bees, and the quilts themselves, and secondary sources of texts about quilts, quilt patterns, and the quilt's functions in culture, I seek to draw out the characteristics and uses of the quilt as a rhetorical tool. Strauss' approach seems to provide a methodology similar to quilt making and the conductive approach to theory development that I seek.

In this second stage, I describe the quilters' tactics that I've initially identified – of condensation, fragmentation, and juxtaposition – and use them to establish a methodological approach. Using Foucault's and Heidegger's framework of a technology and de Certeau's description of everyday practices, I seek to establish an interstitial methodology, one that displaces binary poles by bubbling up through the cracks in the Foucaultian power grid.

In the second stage, I use an ethnographic approach based on my own experiential knowledge as a beginning quilter to define quilters' tactics for creating agency through voice. In this analytical framework, I am positioned as a participant/observer within the quilters' realm. I used what Hoffman describes as 'reconstructive anthropology' or learning by doing to explore quilting, using similar processes and techniques to create a quilt (qtd. in McLean 20). Through this experiential learning, I can further explore the tactics of the quilter that I'd previously identified – fragmentation, condensation, and juxtaposition – and discover new ones.

In the third stage, detailed in Chapter 4: Findings, I use the patchwork metaphor and the interstitial methodology as the basis for describing and building prototypes of the Digital Story Quilt, a visual narrative mapping device of a community's stories using Stephen Mamber's description of such a device. The five prototypes that I have created include:

1. **Software Storyboards**: Using Barbie Cook Looks Fashion Designer® software as a template, I create an initial set of screens for a software interface using Adobe Photoshop®. I describe for the first time some of the basic functions of the Digital Story Quilt patch, the quilt top "views" and some of the analytical tools that individuals and communities can use in interpreting the community quilt.

2. **Paper Prototype:** Using a hexagon template, I use images and text from which I cut patches that I then compose into a quilt text. I analyze the quilt text using a visual and textual analysis.

3. **Prototype Web Site 1.0**: This website, built by University of Central Florida Digital Media Students, provides some basic text functions in entering text into a database for users. A QuickTime® movie details what the software will be able to do as it develops.

4. **Prototype Web Site 2.0**: The Digital Story Quilt for Hurricane Katrina Survivors is developed out of the unfinished work on a kiosk software version. The site went live less than a week after Hurricane Katrina and provided survivors and others to put stories of their experiences along with photographs and fabric

74

5. **Kiosk Software:** The kiosk software is developed in conjunction with a database developer for an exhibit that I curate at the Orange County Regional History Center in downtown Orlando from December 7, 2005 through March 6, 2006. The exhibit, called "Quilts as Texts: Storytelling Using Fabric and Pixels," combines fabric quilts from across the region with the Digital Story Quilt technology. A quilt screen shows the patches created by patrons as they input their stories into the kiosk software.

Each version of the Digital Story Quilt technology brings new insights into what is possible with the technology and stretches my talents and those of my design teams. The coding work performed on quilt texts were used to define the characteristics of the various prototype technologies. At each stage of development, I continue to ask the questions of whether the Digital Story Quilt technology remains true to the quilters' tactics. I also examine whether the Digital Story Quilt creates agency as defined through creating a space for speaking oneself.

In the Digital Story Quilt project, I take the critical theory view described by Sullivan and Porter as the triumvirate framework for the quilt theory I am developing:

1. Cultural postmodernism of Foucault
2. Feminist theory of Lather
3. Postmodern practices of de Certeau and Heidegger

Thus the initial framework or digital quilt process map that I developed from Sullivan and Porter demonstrates the complexity of the project at hand (Figure 4):

PUBLIC
COMMUNITIES
-Quilters
-Subaltern voices
-Young people
-Corporations
-Families

PERSONAL
INSTIGATION
-Digital
communities
-Knowledge
management
-Cultural
memory
-Subaltern
voices
RESEARCHERS
-Involved
participant/
observer

-Grounded theory
-Etnographic research
-Literature review
-Rhetorical analysis

METHOD

THEORY

-Michel Foucault
-Michel de Certeau
-Patti Lather
-Martin Heidegger
-Helene Cixous
bell hooks

PRACTICE

Tactics for Agency
-Fragmentation
-Juxtaposition
-Condensation

PUBLIC POLICY
-Research
methodology
-Interstitial
methodology
-Organizational
culture change

OUTCOMES
-Invention
-Epistemology
-Practice
-Signification
-Situated
knowledge
-Local,
contingent
reflection and
analysis

Digital Quilt Process Map

Figure 4: Critical practices approach map (Sullivan & Porter 102)

The triumvirate framework and the initial quilt research map were applied to both

the analysis of the traditional fabric quilt and the Digital Story Quilt technology, in order

to draw the analogy between the fabric quilts and hypertextual spaces and their

operations. The various spheres of influence inherent in each of the "theory" patches

form the light yellow (or light gray) inner ring of the Digital Story Quilt. The structure of

the Digital Story Quilt theory map also details the relationships and tensions of the

analysis. Patches are related to those whose edges touch, defining relationships and

conversations. Patches directly across from each other – either in the yellow or pink

(darker gray) outer ring – provide tensions that bind the quilt together. Thus, power and

76

knowledge, structure and aesthetics, identity, and communities, define the cultural circuit

of the Digital Story Quilt's operation (Figure 5).
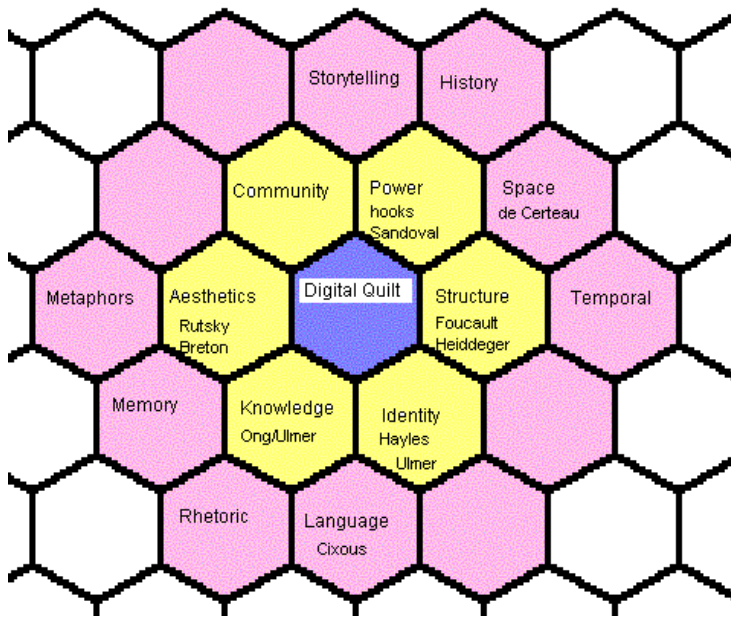
Figure 5: Theory map developed at the beginning of my research.

Stage 1: Exploring Rhetorical Dimensions

In developing the Digital Story Quilt technology, I have used texts – of quilting

poems, interviews with quilters, and quilting stories – to tease out quilting tactics that

might suggest an approach to resistive tactics.

My initial research using Strauss' methodology of coding and quilt texts has been

fruitful in further defining the interstitial methodology described above. I used the book

Words and Quilt, a Selection of Quilt Poems by Felicia Mitchell as the starting point for

my coding of the data.

I used the "theoretical" codes identified in the Digital Story Quilt theory map as category codes: aesthetics, community, identity, knowledge, structure, power – and then within these codes identified whether there was a strategy, interaction, consequence or condition. I also layered the six theoretical codes with my previously identified tactics of the quilt methodology – fragmentation, condensation, and juxtaposition -- as defined below:

Fragmentation: Deals with the fabric of time and space. In the dailiness of women's lives, women are continually interrupted. Quilting, as are many other activities, is pieced into available time and show less a pattern of linear development and more of a repetitive, cumulative, cyclical structure. Fragmentation deals with seizing the moment. Fragmentation also deals with space – the *femmage* of tearing and piecing seemingly disparate elements to create a necessary space in what seems to be whole. Fragmentation deals with the disruptive and destabilizing actions at the start of creation. Related ideas: Temporalization, Free-form signifier

Related codes from my initial analysis:
- Frugality/Salvaging/Thrifty
- Daring/Cunning/Stubbornness
- Patience/ Perseverance

Condensation: Deals with formulaic patterns of narrative. As a synecdoche by which a part stands in place of the whole, condensation also allows a symbolic stand-in/miniature to visually represent a larger concept. The condensation function of the patch acts as a genetic code, or meme that becomes the "portkey" to deeper, subterranean narratives. Related ideas: Density

Related codes from my initial analysis:
- Repeatability/Pattern
- Particularity
- Layering
- Memory/Memoria

Juxtaposition: Deals with the intertextual, polyvocality of piecing. Juxtaposition brings individual voices and stories together into a mosaic by jostling them together in the piecing function. Juxtaposition forces the quilt worker to shift attention from gazing at the quilt pattern to finding meaning for herself within the quilt. It displaces the idea of

the fixed position and opens up the display to possibilities from local and situated knowledge. Related ideas: Complexity, Ambiguity, Topography/Geography, Nonlinear,

Related codes from my initial analysis:
- Layering

I also needed to identify agency within the quilt texts. On the one hand, these tactics – fragmentation, juxtaposition, and condensation – are tactics of agency. I'm defining agency here as:

> **Agency: (Webster) 1: The capacity, condition, or state of acting or of exerting power:** OPERATION 2: a person or thing through which power is exerted or an end is achieved: INSTRUMENTALITY 3: a. the office or function of an agent b: the relationship between a principal and his agent 4: an establishment engaged in doing business for another 5: an administrative division

But I can also rearrange some of my newfound codes under this category:

- Frugality/Salvaging/Thrifty
- Patience/Perserverance
- Daring/Cunning/Stubbornness

A poem by Felicia Mitchell is used below to demonstrate the coding technique I've used for the quilt texts (56) (Figure 6):

> **How to Read a Quilt** [KNOWLEDGE: Strategies. Quilt as text.]
> **Stand back and note geometry of line** [POWER: As observer, detached, taking notes/STRUCTURE: Precise, grid-like]
> **Get a feel for angles and corners** [STRUCTURE: Sharp]
> **As you comprehend symmetry, asymmetry.** [POWER: Strategies.Understanding][AESTHETICS: Juxtaposition. Balance, Imbalance]

Scan patterns of color, the top, the bottom, [POWER: Strategies, visual dissections]

The way small pieces fold into a fit. [STRUCTURE: Precision, boundaries]

Read from edge to center, diagonally, [KNOWLEDGE: Strategies]

Horizontally, in circles and backwards, [POWER: Panoptic gaze]

Till your mind is captured by the small print [KNOWLEDGE: Strategies: Small, close read]

And you stand closer to decipher the quilting. [POWER: Strategies. Details are coded to force closer view]

Swirls, hearts, octagons, triangles –

And more, the alphabet hieroglyphic. [KNOWLEDGE: Coded shapes, pictograms with deeper meaning]

There is no syntax, only the meaning each [STRUCTURE: Holistic reading of all components]

Combination of cloth, thread, and needle yields. [KNOWLEDGE: Juxtaposition of all elements together; "yields" not a violent taking, but a giving]

An hourglass becomes a martingale; [KNOWLEDGE: Interaction. Juxtaposition. Allows for different way of seeing, knowing.; Studied gaze yields different readings of quilt text]

An embroidered semi-circle, the moon.

The unsighted can read with deft fingers, [KNOWLEDGE: Doesn't require visual, tactile contact yields other meanings; Seeing hinders ability to read quilt as a tactile experience.]

Make out a message with a sweeping touch

To feel a knot or silk, wool, cotton, [KNOWLEDGE: Strategies. Tactile]

the way the pieces merge and emerge, [AESTHETICS: Interactions. Juxtaposition, Something comes out of proximity.]

Themes connect and transform as [KNOWLEDGE: Consequences. Connection, transformation]

80

Families are united, children born, [COMMUNITY: Consequences. Quilt pieces bring together family patches.]

The dead saluted and put to rest. [COMMUNITY: Consequences. Continuing timelines through connected themes of life, death, birth, family. Dead 'saluted' are honored through place in the quilt themes, resting in pattern that continues.]

Everyone can read between the lines [KNOWLEDGE: Strategies. Available to anyone. In the in-between, interstitials.]

The promise of warm nights, clear mornings. [KNOWLEDGE: Consequences. Comfort, visibility.]

Figure 6. Using Strauss' grounded theory methodology, I code the words, phrases and evoked feelings within Mitchell's poem.

My second data set was interviews from The Alliance for American Quilts/The Center for the Quilt S.O.S. – Save Our Stories, (http://www.centerforthequilt.org/qsos/). Hundreds of interviews have been conducted with quilters across the country about their practices. While I used the quilt codes of fragmentation, juxtaposition, condensation, and the axial "theoretical" codes of identity, community, aesthetics, etc., I was looking for instances of agency as defined above. Here are some fragments from that coding and my analysis of interviewee Judy Dales, a quilter at the International Quilt Festival in Houston, on 10/22/1999. The interview was conducted by Le Rowell (Tape Number 2).

> Dales: And I think one of the functions of this quilt was to see how far I could take the machine curved piecing, and this is about as far as I want to take it. [laughs]. This kind of represents the pinnacle to me. … So this was a challenge quilt really, and I managed to get through it with a lot of

complaining, but you know these personal goals you set for yourself are one of the things, I think, make quilting so rewarding. And this was definitely a personal goal to quilt. (2)

Through aesthetics, quilters are able to set personal goals that challenge and stretch their capacity. It allows them to push against limits and boundaries. Quilting is making a commitment.

Dales: When I went off to college, I was the youngest of six children. My family runs a hotel in Vermont, and by the time they got around to sending off the sixth child, nobody paid much attention. I packed my own bags. I got myself to college.

Quilters demonstrate agency in pre-quilt years through their actions?

Dales: It had a beautiful chintz fabric on the back, and it was sort of starting to shred so I just ripped it off and got rid of that part. And nobody in my family knew that I had this quilt. Nobody noticed that I took it away.

Quilters are willing to fragment, discard parts. Cunning and secretive.

Dales: And my husband is a workaholic, so when he would come home from work all he wanted to do was sleep late and take a nap and have a quiet weekend. And I used to think, 'Let's go somewhere; let's do something.' And then I discovered quilting….And then my husband discovered that there was a down side to all of this and that I was no

82

longer staying at home. Now he's staying at home and I'm traipsing around the world.

Quilting is a discipline, a practice that allows one to travel the geography in one's lap. Quilting action brings one's focus in, but eventually takes one outside – mentally and physically.

Dales talks of her family as her primary focus, but says that her other passion – quilting – "prevented me from being a door mat." She says "I think if a woman doesn't have something she truly cares about; it's very easy to make yourself too accessible. And I always said, 'No, I can't do that now,' or 'Do it yourself, I'm busy.' And I think that's a good thing."

> Dales: The other thing I think that's significant and I'm sure you'll find many quilters telling you this. The old stereotype of the husband going off to work, growing, becoming better, more sophisticated, and little wifey sitting at home stagnant, that has certainly not been the case in my marriage because I'm the one that's done the most changing and the most growing. And my husband has had to accommodate himself to that. I think I'm very lucky that I have a husband who could do that or who was willing to do that. I don't think quilting is necessarily good for marriage. [laughs].

Dales refers to the agency of the quilter and quilting as a disruptive technology, one that displaces "traditional" women's roles and ways of being and allows for her to grow.

These fragments help to highlight some of the conditions and strategies of agency in the quilt and of the quilter's tactics. Dales talks of how the quilt itself has agency. She personifies her quilt and talks of its travels around the world and the quilt as having its own destiny. Quilting is about taking a stand, creating space for oneself, and the ability to act in the face of barriers and limits. So the quilting action is first an individual one, a discipline that allows one to focus on one's situated knowledge. Then it is a social action that involves community through quilting bees or as the quilter and the quilt travel with their story around the world. Both the quilter and the quilt can have agency. The quilt acts as the quilter's agent in the world, continuing her story and building its own connections and community. This quilt agency, think of the AIDS quilt, speaks to the operation and instrumentality of the Digital Story Quilt technology through fragmentation, condensation, and juxtaposition.

From this analysis, I developed additional generative questions:

1. What are identified strategies and tactics of resistance for agency in a technologized environment? I am most familiar with terrorism as a strategy for resistance, but what are its characteristics? What other strategies and tactics are available?

2. What would make a quilt methodology different? Go back through the codes and identify those that I think are unique to quilts.

3. Recognizing the quilt as a technology, does not mean it is a neutral tool. It can be wielded for many uses and abuses. How might the quilt's "interstitial methodology" be appropriated by the discourses? How might marginalized voices be subverted using the Digital Story Quilt methodology?

The distinctive features of the quilt are due to the economy enforced on it by the constraints on its creators: fragmentation, condensation, and juxtaposition.

Fragmentation—Of the Fabric of Time and Space

Fragmentation deals with seizing the moment and notions of manipulating time. Fragmentation represents the disruptive and destabilizing actions at the start of creation. Fragmentation also deals with space – the *femmage* of tearing and piecing seemingly disparate elements to create a necessary space in what appears to be whole. Miriam Shapiro defines femmage as a play on collage and assemblage that is women's artistic process of collecting and joining seemingly disparate elements into a functional whole (qtd. in Bach 146).

Examples of words and phrases from the poem "Repairing the Heirloom" by Deborah Browning include:

- Scraps of fabric
- In the patchwork
- The apron itself cut from the faded dress

85

- Winters passed to the scrape of scissors trimming those rectangles

In the dailiness of women's lives, women are continually interrupted. Quilting, as are many other activities, is pieced into available time and show less a pattern of linear development and more of a repetitive, cumulative, cyclical structure. The process of quilting is one that has been characterized as *femmage*, the feminine equivalent of *bricolage,* says Turner (Elsley 13). *Femmage* is distinguished from *bricolage* in its aesthetic function of connection and relationships. (Elsley 13).

This fragmented method of work allows us to take the patterns women create and the meanings women invent, and learn from them.

Condensation – Formulaic Patterns of Narrative

The fabric patch, unsecured from its original use, becomes a synecdoche by which a part stands in place of the whole. The condensation of the synecdoche makes the visual denser and miniaturizes the story of the cloth from which the patch originated. In other words, the patch becomes the decorative container, the relay to everyday narratives.

Condensation, or miniaturization, also occurs at the level of the individual or family unit. These inward-turning histories, pasts that others are not allowed to read, says de Certeau, are like stories held in reserve (108). These life stories remain in an enigmatic state, until they are joined into the metanarrative of the quilt, to become symbolizations of habitable, intimate spaces.

Examples of words and phrases from the poem, "Repairing the Heirloom" by Deborah Browning include (26):

- Her family's clothes,
  The work of her hands, for years
  Were conserved.

Juxtaposition – The Intertextual, Polyvocality of Piecing

These narrative patches are analogous to de Certeau's symbolizing kernels. When juxtaposed with other patches, de Certeau says, the resulting discourse creates "a second, poetic geography on top of the geography of the literal, forbidden or permitted meaning" where they form a symbolic whole (102). The quilt, as Lather describes, is a move "toward a mosaic, multilayered text designed to interrupt the reductiveness of the restricted economies of representation" ("Multilayered Text" 234). The creation of the quilt unravels connecting threads, juxtaposing narratives, forcing the viewer to shift attention from gazing at the quilt pattern to finding meaning for themselves within the quilt text.

This tactic mimics the actions of montage, the aesthetic that creates two paths – one toward the mechanistic, industrial age assembly of mass production; the other linked to a modernist aesthetic that creates fragmentation, disorientation, and insurgent relinking of symbology.

Examples of words and phrases from the poem "Repairing the Heirloom" by Deborah Browning include (26):

- I trimmed a scrap of fabric from my old sundress,
  Appliqued it over the threadbare original
  Bright red against worn calico
- My stitches met hers

As Haraway describes, "Out of each of these nodes or stem cells, sticky threads lead to every nook and cranny of the world" (129). Each patch becomes, as Haraway describes,

> …a knot of knowledge-making practices, industry, and commerce, popular culture, social struggles, psychoanalytic formations, bodily histories, human and nonhuman actions, local and global flows, inherited narratives, new stories, syncretic technical/cultural processes, and more. (129)

If we map what we learn, connecting one meaning to another, we begin to lay out a different way of seeing reality (Aptheker 39).

Using these three tactics in concert, the quilter creates room for social differences, for local and situated knowledge and for the agency that resituates these as a challenge to objectified notions of knowledge. In its simplicity, the quilt epistemology allows for individual voices to interact in a communal space, defining what Bakhtin once called "an eternal harmony of unmerged voices" (Tanaka 264).

My goal in developing the interstitial methodology is not to resurrect folklore as the antithesis to discourse, but to have situated knowledge take its place between the discourses in the cracks and crevasses in the power grid, to "displace," not erase. Perhaps, this praxis may reinvest cultural memory and history with the particular and the marginalized. Perhaps it may add layers to the interstitial using the depth of personal narrative and the passion of everyday life as a focal practice for postmodern survival.

88

Stage 2: Reconstructive Anthropology – Be the Quilter

I was so excited to be taking my first quilt class. I had been admiring quilts at the

Virginia Highlands Festival contest in the mountains of southwest Virginia for several

years and had been so inspired by the creative use of design, color, and technique. These

innovative free-form quilts, as well as traditional designs, showed an understanding of the

rules of quilting. Yet they also showed an improvisational skill through the use of color,

design, and finish. I was eager to get started.

I've told my classmates that I am learning how to quilt to apply my learned skills

to creating a digital interface. They all seem genuinely interested in the project. My

instructor's name was Nancy. She said she was a former elementary teacher and first-

grade was her favorite. She's been quilting for over 30 years.

Figure 7. The fabric I selected for my first quilt had a bright, yellow background with African women in the foreground.

I had picked the fabric before I got the instructions and materials list for the class.

As I scanned bolts and bolts of fabric arranged in color blocks, the bright yellow

background of the figures caught my eye. The African women, wearing brightly

patterned fabrics themselves, danced, walked with children, and lifted infants to the sky. I

imagined that some were in fighting stance, while others prayed. Yes, these were the

women that I wanted to grace the top of my first quilt (Figure 7).

I bought matching red, green, and blue fabrics. The red outlined little huts in a

deeper red that faded to a tone-on-tone pattern when you stood back far enough. The red

came to symbolize the blood of the village. The green, with small beige circles, came to

symbolize land. The blue, with light blue wavy lines, represented water. These elemental symbols of life, growth, nourishment, and protection came to represent the homeland of the African women, the land they nurtured and tended and that in turn sustained them and their communities. For me, the women represented my mother, my sisters, my girlfriends, my mentors, and my angels that had guided me, protected me, and showed me the way to survive and thrive in my life. They showed me in various stages of my own life – as mother, as dancer, as protector.

I bought yards and yards, thinking that I wanted to make three quilts of the same fabrics, one for each of my children. I laughed. Here I hadn't started one yet, and I was already planning for two more.

As I found out the beginning quilting class, I was taking was making a tabletopper – a small 20 x 20 inch sampler of four squares – not a quilt (Figure 8). The African fabric that I purchased won't work with the small patches needed for the rail design we are working on today. And the design called for four classic quilt patterns using different techniques – St. Louis Block, Four in Nine Patch, Hole in the Barn Door, and Sweetheart Block. So I picked out some fat quarters as it called for in the materials list. I picked a bold red, orange, brown, and tan floral batik pattern like poppies, along with another African print of black and beige, a mossy green, and plain beige. None had the calico, floral designs of more traditional quilting prints. But even in this beginning class, I had my own idea of what my quilt should look like and it was awash in attitude.

Figure 8. The completed tabletopper quilt, a small sampler of four traditional quilt designs.

We're learning about tools today so we know what to purchase for class next week. I've often looked at the grids, rulers, and templates in fabric stores, and now I understand a bit more about the precision required to do even the simplest of these patch designs. "Accuracy is key," says my teacher. As I attempt to stitch a consistent one-quarter inch seam, I see that this is going to be challenging. I use my yoga breath to relax and regroup. Within the first 30-minutes of class, I've had to use the seam ripper that I purchased for the class. I've been sewing for probably 30 years and never had a seam

ripper. In just 30 minutes, I see that for some types of quilting work, the seam ripper will be critical. So out go the stitches in my strip patch. I iron out the four patches I've created, then piece them together, trying out the combination of directions to see which will work best.

I'm frustrated as the edges don't match up the way they should. Georgia, the older woman next to me leans over. "Mine didn't match up either," she confesses. "I just stretched the fabric a bit to make it work."

I see her solution works if I pin from the two ends of the piece in towards the middle, tugging to make it work. I'm fairly pleased with the results of this first patch. Even though I have not achieved the precision of some of the quilts I've admired, I've improvised a bit to make it work, both in my fabric selections and how I compose them and in the methods I use to achieve my results. Improvisation is a critical aesthetic in the design of African-American quilts, but I realize that I've got to learn the basics of quilting before I can improvise and piece on the fly.

I rebel against these more conventional American patterns, even while I enjoy their preciseness. I like the imperfections of the strip quilts and other patterns of African-American quilters I've examined. I enjoy the freedom of creating a design, not quite sure how it will turn out, but making it work.

Key characteristics learned thus far: precision, improvisation, and especially humility, now defined as attitude tempered by discipline.

The African women were still in my mind as I completed my first class. Since I wanted to preserve the women, I had to find a design that allowed for them to remain

93

intact, with the complementary fabrics around them. I showed my instructor the original

piece of fabric that I wanted to work with to get her suggestions for creating a quilt. Since

the figures of the African women will be medallions centered in a larger design, I had to

work from the size of the final medallions to create a design. A final square of 6 inches or

6 and a half inches will work, I thought. My teacher sent me off to look at some books to

get some ideas for a design. I thumbed through several, taking down their titles to

examine them further after I ordered them online. I also wanted to return to some of the

African-American quilt books that I have at home. I really liked the idea of bringing

some of the African aesthetics of design into this African-themed piece. So the idea of

using a strip technique was appealing.

I played around with my African fabric and leafed through *Signs and Symbols:*

African Images in African American Quilts by Maude Southwell Wahlman (Tinwood

Books, 2001) for some ideas. I really liked a strip design that looks like a Kente cloth

design. Wahlman suggests that several traits distinguish African American quilts from the

Anglo-American tradition: an emphasis on 1) vertical strips, 2) bright colors, 3) large

designs, 4) asymmetry, 5) improvisation, 6) multiple patterning, and 7) symbolic forms

(7). While Wahlman's ideas may not be all that African-American quilting can be, the

visuals channel an African aesthetic that I desire for my quilt as my fabric selection and

feelings about the design already confirmed an African design tradition. I got some blank

paper to sketch out the idea. I resisted using the grid paper I bought, even though

eventually I realize I will probably have to transfer the design to something more formal

in order to get the exact measurements down. I liked the idea of having the orange red as

one long strip through the design. I played around with diamond, handprints appliquéd, and finally settled on a simpler strip patch to frame the medallions. I used my daughter's colored markers to color key the design and when I'm done, the design looked like the Kente cloth idea I was trying to achieve.

After measuring and making calculations in class the next week based on my design, my teacher sent me home suggesting that I cut out pieces as I envisioned them, piece them together and examine the result.

From January 12, 2005, until March 19, 2005 I worked on and completed the tabletopper and the African women quilt. But the final quilt does not look like my original sketch. Each piece presented its own challenges and insights.

In the tabletop design, I had not purchased a light fabric as called for in one of the blocks. I had picked out a batik I thought might work at the quilt shop right before class. That bit of serendipity added a bright element to the design that had been missing. On the Sweetheart Block, we were to practice different appliqué techniques. I couldn't find a satin stitch on my new sewing machine, even in the instruction booklet. So I tried out a variety of decorative stitches on a scrap then settled on a stitch that looks like a string of pearls. The balls mirror the dots that are also prominent in the African cloth and the bright batik I had found, carrying that theme into the stitching and adding a bit of textural interest. Improvisation became one of the key characteristics of quilting that I used, even within the traditional patch designs. In the moment, I came up with creative solutions that made the piece stronger in the end.

95

In the African women quilt, I changed the size of the color blocks and found an additional African symbol fabric to use in between the larger strips, rather than the orange-red hut fabric I originally had picked. The bold red diamonds against a black background frame each of the strips added an additional strong graphic element to the design (Figure 9).

Figure 9. The completed African women quilt made in my first quilt class.

I faced additional challenges as I sought to back, quilt, and bind the design. Each solution required improvisation, working with and against traditional methods. It also required patience, to be willing to wait on the inspiration coming forth from the design, rather than forcing a solution onto the fabric.

Out of these two quilt projects, I experienced fragmentation as a tactic as I attempted to fit my quilting activities into my evening hours with my children. My quilting was constantly interrupted by the dailiness of life. Once, when I pulled out my machine, my oldest daughter pulled out her scrap bag and began cutting and piecing a quilt top of her own. Her fabric finally overwhelmed my fabrics on the table, so I put aside my quilt and helped her complete the design on the table. My quilting activities were constantly juxtaposed against other activities and ideas as my children offered their own thoughts on how I should proceed.

I identified an additional quilting tactic, improvisation, as I worked to find solutions throughout the construction of the two projects. As I thought about how improvisation came to be played out in each of the designs, I found that it was different from the fragmentation of time I'd identified earlier. Instead of time being fractured, with improvisation time is pierced with insight, with creativity, with just the right suggestion at the right time that forced the projects to go a different direction.

Improvisation – Time Pierced with a Stitch

This tactical operation, improvisation, seizes the advantage of the moment to piece together a discourse. Leon suggests that improvisation in quilt-making comes from

an African-American aesthetic that favors individualism and creativity (71). The artist, says Leon, works within prescribed boundaries that both regulate and yield to the creative process. In the Digital Story Quilt *kairos,* or a break in time, characterizes the improvisational move. In the moment as the digital quilt top is composed, the writer/reader penetrates the surface of the narratives and is virally infected with remnants of subaltern voices.

Endurance – A Memorial that Stands Through Time

Dailiness is by definition never a conclusion, always a process (Aptheker 44). "In their form," says literary critic Suzanne Juhasz, "women's lives tend to be like the stories that they tell: they show less a pattern of linear development towards some clear goal than one repetitive, cumulative, cyclical structure" (qtd. in Aptheker 44). As I worked on my two quilts, I realized that quilting was a commitment. Quilt projects are typically of a long duration, lasting weeks, months, or sometimes years. Sometimes quilt tops are designed by one generation, yet quilted into its traditional backing by another generation of hands. In this temporal mode, quilt projects are usually in various stages of completion. Before I had finished the two quilts in the class, I had already purchased fabric for two others and was thinking of designs that might use the scraps from the projects at hand. Thus, the quilting activity becomes woven into the in-between of other daily activities, becoming a meditative outlet for creative expression. Certainly, quilts are considered heirlooms that connect one generation to another. The attention and care that

98

goes into the quilt creation is enjoyed by more than the creator and endures long after the

creator has died.

This Crazy-Quilt World

Through quilt texts, women use their tactics – of fragmentation, condensation,

improvisation, endurance, and juxtaposition – to create a space that expands their

domestic rhetoric into a public realm. These five tactics define what I call an interstitial

methodology:

- *Fragmentation* calls for tearing apart that which is or is seemingly whole into pieces to create a liminal space both mentally and physically. Quilters use fragmentation in tearing apart whole cloth and in the fragmentation of time to achieve the time-consuming quilting act.

- *Condensation* calls for the reduction of time and ideas to appropriated iconography or the synecdoche of patterns and stories embedded in each intimate scrap of clothing.

- *Juxtaposition* calls for tactics, fragments, and condensation to work together to effect oppositional social movements. Juxtaposition also produces a destabilizing force upon aggregated representations.

- *Improvisation* calls for *kairos* the right break in time to reveal the right action in the moment. This action might appear as insight into new directions or a revelation of the larger design.

- *Endurance* calls for the cyclical time experienced in women's narratives. Quilters engage in the quilting activity over time, requiring a commitment and discipline to complete projects that may take years. In addition, the endurance tactic speaks to the quilter and her work as it outlives her and travels to future generations.

Each of the five quilting tactics will be incorporated into the creation of the Digital Story

Quilt technology. Each defines a unique way of working with what one is given in life to

create a story that contributes to the self and to others. As my quilting skills develop, the

99

technology will be enriched by this intimate, experiential connection to quilters past and present.

Case Study: The Quilts of Gee's Bend

For me, the quilts of the women of Gee's Bend speak of the tactics I've summarized in my research. For these women, defying the times, circumstance, and geography, stitched a means to speak their voice beyond the grave to future generations. Today, quilts from these women travel the country and are nationally acclaimed as contemporary pieces of art – valued for their artistry and coveted for their unique style.

A remote, black community in Wilcox County, Alabama, Gee's Bend women create quilts from the early twentieth century to the present. For more than a century, the unique geography of this inland island surrounded by the Alabama River on three sides, isolated and fostered the quilting traditions of this small community. Tucked in a hairpin turn of the river, Gee's Bend is a remote town of about 750 residents in a five by seven mile area. Almost all of its residents are African American. The quilting tradition there dates back to the mid 1800s and the slave ancestors on the Pettway plantation. The geographic isolation and poverty resulted in a distinct quilt tradition most noted for its strip-style quilting and its lack of influence by outside styles or patterns ("Our Quilts" 49).

In Gee's Bend, the role of family relationships and friendships created a strong communal aesthetic that illustrates the tremendous range of expression the quilters achieved with a limited choice of materials and the most elemental geometric forms.

These quilters demonstrate individual creative visions within restrictions. In *Gee's Bend: The Architecture of the Quilt,* editors Paul Arnett, Joanne Cubb and Eugene W. Metcalf, Jr. explain that the built environment became inspiration for the quilters' aesthetic style. Architectural structures in and around their environment create fragmented views of their world that carry through in their improvisational designs (7). The Quilts of Gee's Bend web site states that in earlier years, the newspaper- and magazine-collages used for insulation on the inside walls of homes in the rural American South provided one of the primary influence for the Gee's Bend quilt aesthetic. Using rectangular blocks, bright, unconventional colors and compositions, the women of Gee's Bend, as Alvia Wardlaw comments, have managed to "harness an incredible freedom."

> Not in a grand manner – as in conquering the Himilayas or Kilimanjaro – but in the very real struggle for a decent and rewarding life. From this struggle emerge a resilience and an ascension of spirit that Du Bois refers to as "spiritual striving." (18)

These women composed in their heads, bringing together scraps and meager discards to create dynamic, improvisational compositions. William Arnett and Paul Arnett say these women synthesized traditions to create a style all their own. "In the Gee's Bend area, when a tradition aligned with strips, strings, quilt 'backs,' and abstract work clothes collided with an equally old American practice of repeating complex geometries strangely simple and cleverly direct forms emerged – forms uncommon to either tradition" (45). Their minimalist compositions as Arnett and Arnett

note, "coexist with the African American preference for the asymmetrical, the syncopated, and the dissonant" (45)

The women of Gee's Bend, says Wardlaw, are not "linear in their behavior and movements, but expand from a centered and anchored self, moving in several directions at once, and always with grace" (15). Their quilts, while rooted in the Gee's Bend tradition, now travel the world appearing in such notable museums as the Corcoran Museum of Art in Washington, D.C., The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, and the Orlando Museum of Art in Orlando, Fla.

While the pieced-quilt tradition, as Arnett and Arnett note, is an art of limitations, the women of Gee's Bend have loosed these constraints. Their work is "challenges collectively pursued by individuals" – the essence of the Gee's Bend tradition (47). A "marvel of memory, imagination, and live performance," the Gee's Bend quilts embody the narrative performance tactics of the Digital Story Quilt methodology.

CHAPTER 4   FINDINGS

The ideas for the Digital Story Quilt coalesced in my first semester of graduate

school. The course work generated ideas on how to do research differently through an

interface design that forces a synergy between the different ways of knowing – the

scientific and the poetic.

The fabric quilt came to mind as a connective structure that might work as a

possible interface design. Alan Kay suggests that the emphasis on images bypasses the

logics of words and paragraphs that have an *a priori* order in which they should be

understood (202). Thus, someone coming into this quilt patchwork interface, with its

focus on images and icons and fragments, has no immediate strategy for solving it. This

visual perplexity allows users to generate their own continuities as a connective logic

draws the reader from patch to patch. Through the active simulator of the Digital Story

Quilt, the user tries out and compares a multitude of points of view.

The Digital Story Quilt becomes a methodology for thinking and knowledge

creation in a digital world. Using the patchwork metaphor as the basis for a web

interface, the Digital Story Quilt creates a visual narrative mapping device, a digital

network of a community's stories. Individual patches, which represent the gateway to the

stories of an individual, are pieced together into a larger quilt design, creating a visual

space that yields the voices of its creators at the click of a mouse.

The Digital Story Quilt provides users with a way to change knowledge creation

and writing. The technology denies the scientific gaze and the manner of historical

production by providing a means of autoethnography. In contrast to history, the poetic and emotional writing of the quilt is an evocative means of surfacing knowledge of social networks.

Creating the Digital Story Quilt Patch

The Digital Story Quilt project uses a condensed version of Ulmer's mystory as a writer/reader's patch on the digital quilt. The mystory is a pedagogical genre Ulmer introduced in *Teletheory: Grammatology in the Age of Video*. He explains the form is his response to a suggestion "that if history had been invented in the twentieth century rather than the nineteenth, it would be quite different, reflecting a different science and a different aesthetic: not positivism but quantum relativity; not realism but surrealism" ("Internet Invention" 5).

Ulmer states that the feeling of this method, in design or invention, will be close to that of the double bind or paradoxes of myth – a holding together of what does not "fit," enacted by an "anyone" (person or discipline) that is "a stranger to itself, foreign to itself" ("Heuretics" 31). As Ulmer suggests, the mystory as a method of televisual memory, provides a destabilization required to see and hear the world differently ("Heuretics" 95). This new writing method, as described by Ulmer, organizes information by means of the writer's specific position in the time and space of a culture. It may even be described as autoethnographic, a way of knowing in a digital age.

The mystory provides access to a decentered space with neither subjectivity, nor objectivity either. It is a genre that places history in a dialectic with individual stories or

104

"distributed" memories. Western culture derived from Aristotle creates a world view that seeks to organize and divide, compartmentalize, and name. Where positivism stresses hypothesis testing as the means to knowledge development, the mystory portrays visual exploration as a process of invention.

Ulmer believes in electracy, where the focus is on the image, not the word. Feelings provide an express route to openness, possibility, and another layer of expression. The mystory uses collage and juxtaposition to shift the relationships between the "knower" and the "known," power, objectivity, reflexivity, and the subject.

Ulmer's methodology shifts the routes inscribing logical relations from the deductive and inductive modes of traditional rhetoric. An electrate state of mind includes a tolerance for nonutilitarian, inefficient, irrelevant events, and experiences. Says Ulmer "This difference in 'logics' is the point of departure for imagining what a new rhetoric will do that does not argue but that replaces the logic governing argumentative writing with associational networks" ("Heuretics" 18). Ulmer states that this new electronic logic calls for conductive logic, a movement from "thing" to "thing." This electronic path of inference is called "conduction" and its operations show that "chance" has its own order that makes "opposition" thinkable in another way – a new gesture ("Heuretics" 195).

In the mystory, the writer/reader first tears apart the whole cloth of their lives, seeking the *punctum*, the experiences that provide an "emotional sting." The mystory text begins with those moments that define the crisis in question, a turning point in the person's life (qtd. in Denzin 2002). Ulmer suggests the following starting point:

105

The sting of memory locates the moment, the beginning. Once located,

this moment is dramatically described, fashioned into a text to be

performed. This moment is then surrounded by those cultural

representations and voices that define the experience in question. (qtd. in

Denzin 209)

Ulmer uses the *quadripodes* or the squares of the family, school, entertainment and

discipline to inform what he calls his popcycle or the discourses articulating the

Geschlecht of culture. In the diagram below, I've oriented the squares to create dynamic

triangles that point toward increasingly smaller, condensed mystorological forms that

stand as signifiers for the popcycle. In this figure, the successively smaller squares

represent the condensed space in which the Digital Story Quilt patch operates (Figure

10).

Ulmer's Mystory or The Seeing "I"

Family

Choral Word
or
"Rock of my
Interpellation"

Discipline

School

Entertainment

Heraldic Emblem
Shortcut or mnemonic device
that symbolically captures
the popcycle quadrants.

Mise en Abyme
The "abyss"-- always
generating different
dimensions
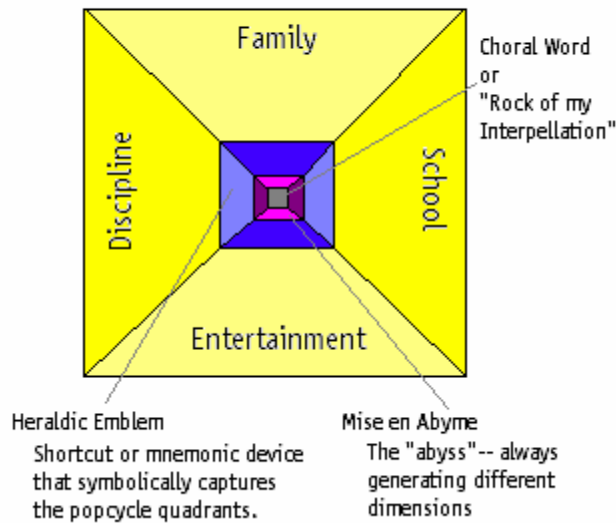
Figure 10. I've redesigned the quadripodes of Ulmer's popcycle into increasingly condensed forms as the schema draws toward the center of the "seeing I."

As one gazes deeper into the God's eye design, the story moves from a seemingly whole form to the heraldic emblem of pictures and symbols. The writer/reader examines the continually condensed forms, ultimately discovering the choral word or signifier that drives the tuning of the quadripodes.

Tuning – or shifting the method of viewing – makes the cognitive schema of the popcycle dynamic. Through collage, tuning dislodges and deconstructs the schema, freeing its symbolic signifiers and traditional associations to generate unexpected patterns and logics. Unpredictability, according to Ulmer, is where one finds invention or the creation of knowledge.

Using four themes of family, entertainment, discipline, and community, writers seek the punctum or emotional sting in each of these themes as the touchstone from

107

which to generate intimate narratives. These narratives use digital images and text fragments in a collage-like fashion to compose a mosaic of one's life along the four themes. Ulmer suggests that by combining these four narratives, one should be able to discern one's "image of wide scope" or the guiding icon common to each theme. This image of wide scope is the core, the choral word, that stands as the driver for the actions of one's life.

This method is what Ulmer coins *chorography*. *Chora* is the sacred nature of specific places. Chorography bypasses the typical organization of things and allows for access to a different place. In chorography, the construction of a core image replaces the creation and resolution of enigmas and enthymemes as the means for managing curiosity at the level of composition (Heuretics 202). Says Ulmer,

> In subordinating mystery to memory, and arguments to paradigms, chorography promises something more than just an alternative to concept formation as a way to organize data into meaningful sets. It promises also to engage the users' premises in the process of learning, opening a mutually transforming circuit between judgment and theory, and hence to affect not only the institutional practices of the apparatus but human subjectivation as well. (Heuretics 202)

The mystory is fragmented, passionate, poignant, like an ecriture feminine or feminine writing. Helene Cixous describes ecriture feminine as "writing the body," a generative style that births possibilities and pathways that lead writers/readers into new

directions (2039). This writing does not lead to conclusions, closures, and endings, but draws the writer/reader on a meandering path that fosters self-expression. Thus, writing the woman's body gives birth to the voice within each of us as we learn from writing that nourishes us within its womb.

in my dream, i've lost my way. huge towers of discourse weigh deep, heavy, big-word laden branches down toward the warm earth. i'm running, but my brown arms and legs are scratched and bleeding from the branches as they punish me for not standing still, not taking root, not sending out leaves of new knowledge to block out the moon.

The codes of society's rules are inscribed on the body of the subject, to be performed on a world stage. The subject is acting out its roles through language inscribed through skin and on skin through clothing, jewelry, hair choices, makeup, and other cultural artifacts that signify.

i stand in the clearing, peering up at the dappled sunlight, trying to get my bearing. is it near time? is it time for me to stand and create a clearing for me? the heat penetrates my skin, oozing words and paragraphs cooling my skin. i stop, closing my eyes to the chatter of the trees crowding my thoughts telling me that only the mighty oak can stand.

To speak the body as Cixous encourages, is to recognize the skin-deep tattoos of societal norms, yet reach past them into the soul. To speak from the soul's depths denies cultural icons and stereotypes. It speaks the subject honestly. To speak the body may also mean to bring all the cultural artifacts that we have to bear to shape who we imagine

ourselves to be, reinscribing ourselves through rhetoric and dress, through talk originating from the soul and intimate, daily actions.

i lay on the mossy undergrowth and feel the pulse of the earth reaching up through my belly and with tender fingers catching and holding my heart, be beat, be beat, be beating.

Sing!

Writing the body is distinct from the patriarchal style of "writing the mind." In writing the mind, there is a quest for Truth and knowledge, logic, and arguments to arrive at a specific point of view. Traditional research and rhetoric leaves a distance, not an intimacy. In writing the mind, there is an end point, a conclusion, a closure.

the ground beneath me vibrates, shaking my innards to release them from self-imposed moorings, societal impositions, cultural catastrophes from which they hang, splayed and taunt until now. loosed, words and thoughts tumble from openings held tight by crossed legs, mixed signals, glass ceilings unseen until I've crashed against them and rebounded crying with pain.

Writing the body is antithetical to that which is analytical, categorical, dissected, cleansed, filtered, methodical, treated, Cartesianed, controlled, codified. Writing the body is writing that comes from the heart – bloody, life-enhancing, wild, death-defying, passionate, conductive, poetic, an opening – that leads me into a place that allows me, the reader, to generate meaning for myself. Writing the body is a giving, a risk of exposing one's self in writing in order to create intimacy with readers. My pains, my pleasures, and

the erotics of my thoughts contain stories that don't convince, but nourish one toward one's own truth.

Sing!

 Deep inside, a new life grows tethered by a tenuous lifeline to the armor of my words as they ease from my pores and spill to the ground, nourishing a new life-giving knowledge of me.

 My variation on Ulmer's mystory uses this style of ecriture feminine and pastiche to create an emotional, autoethnographic, multimedia narrative that provides access to a decentered space.

The Digital Story Quilt Patch

 The Digital Story Quilt takes Ulmer's mystory and uses it to create a cultural narrative that surfaces the underlying metaphors of an individual or a community. The Digital Story Quilt patch is a condensed form of Ulmer's mystory that creates fragmented mnemonic devices that capture Ulmer's popcycle quadrants. These fragments of fragments of stories, images, quotes, sound bites, and video become the deconstructed substance of the writer/reader's patch in the Digital Story Quilt (Figure 11).
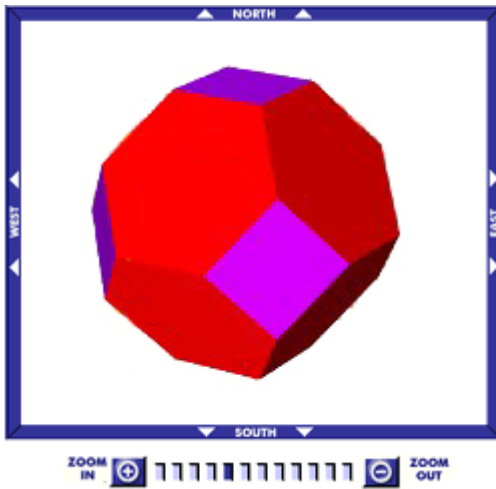
Figure 11. The three-dimensional writer/reader patch on the digital quilt.

Prior oral history and digital storytelling efforts depend on linearity – the fact that the user is aware of the story she wants to tell from a clear beginning to a finite end. On the other hand, the method of the Digital Story Quilt enables nonlinear authoring of a story. The user need not compose a story based on a linear narrative, but is able to combine fragments of multimedia content in Ulmer's collage-like fashion.

A writer first creates his or her digital story patch on the web, using multimedia files of fabric images, text, sound, video, or other digital images. The patch, a three-dimensional gem, is a polygon of six sides. Six themes – family, entertainment, nature, ancestry, discipline, and school – prompt the user to think about various aspects of his or her life. The user then selects fragments of memory and multimedia artifacts to represent these themes and composes a multilayered quilt patch that represents her voice, her memory, her history. Each theme – family, entertainment, nature, community, ancestors, and discipline – is represented on one of the six faces of the gem.

112

The Digital Story Quilt patch adds ancestors and nature as two new themes to

Ulmer's mystory structure. By way of the ancestor theme, writers/readers create links to

distant family history and a perspective that is multigenerational and perhaps

international. Through the nature theme, writers are encouraged to see connections to the

planet Earth, the environment, and the larger ecosystem of which they are a small part.

As Lefebvre argues, the social community's relation to the soil is one of the elements in

the make-up of repression ("Everyday Life" 149). Writers/readers examine their

relationship to the natural world so as to release natural resources from their use role.

On its top, the mystorological patch, is represented by a pattern, fabric, or image

that is a reminder of a special memory (Figure 12).

*Figure 12. Fabric, text, or other images may become the punctum or the relay on the top
face of the Digital Story Quilt patch.*

As described by Roland Barthes, this memory is the punctum, that which stings or pricks emotionally (qtd. in Ulmer "Invention" 44). This punctum becomes a relay into one of the six themes of the patch.

From the punctum of the face, the individual bolsters the patch with narrative, visual, auditory, and other multimedia artifacts. These artifacts illustrate the memory and form the batting of the quilt patch, the inside of the textile sandwich. The backing of the sandwich is the digital signature of the individual — an emblem — in the form of a quotation, symbol, haiku, or other condensed symbolic form. The six sides of the polygon are then composed to make a three-dimensional, multifaceted mystorological gem. Each face of the gem may be "clicked through" to reveal additional layers of the patch that yield multimedia artifacts that illustrate the story (Figure 13).

Figure 13. Each of the top polygons represents the top layer of the flattened quilt patch. The batting and backing layers lie below the face and can be clicked through to reveal additional multimedia data.

As Ulmer suggests, this collage-like, hypertextual form allows users to invent links and associations to content in other parts of their mystory. This connective logic denies the linearity and chronology of traditional historical narratives. By bypassing the logics of time and logos, the user focuses on imagery and invention, creating meaning through their hypertextual wanderings.

Beyond the Mystory Patch: The Digital Story Quilt

Individuals contribute their patches to the larger mosaic of the quilt top, creating a metanarrative that displaces a sense of fixed location in time or space (Figure 14).

Figure 14. The Digital Story Quilt "top" shows just one side of an individual's patch as it is juxtaposed against other patches.

This collective mystory of the community Digital Story Quilt realizes the deconstructive hypertext envisioned by Moulthrop. This space, as described by Derrida, is one in which "assemblage" suggests a bringing-together of "a structure of an interlacing, a weaving, or a web, which would allow the different threads and different lines of sense or force to separate again, as well as being ready to bind others together" (qtd. in Landow "Hypertext 2.0" 35).

Using a peer-to-peer network structure, the digital quilt interface "on the fly" pulls together individual patches from across a geographically dispersed network. The

116

resulting composite may be dynamically manipulated by the writer/reader to create

multiple arrangements of the quilt "faces." In the Digital Story Quilt, the user can select

the patches of others, using complex sort functions that can separate patches by theme,

date, geographic location, color, and other data (Figure 15).
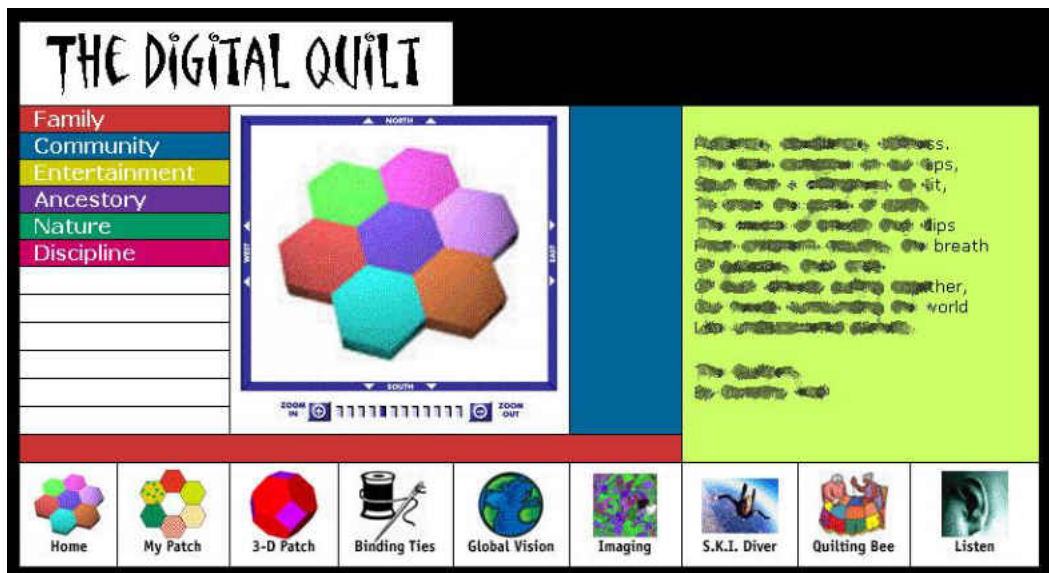
Figure 15. The bottom row of actions allows users to view the Digital Story Quilt in various configurations.

The Digital Story Quilt composing functions then allow the user to piece the individual

patches into a quilt top that can then be explored by the user.

The writer/reader then uses "threads" – digital hypertext links created by the

writer/reader – to stitch a path across the faces and into the depths of individual patches.

The resulting composition and reader's path is interpreted by the reader. Each

writer/reader that uses the Digital Story Quilt interface creates a unique stitched narrative

as he or she travels the topography at their fingertips.

The Digital Story Quilt enhances the storage and retrieval of these multimedia stories by presenting a visual field that can be manipulated by the user. Like a map, the quilt face creates a cultural topography that provides easy access to the stories of a family or a community. By using condensed, symbolic data in a familiar and comforting interface, the Digital Story Quilt face invites users to explore. Digital patches lead to the intimate nooks and cranny of everyday stories.

The Digital Story Quilt also answers Ulmer's question of how to use this new method of invention to solve community issues. Instead of a single mystory informing community issues, a community of mystories is used to search for common metaphors, themes and relays that point the direction to future work.

The Digital Story Quilt project uses narrative mapping as described by Mamber as a technology for poetic dwelling. Mamber speaks of narrative mapping as an attempt to visually represent events that unfold over time. A visual information space is constructed that provides a formulation of complex activities. The four purposes of narrative mapping are:

1. *Representation* – Maps can become that which they represent. They can stand in for and replace that which they seek to model. Maps have the ability to unpack, deconstruct, and resequence.
2. *Analysis* – Mapping clearly is interpretation, textual analysis. Maps must accommodate ambiguities and contradictions regarding temporal and spatial questions.
3. *Information Space* – To map narrative is to model an information space, or in part to construct an underlying database that is then visually represented.
4. *Interface* – Narrative can shift into its own interface. Fragments of narrative can provide new means of accessing the work (146).

Mamber describes five types of narrative mapping: 1) geographic, 2) temporal, 3) thematic or structured, 4) conjectural, and 5) conceptual. The Digital Story Quilt allows for the manipulation of the patch as a free-form signifier along Mamber's five frames or others, animated by the writer/reader's desires:

1. *Geographic* – Using a global positioning system coordinate, a writer/reader may request patches from a specific community or region.

2. *Temporal* – Using time markers embedded in the patch by its creator, a writer/reader may request patches that represent a particular chronology.

3. *Thematic or structured* – Writer/readers may view the quilt using the six faces of the mystory gem as relays to deeper content. The binding ties function allows the user to identify a signifier that searches the network for other patches with identical signifiers.

4. *Conjectural* – Writer/readers may randomly generate the quilt face, bringing the patches together to interpret a pattern using tools which jingle patches together or allow the user to dig through layers of the hypertext space revealing even more fragmented pieces of narrative and images.

5. *Conceptual* – Writer/readers may create a conceptual frame for the organization and arrangement of the patches. Users may reflect on the arrangement and ideas of the patches, generating their own ideas.

The Digital Story Quilt allows the quilt map to be animated, dynamically representing one or all of Mamber's five dimensions.

As Rutsky explains,

> "to imagine our relations to the techno-cultural unconscious is to imagine our relations both to 'others' and to these 'other' futures. These 'other' futures cannot be represented through rational analysis and prediction: they can only be imagined through a science-fictional process – an imaginative, aesthetic process that is similar to the 'bringing forth' that Martin Heidegger saw in the Greek *techne*" (158).

The Digital Story Quilt maps universes of knowledge, practices, and power by providing

a poetic means for individuals and communities to develop stories, store them, and

connect with and learn from other communities. The Digital Story Quilt also fulfills

Greco's poststructuralist feminist research agenda by creating a polyvocal space of

decentered authority that allows communities to learn from their situated knowledge.

Thus at the three layers of deconstructive hypertext space – the physical, the code, and

the content layers as described by Lessig – the Digital Story Quilt fulfills this agenda

(Table 2):

Table 2. Comparison of Lessig's hypertext layers and the Digital Story Quilt interface.

Layers	Within the Digital Story Quilt
Physical	At the physical layer, the Digital Story Quilt is a peer-to-peer network that denies the centrality of an authority as in a database. In its participatory action, the Digital Story Quilt allows anyone to create a patch, helping everyone to speak for themselves. Patches are composed from across the network as they are available by its creator, thus the universe of available patches is always expanding, but constrained by those which are made available at the time the writer/reader composes the Digital Story Quilt top.
Code	At the code layer, the writer/reader is given the tools to create his own patch, compose the quilt top and inscribe meaning through the "threads" or constructed links. Additional tools in the Digital Story Quilt interface provide unique ways of manipulating the patches to "frame" the pieced quilt using different types of views. The Digital Story Quilt top is writer/reader defined, freely revisable and dialogic, continually questioning with an and/and/and logic that opens the way for possibilities and dismantles received categories.
Content	At the content layer, the Digital Story Quilt is polyvocal, allowing a "communal authorship." Through the use of personal "artifacts" or the symbology of his or her culture, the writer/reader appropriates the tools of knowledge production for individual and community use. The writer/reader participates in a solitary or communal fashion in deconstructing and constructing multiple narratives within the interface.

The Digital Story Quilt foregrounds the multilayered nature of experience. It appropriates the methodologies of the quilt – fragmentation, condensation, improvisation, endurance, and juxtaposition – to endow quotidian, pedestrian narratives with the power to virally infect discourses of power. It uses the politics of displacement – shifting the disciplining gaze – to allow us to interrogate questions of self, identity, history, and memory.

Bell hooks describes this new practice of looking. "You're not looking to 'document' in some scientific, linear, orderly, factual way where we came from, how we got here; you are uncovering these details, but also exploring the gaps, the spaces in the shadows that facts don't allow us to see, the mystery" ("Art on my Mind" 84). The creation of the Digital Story Quilt unravels connecting threads, juxtaposing images and narratives, forcing the viewer to shift attention from gazing at the quilt text to finding meaning for themselves within the text. The quilt, as hooks suggests of the photography of Carrie Mae Weems, "displaces that sense of fixed location, because the meaning depends on the direction from which you gaze at the piece. It mirrors the postmodern emphasis on the fragmented sense of self" ("Art on My Mind" 84).

The Digital Story Quilt appropriates Lather's methodology of the imaginary to bring forth possibilities and a new way of knowing. It is an interruptive process which produces an image that works as an uninterpreted flash of recognition (238). In the moment of its legibility, the Digital Story Quilt is able to presence the absence of truth. The space of the digital quilt interface shapes and reshapes relationships and interactions,

denying the "comfort text" as Lather suggests, in the hope of opening up possibilities.

The digital quilt is text writ large, situated knowledges ever expanding and increasing

from within and up through the cracks in the Foucaultian grid of power relations.

The Hyperrhetorics of the Digital Story Quilt

Designed to be nonlinear, insertive, layered, disconnected, nonorganized or

categorized, defamiliarizing, disruptive, scalable, and complex, the rhetorical style of the

quilt is refashioned as a hyperrhetoric for a deconstructive hypertextual space.

Through the textual analysis of the quilt texts and through experiential learning as a

quilter, I defined the rhetorical tactics of quiltmakers. Each of these five tactics is used in

the development of the Digital Story Quilt prototypes. During each of these projects, I

created functions and designs that would embody the tactics of the "interstitial

methodology" developed from quilt work:

Fragmentation

Fragmentation calls for tearing apart that which is seemingly whole into pieces to

create a liminal space both mentally and physically. Quilters use fragmentation in tearing

apart whole cloth and in the fragmentation of time to achieve the time-consuming

quilting act.

In the interstitial methodology, users tear apart the whole cloth of their lives,

fragmenting the seemingly cohesive, linear chronology into fragments tied to the six

themes in the mystory. Further, fragments of various media are used to illustrate this

microstory.

Condensation

Condensation calls for the reduction of time and ideas to appropriated

iconography or the synecdoche of patterns and stories embedded in each intimate scrap of

clothing.

In the interstitial methodology, fabric scraps, like a family coat of arms, become

emblematic of a larger story. Memories and stories are also embedded in the postage

stamp pictures, quotes, sound bites, and other fragments used to illustrate the stories.

Each media fragment becomes the touchstone that animates the larger story.

Juxtaposition

Juxtaposition calls for tactics, fragments, and condensation to work together to

effect oppositional social movements. Juxtaposition also produces a destabilizing force

upon aggregated representations.

In the interstitial methodology, media fragments are juxtaposed against other

fragments, either from the user or combined with other users' patches. This juxtaposition

forces the user to "read" the text differently, not in a linear fashion, but in a conductive

logics that doesn't honor any one reading.

Improvisation

Improvisation calls for *kairos,* the right break in time to reveal the right action in

the moment. This action might appear as insight into new directions or a revelation of the

larger design.

In the interstitial methodology, the collage-like process calls for the user to make

in-the-moment decisions about fragments to use. The technology also allows for users to bring together various patches on the fly, using kairos or serendipity to assemble a mosaic that is different in each view. In each successive reading, the writer/reader decodes the text differently, creating new connections as he or she navigates the quilt mosaic.

Endurance

Endurance calls for the cyclical time experienced in women's narratives. Quilters engage in the quilting activity over time, requiring a commitment and discipline to complete projects that may take years. In addition, the endurance tactic speaks to the quilter and her work as it outlives her and travels into the future.

In the interstitial methodology, the writer/reader builds a personal patch over time, stitching together and ripping out fragments to continually remake the patch. The personal patch is a work in progress, always changing. The user may choose to share the patch with others, thereby ensuring that the digital story patch of the user is made available in the larger cultural memory of the Digital Story Quilt technology.

Thus, the Digital Story Quilt technology embodies the quilters' tactics in its operations.

A Mystorological Experiment

I've used the interstitial methodology of the quilt – condensation, fragmentation, and juxtaposition, improvisation, and endurance – and my own mystorological images and text to piece together a quilt face using a paper prototype.

Texts and images make up the whole cloth of my mystory from which I will
create the mystorological nuggets. A certain amount of condensation has already
occurred in the filtering and selection of the texts and images to use in the mystory.
Additional fragmentation occurs as a hexagon template is used to randomly create the
polygon patches for the quilt face.

These patches are pieced together, juxtaposing images and text from the six
discourses of family, entertainment, community history, discipline, nature, and ancestory
to create a quilt face. In the Digital Story Quilt version, these patches would be
juxtaposed as shown here, or composed with mystorological patches created by other
individuals.

The question I posed as I selected images for my mystory texts and for the
patches I cut from them was "How can the Digital Story Quilt create knowledge?" If
indeed, as I claim, the quilt methodology leads to an epistemology, then what does the
quilt face created from my mystory reveal about me and the world? (Figure 16):

Figure 16. In the paper prototype, polygons made from the paper template are joined to make a quilt mosaic.

The resulting analysis provides one answer:

As I look at the quilt face I've created, I'm first struck by the predominance of red that appears in the images and in the fabrics I've selected. Red appears in the inside of the tomato, that resembles a woman's womb. Red appears in the veins of small roads that lead to places called "Hopetown" and "Pleasant Valley." Red appears in the lettering of the word "MA" that is on a canvas feed bag and on the fabric swatch with white stars in a field of red that remind me of spaghetti dinners at grandma's house or of the bandanna tied around Aunt Jemima's head. In the text, the words "bleeding," "passionate," "internal juices," and "innards," appear.

Red, to me, is the color of passion, heat, and fire. It is in fire that elements are purified. Red is the color of blood that nourishes the body. Red is the color of the blood that Jesus shed that covers all believers. Red is the color of violence, loss, and pain.

When I look at the patches from the entertainment mystory, they depict images from "To Sir With Love" and from "Miss Suzy" a book from my childhood. What does Sidney Poitier and a squirrel who is chased from her tree home have to do with me?

"Grown" says one fabric swatch. Another says "silent, quiet, be sweet." I look closely at the Sidney Poitier frame. In this image, he's teaching the class how to make a salad. I don't remember this scene from the movie. What I remember is an African-American teacher fighting for the respect of his students in a London school. At the end of the movie, the students have grown into young women and men. Then I remember other scenes – Sir finding the feminine napkin burning in the radiator, Sir giving lessons on how to be proper young ladies and gentlemen. The movie is a "coming of age" film

127

that says less to me now about the first black actor I remember seeing on television and more about the process of enculturation.

The Miss Suzy book tells the tale of a squirrel that was chased from her treetop home by a band of rogue squirrels. She takes refuge in the attic of an old home and finds a dollhouse filled with toy soldiers. Throughout the winter months, she tidies the dollhouse and takes care of the soldiers. But she longs for her treetop home. In the spring, the band of soldiers march up the tree and scare off the rogue squirrels returning Miss Suzy to her home. Miss Suzy was a favorite childhood book, but what was she telling me about who I am now?

Additional images from the family mystory show a swatch of teddy bear fur and an image of me as a 13 years old, washing dishes in front of a window. The sun shines through a window, resting on my face, tilted in a dreamy, wistful way. I also look at a recent picture of me smiling, resting on the door of my daughter's playhouse. I remember finding the Miss Suzy book in my church nursery one day. As I flipped through its pages, I began to sob uncontrollably. Like Miss Suzy, was I trapped in my own dollhouse, waiting for someone to restore me to my true self?

I take all the visible words in each of the polygons and create a narrative from the fragments I see:

"People of the world" "consumed me." From my childhood, the image "that was Barbie" became "the site of pain," "codes of society's rules" became "language inscribed" "on my body." "Barbie" became my "teacher," my "queen." Through "makeup," who I was became "filtered," I was "losing one's self." As a child, I freely

"offered up nature's gift" "for the occasion." "In my perverse way" I was "bleeding from" "internal juices" "on a world stage." "My daughter" "the other" "both fell to the game." "Grown" "for the occasion," "Barbie" "didn't seem to care" "of the top dreams of my life" "being an astronaut." "Silent," "quiet," "be sweet." The mantra of feminity "consumed" "my life."

On "a quest for Truth" through "Pleasant Valley" and "Hopetown," as "MA" "teacher," I sought a "point of view," the "erotics of my own truth" for "my daughter "I wrote a story" that is "passionate, possibility." It allows "the reader, to generate" "one's self" "one's own truth." This story required "shaking my innards to release" "catastrophes." "Thoughts tumble unseen until" "the clearing, peering" "didn't seem to care" about "writing the mind." "The body to me" is "about a girl" who "sneered when she turned back to her dolls." These "odds, risks and" "years of my life" I "fly like a bird" an "astronaut" "with the sky, the wind" "telling my kids" to seize a "pencil to write great works." "Losing one's self" requires "Me" to "play swords," "bleeding from" "dueling" "language inscribed" in "the codes of society's rules." The "body is writing that comes" from the "root" denying the "chimera in a forest" that takes me on "a quest for Truth" that denies the "dreams of my life."

The image of wide scope is that of Virginia Woolf's "Angel in the House" and my battles to create my own identity, to represent myself within this world. Through my childhood, first as a poet, now as a columnist, I have used my words as swords to rewrite my world view.

The Digital Story Quilt seeks to make a space for oneself in the world, pushing

together the fragments of one's defining moments and perhaps creating connections between the core metaphors and images of one's life and others. The resulting poetic narrative, a form of ecriture feminine, illuminates the spaces in between the official stories I tell myself. This paper prototype of the Digital Story Quilt methodology animates the signifiers of these patches and foregrounds that above all, history, representation, identity, and knowledge are moveable objects.

CHAPTER 5   DIGITAL STORY QUILT PROTOTYPES

Testing the Methodology

I used a variety of methods to test the tactics of the interstitial methodology I had

played with in the paper quilt prototype. While the structure of the paper quilt prototype

worked, could I translate its functions to a digital interface? I conceived of four projects

to put the Digital Story Quilt to the test:

1. **Software Storyboards**: Using Barbie Cool Looks Fashion Designer software as a template, I created an initial set of screens for a software interface using Adobe Photoshop. I described for the first time some of the basic functions of the Digital Story Quilt patch that embody the interstitial methodology, the quilt top "views" and some of the analytical tools that individuals and communities can use in interpreting the community quilt.

2. **Prototype Web Site 1.0**: This web site, built by University of Central Florida Digital Media Students, provides some basic text functions in entering text into a database for users. A QuickTime movie details what the software will be able to do as it develops.

3. **Prototype Web Site 2.0**: The Digital Story Quilt for Hurricane Katrina Survivors is developed out of the unfinished work on a kiosk software version. The site went live less than a week after Hurricane Katrina and provided a place for survivors and others to put stories of their experiences along with photographs and fabric swatches online. The site can be viewed in a variety of modes and searched using various demographic parameters.

4. **Kiosk Software:** The kiosk software is developed for an exhibit that I curated at the Orange County Regional History Center in downtown Orlando from December 7, 2005 through March 6, 2006. The exhibit, called "Quilts as Texts: Storytelling Using Fabric and Pixels," combines fabric quilts from across the region with the Digital Story Quilt technology. A quilt screen shows the patches created by patrons as they input their stories into the kiosk software.

Software Storyboards

I used my young daughter's Barbie Cool Looks Fashion Designer software as a

model for developing the first user interface for the Digital Story Quilt (Figure 17).

Figure 17. The back of the Barbie Cool Looks Fashion Designer package shows some of the screen views of the software.

I had played with the software myself and enjoyed the simplicity of the icons that made

creating and designing the fashions easy for children of all ages. Plus, I wanted my

software to be used to give children a fun tool for learning about themselves and their

world. They wouldn't be modeling clothes on a runway, but piecing together their digital

identities and fashioning a voice for themselves in the world.

Some of my early sketches and ideas put a figure at the center juggling an array of

choices, just like the Barbie software. Because of my limited drawing skills, I kept the

final interface I designed using Adobe Dreamweaver more geometric and colorful, using

most of the screen space for the quilt views (Figure 18).
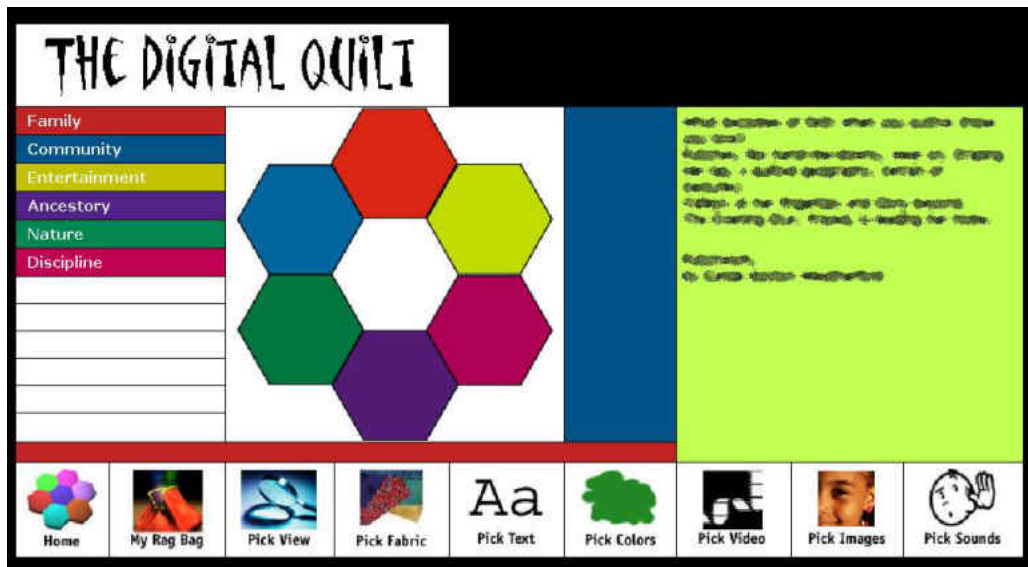
Figure 18. The home page of the Digital Story Quilt prototype shows buttons at the bottom that allow writer/readers to insert multimedia content into their individual patch.

The theme tabs down the left side would allow users to select each theme and

begin to build content using the icons across the bottom (Figure 19):

Figure 19. Some of the multimedia content icons that users could select in the Digital Story Quilt.

Using the "Pick View" icon, users could see the quilt patches arranged in a variety of sort views, based on demographic sorts and other arrangements of the patch data (Figures 20-24).
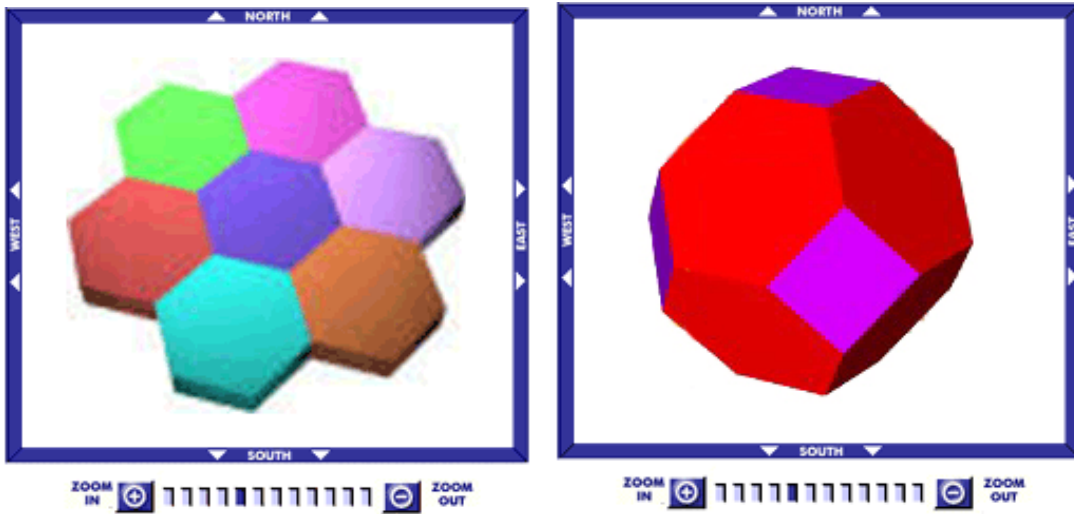
Figure 20. The user can view their individual patch as a flattened quilt top or composed as a three-dimensional, multi-sided gem.

Figure 21. Using the archelogos view, the user selects various archeological tools to dig through the layers of soil to reveal patch content.

Figure 22. In the S.K.I. Diver view, users see the quilt topography as a skydiver would, but are quickly brought down to the level of a community of patches.
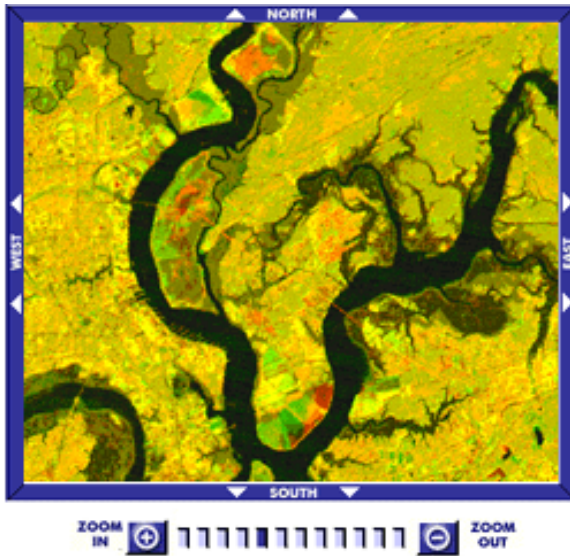
Figure 23. In the imaging view, the user selects a community of patches but then uses various filters to dampen down or heighten various factors.

Figure 24. In the divination view, users select patches based on demographic or other variables, but then uses a jingling method to randomize the faces that appear on top.

As I developed the screens, my children – then ages 11, 7, and 4 – peered over my shoulder, asking me when the software would be done. They wanted to start playing with the Digital Story Quilt right away. They liked the bright colors in the design and wanted to create their stories. The software couldn't be done fast enough – even when I explained that the designs I was creating weren't functional – yet.

Some of the ideas that I developed in this initial prototype have yet to be realized in any of the software created to date. The functionality of the views and sort mechanisms are critical to adding the "play" to the interface so that users can become authors and ethnographers as they delve into the multimedia artifacts left by themselves and others. Thus, these ideas continue to inform successive iterations of the project.

Prototype Web Site 1.0

In the fall of 2004, students in the Production II class in the Digital Media

Division at the University of Central Florida assisted in developing the first working

prototype of the site, located on a campus server at http://sulley.dm.ucf.edu/~digitalquilt/.

This prototype used a MySql database to capture the text stories of users. The home page

used tabs to access the various themes while the new icons down the left provided

immediate access to public functions such as "Binding Ties" and "Quilting Bee" that

allowed users to create quilt groups, post the results of the quilts they'd created, and

discuss their ideas of what the digital quilt top meant in a bulletin-board setup (Figure

25).

Figure 25. The home page for the first working prototype of the Digital Story Quilt.

A new user begins by creating a login name and password that makes a space in the database for their quilt patch entries. Each patch starts with the user selecting the fabric for each of the six theme tops (Figure 26):

Figure 26. Users select fabric swatches to illustrate the tops of each polygon of the six themes.

Users then input the text for the batting or inside layer of the quilt sandwich

(Figure 27):

Figure 27. By selecting the theme tabs across the top, users can add text to each of the theme layers.

Using the database search functions, users can then find and select patches with

the criteria they've designated (Figure 28.):

Figure 28. Search results are displayed in a list below the search fields.

Results are listed under the search. By clicking on a link, the users display the text for

that patch (Figure 29):

Figure 29. The story for that person's patch and the selected theme appears to the right.

In addition to the web site, the students also developed a digital video using QuickTime and Flash software, accessed by the film spool on the bottom of each page of the web site. It details functions that I hoped to include in future versions of the software. In the video, I introduce an animated spool character to be developed for the software that provides audio and text help instructions for users. I wanted to ensure that the software could be used by beginning readers.

The prototype web site 1.0 proved to be successful in many ways. The primary goal of the site was to introduce potential funding agencies to the project. Although the site had limited functionality, visitors to the site could see its potential. They could also

143

view the digital video to get more information about future updates. And the "About" link described the project and provided contact information.

In addition, the student project team helped develop the aesthetic look of the site. We abandoned the primary colors of my initial storyboard designs for a softer color palette, brought more of the functions to the home page and removed some of the patch tools such as "Pick Video" and "Pick Sounds" that we left for development in future versions of the web site.

This prototype has one major drawback. The visuals of the text and fabric were not displayed as part of a "quilted" top. The patches weren't integrated into the view screen as I had conceived. Unfortunately, the technical requirements I had envisioned fell far beyond the skills of my first student team.

The team, however, worked with me to develop a project spreadsheet that outlined what features should be added to future versions. They advocated a stepped approach to the software creation, encouraging small victories each semester in achieving my final vision. This approach allowed me to work on concrete, achievable goals with future student teams and made room for my software to evolve and change course as I continued my dissertation research. It also allowed me to see where I would need to seek technical skills, perhaps from a professional firm, in order to achieve my vision. Another year would pass before the "melding the visuals with the database" mantra I had started with my student team became real.

Prototype Web Site 2.0 – The Digital Story Quilt for Hurricane Katrina Survivors and Family

The Digital Story Quilt for Hurricane Katrina Survivors and Family was birthed out of the horrendous events on the Gulf Coast and in New Orleans in August and September 2005. Out of the prototype web site developed with my student team, I had been awarded a grant from the Florida Humanities Council to develop kiosk software for an exhibit at the Orange County Regional History Center in downtown Orlando in December 2005. But as the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina began to unfold, a more urgent mission called me to adapt the kiosk software to capture the stories of hurricane survivors.

My husband's family is from New Orleans so we were literally thrown into the storm. Four generations of his family had lived in the city and its surroundings for well over 70 years. The destruction of the hurricane cast them from their homes – just in time for some to avoid the devastating breech of the levies and the floods that left their homes uninhabitable.

In the days following the hurricane, I tried to keep in touch with relatives scattered all over the United States – from Houston to Washington, D.C. and to Nashville. I tried to find housing for displaced family and find relatives still unaccounted for who had stayed behind. I became frustrated at the technologies on the web for finding missing people. Day after day, I searched registry databases and blogs for news of my sister-in-law and her family. The technologies required too much personal information and didn't allow families to post pictures of missing relatives. I fell into a deep

depression as my search for missing relatives stretched day after day. Then an anger rose

within me as I realized the potential of my dissertation software to help in just this type of

situation. I e-mailed my dissertation adviser that my software should have been ready to

step into the gap.

Instead of becoming paralyzed in this emotional aftermath, I went into action. I

called my software developer Ascenda, Inc., a UCF technology incubator business that

was building the kiosk software, to help adapt the software for the web. Within two

weeks, we'd reworked the software and the screens to get the new site up and running by

Sept. 16. The site, www.digitalstoryquilt.com was born (Figure 30):
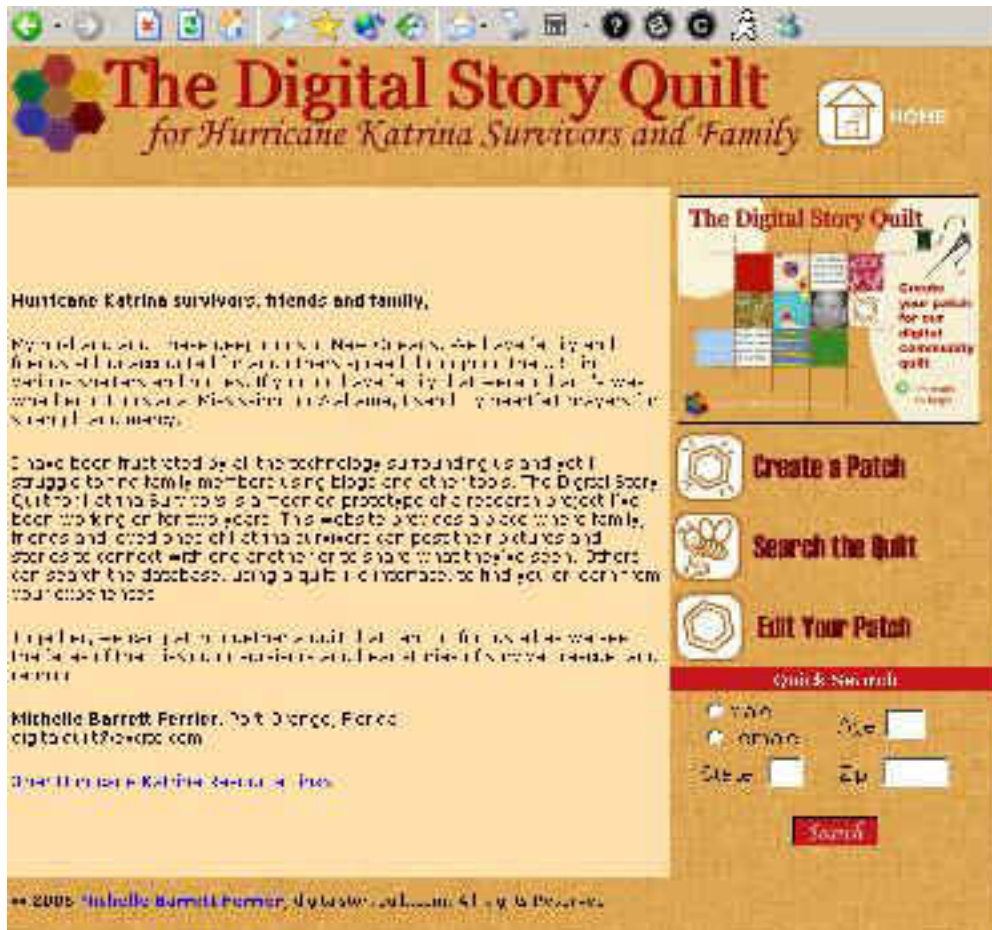
Figure 30. The home page of the Digital Story Quilt for Hurricane Katrina Survivors and Family tells my story and encourages visitors to create a patch that is a memorial, a missing persons, or a personal story.

The web site allows visitors to create a patch, selecting the options to choose the

type of story – a memorial to a deceased one, a missing person report, or a personal story.

The patch consisted of three layers: 1) the fabric layer, 2) the text or story layer, and 3) a

photo that visitors could upload to the site (Figure 31):

147
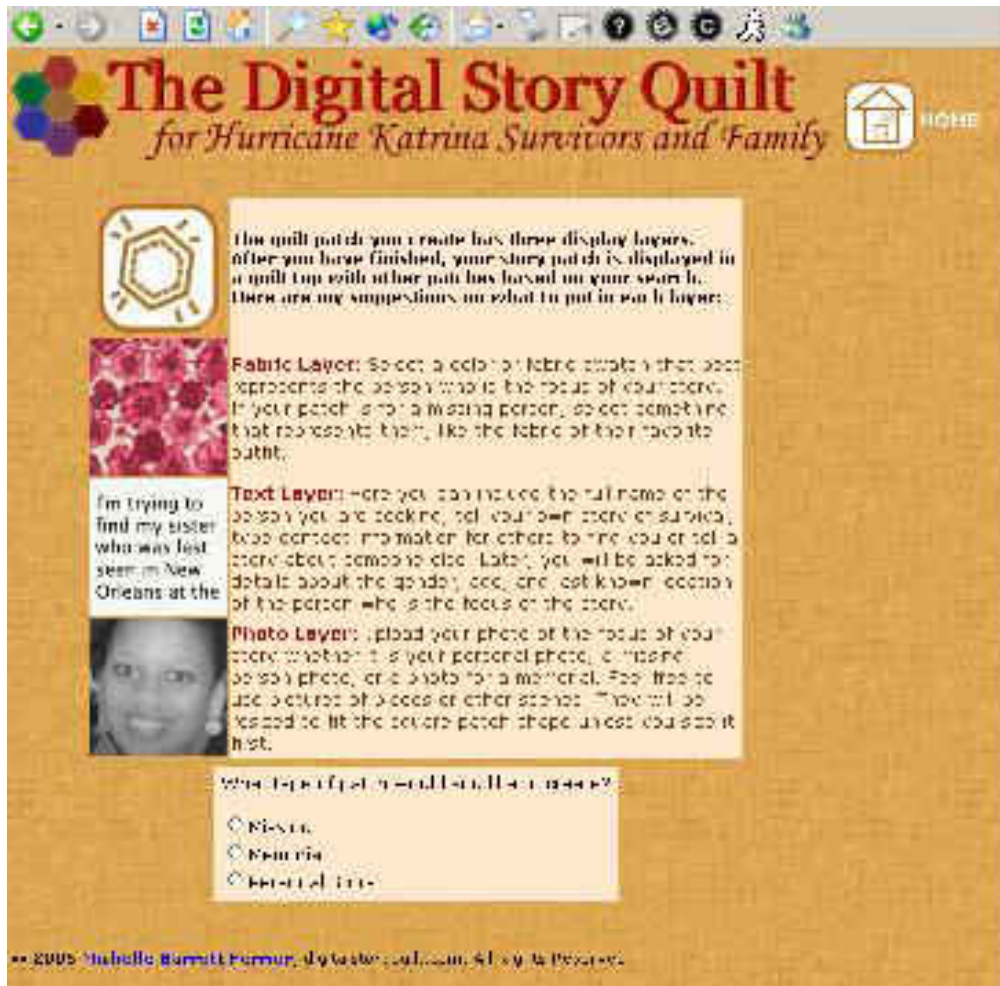
Figure 31. The Create A Patch screen explains the three layers of the digital patch and asks visitors to select the type of story they would like to create.

Visitors to the site can then search the Digital Story Quilt patches to compose a

quilt top built from their search criteria (Figures 32 and 33):
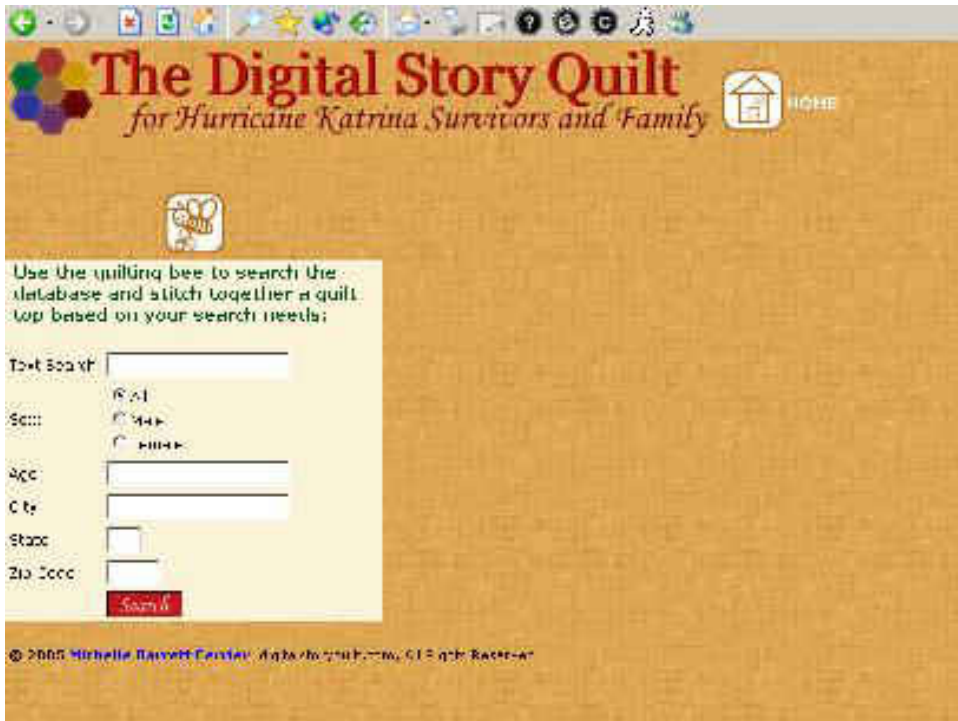
Figure 32. The search screen allows a text search using keywords, a search by gender, age, city, state or zip code.

Figure 33. The Digital Story Quilt top is composed of the top fabric layer. Users can click on a patch to display its other layers.

Getting the Word Out

I sent out e-mails to friends and family, encouraging them to enter their own stories or to forward the e-mail to others affected by the storm. I also sent out press releases to several media organizations, including nola.com, the online site of the *New Orleans Times-Picayune*. I also inserted the site's URL into several online blogs and databases designed to aid in finding Katrina's missing. It seemed as if this first draft of history in the nation's newspapers wouldn't include my personal story and the Katrina Digital Story Quilt site. In frustration, I finally wrote a column in my local newspaper, detailing my struggles to find my family and pointing readers to the site.

As of May 15, 2005, more than six months after the hurricane, 29 patches had been created on the site. Most of the patches are personal stories of experiences during the storm, of places destroyed by the storm or of prayers or messages to those affected by the storm.

One patch, from a woman living overseas, shares her mother's story:

My mom's boyfriend was trapped for days in a hotel room in New Orleans' we didn't know for a week if he was alive or dead. Thankfully, he made it back to her – 20 lbs lighter, but safe. Now comes the second challenge: figuring out what to do now that his life has been turned upside down. This event has tendrils which have affected so many more people than the ones who were physically there.

Another is a memorial to a woman who died in the storm:

Celeste Hingle an 85 year old Alzheimer's patient from New Orleans, La. May you rest in peace. From all the volunteers at volunteers2katrinamissing.

Others offer prayers of comfort and blessing to those affected by the storm:

There are no words to describe the heartache that has been felt around the nation for victims of Hurricane Katrina. Yet the outpouring of prayer, generosity, and love should remind us all of the grace of God that sustains us and keeps us during times of distress. May the mercy and compassion of God continue to heal your soul and draw you closer to his gentle side.

151

And some stories sought to encourage others to share their memories of places now washed away:

> *Let these people talk to you. Ask them for their memories. Ask them to tell you of their city and their lives. The good and the bad – all of it. Capture the essence. Let us all smell the beignets and coffee, taste the crawfish and hear the music and laughter. Tell us about the families, their joys and their struggles. Do it for those who are too young to know and those who need to ease their grief. Write the eulogy of New Orleans. Oh yes, a new city will emerge from the destruction, but it will be just that – a new city. We all need to know and remember the one that was.*

One example shows just the spirit that the Digital Story Quilt was designed to encourage – the type of fighting spirit that calls us to be grateful for what we have and to continue to fight for what we deserve:

> *WE OFTEN COMPLAIN ABOUT WHAT WE DON'T HAVE. WHAT ABOUT WHAT WE DO! MANY OF THE SURVIVORS OF KATRINA LOST EVERYTHING, BUT MANY STILL HAVE THEIR LIVES. THE AMERICAN SPIRIT LIVES AND GETS STRONGER IN EACH OF OUR HEARTS. LETS BE GREATFUL FOR WHAT WE HAVE. OUR LIVES! OUR HEALTH! OUR SPIRIT! OUR FAMILIES! AND OUR THIRST TO LIVE ON!!!!*

152

The Aftermath and the Technology

The site still exists as a memorial to the nation's upheaval over Hurricane Katrina. I've argued that the media is the first cut at history. Through the confusion of Katrina, the world found out how often the media can get the story wrong. One story on the Katrina site counters the prevailing media story that New Orleans residents were lawless, violent criminals out to steal and pillage while they could:

> *those young me with guns were protecting us. if it wasn't for them, we wouldn't have had the little water and food they had found. "It makes me think of what my friend Rev. Goat just told me: Let me say this before it goes any further; New Orleans didn't die of natural causes, she was murdered." – Bluesman Dr. John*

Unfortunately, few stories on the Katrina site challenged the prevailing media myths. The lack of publicity of the site's availability, particularly among those affected by the storm, hampered the development of more patches on the site. The disciplining of the media technology was at work, blocking stories not deemed to be newsworthy.

In addition, the cacophony of databases and technologies on the web made communicating about the site difficult. I had attempted my own "viral marketing" campaign with the e-mail, hoping that people would pass the message along to their e-mail lists. Unfortunately, even these efforts were often countered by e-mails circulating "urban legends" that vilified survivors. Six months later, e-mails like the one below perpetuate distorted views of events surrounding Katrina survivors (Figure 34). A simple

search would have turned up real stories and an urban legends web site that separates the

truth from the fiction.

X Message is not flagged. [Flag for Follow Up]
⌂ Message has been replied to in the past.

Date: Mon May 15 23:17:12 2006
From: Scooter <   >
         [Add to Address Book | Block Address | Report as Spam]
To: <"Undisclosed-Recipient:;"@excite.com>
Subject: Job Fair for Katrina Evacuees

This past weekend FEMA and the City of Austin , along with the Texas
Workforce Commission setup a job training/hiring/interview/job fair for
all the Katrina FEMA evacuees in the Austin area to be held at the ACC
campus on Webberville Road in East Austin . Several of the evacuees said
they had no transportation to get from the apartment complexes.
So the city of Austin/FEMA/TWC set up transportation for each of them to
ensure they would be able to partake of the benefit of job searching.
   The transportation consisted of nine buses and vans, to run from four
locations in Round Rock, and five locations in Austin, in continuing
shuttles back and forth to the campus to ensure that the hundreds of
people looking for jobs would be transported in comfort. The vehicles
were brought to their residences; drivers knocked on the doors; and every
effort was made.
        At the end of the day, the nine vans and buses transported a total of one person.!!!
Not one person per bus - one person total.
At the end of the day, none of the Katrina Evacuees applied for any of the jobs.
Not one person took employment - NONE total.
The bill to FEMA was $7800.
And yet they still get on TV claiming that the United States Government
"OWES THEM", I say we don't owe them anything and if anything, they OWE
us - the Tax Payers that are "WORKING PEOPLE", they owe what they have
been mooching off of the Tax Payers for almost a year now. It is obvious
that they don't intend to work as long as they can sponge off of the
system. It is time to cut them loose and tell them the free ride is over !!!!!
PS - Pass this along to everyone you can if you agree that we don't owe them ANYTHING

*Figure 34. An e-mail circulating six months after Hurricane Katrina demonstrates that
the viral nature of e-mail can be more effective at getting the word out -- whether it is
true or not.*

154

However, blogs and other social network technologies filled in to offer alternate opinions of what was happening in New Orleans and on the Gulf Coast. Few sites, I believe, offered a place like my Katrina site that allowed survivors and their families to remember and reflect. The Katrina site, even with its limited reach, stands as a cultural memory of this historic event.

Kiosk Software- The Quilts as Text Exhibit

Some of the toughest questions in my proposal defense were the ones I had posed as part of my research that were thrown back at me by my professors. "How can the technology be co-opted by the establishment? How can the technology be subverted or perverted to undermine personal voice and the ideals of community?"

My demonstration project at the Orange County Regional History Center provided the answer.

Developing the Exhibit

A grant through the Florida Humanities Council provided matching funds from the University of Central Florida to help develop the kiosk software. The software was to be the demonstration project as networked art for a larger exhibit I curated called "Quilts as Texts: Storytelling Using Fabric and Pixels," on display at the Orange County Regional History Center from December 7, 2005 through March 5, 2006 (Figure 35).
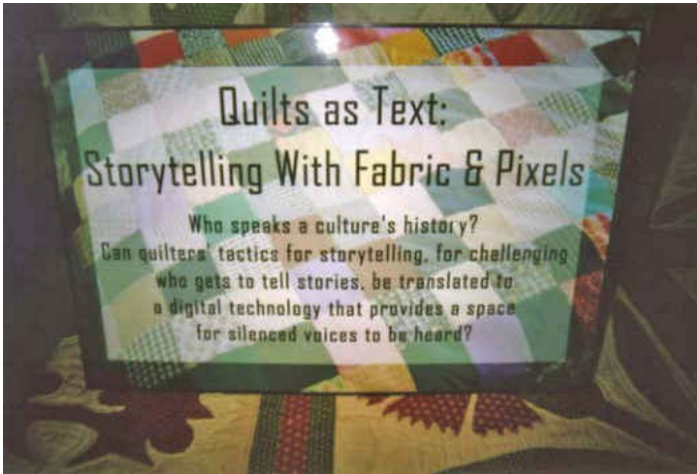
Figure 35. The introductory panel of the "Quilts as Text" exhibit at the Orange County Regional History Center.

The exhibit featured historic quilts and contemporary creations I solicited from quilters and quilt owners from across Central Florida. The text panels described the role of quilts as storytelling devices throughout their history, displaying a signature quilt, a death quilt, a Works Progress Administration quilt from the History Center collection, and the ways in which the fabric had been inscribed with the stories of its makers and owners (Figure 36).

Figure 36. On the left is a death quilt, used to drape the body of the deceased. The middle patchwork quilt is a Works Progress Administration quilt.

Contemporary quilts were displayed along with the stories created by their owners that told of what the quilt meant to them. The six women whose quilts were featured demonstrated a variety of quilting skills, from the more traditional types of patchwork "piece" designs to more contemporary "art" quilts that used fabric as paints or the quilt canvas as collage. The stories they chose to tell about their quilts speak of childhood, family, community, illness, history, and friendships. I ran into my own ethical dilemmas as I edited these stories so they could appear on panels next to each of the quilts in the small display cases. To resolve my dilemma, I allowed each quilter to review the edited stories before they were printed as text panels. Additional text panels also educated patrons on how the Digital Story Quilt installation used the quilts' functions for the Digital Story Quilt technology in the kiosk.

157

Barbara J. Holmes

Edgewater, Florida
"Hurricane Story Quilt"

Figure 37. Barbara J. Holmes

Figure 38. Hurricane Story Quilt

My "Hurricane Story Quilt" represents the mass confusion most people of the state of Florida and I endured in 2004 when Hurricanes Charley, Frances, and Jeanne, and Ivan came to visit.

One storm after another brought heavy rains and destruction. Beaches washed away. Boats sank. Trees and electrical poles fell with live wires lying around. Signs along highways said "No Gas, No Food," and "No Ice or Water." Motels filled up with the displaced. Many roads were flooded and closed. President Bush came flying in by helicopter. Motor homes were bringing in "out of state" help.

Now came the time to survive. My husband and I found ice and I filled my cooler with food from the freezer and began cooking on the outdoor gas grill. We handed out food to the neighbors. We all ate well. I cooked spaghetti, meatballs, shrimp, pork chops, and vegetables. Peanut butter and jelly sandwiches and bottled water were the only food for many.

Torn pieces of tarp and shingles showed the damage to many structures. Wrinkled metal lay where there had once been trailer parks. Everyone began the cleanup process. Street sides and landfills were overflowing with trees, limbs, and other debris.

In my quilt, people are shown preparing for the storms – stocking supplies, sand bagging, and boarding up windows. Police escort bumper-to-bumper cars along the evacuation route from the Keys northbound.

After the storms hit, FEMA trucks are shown delivering blue tarps and plywood. Gov. Bush is looking down from the Capital as if he were thinking, "What has happened to my state?"

My daughter challenged me to think about the positive things that had come from the storms. I thought about the love of neighbors helping neighbors, many of whom I had met for the first time. This love is shown on the quilt with the silver heart and a couple holding hands.

Barbara Miro Soumar

Vero Beach, Florida
"Peace River"

Figure 39. Barbara Soumar

Figure 40. Peace River quilt.

"Peace River" is a tribute to a friendship of many years. It began when two families met through Cub Scouts. Actually, it began on a canoe trip. We met the Widmann family on a scouting family day on the Loxahatchee River. Their canoe capsized and they needed help catching all their possessions that were floating away.

We shared many camping and outdoor events as families with young children, canoeing, camping, and hiking among them. We forged a bond of friendship outside of the ordinary situations of everyday life where the unexpected can happen. As our children grew up and left home, the friendship continued with only the adults left to share the activities.

Friendship and life can be a lot like a canoe trip on a river. Sometimes everything goes along smoothly, like everyday living. Then, you hit a stretch of rough water; problems arise in our lives that need to be dealt with. The assistance of a friend to throw you a rope or right your canoe helps in the wilderness. A friend is even better to have by your side when illness, family crisis, and death strike.

My quilt is a fabric interpretation of a digital photo I took of our last canoe trip with Roger and Wendy Widmann on the Peace River. I chose this particular photo to illustrate this friendship for several reasons: It represents the tranquility of nature and life, but also under the surface of the seemingly placid waters lurk hidden snags and alligators that threaten our safety in a manner similar to a life crisis. Nature is a sacred and healing place for both the body and soul. This canoe trip was taken not long after

Roger Widmann's recovery from cancer. It also was our last major trip before my

personal year-long bout with illness. I guess that means another canoe trip is in order!

I traced and enlarged the photo to make templates for fusible appliqué. A variety

of fabrics, embellishments, and quilting techniques were used to recreate the feel of

tranquility experienced in the wilderness of Central Florida.

Mildred Maynard

Palm Coast, Florida
"A Look at the Village"

Figure 41. Mildred Maynard

Figure 42. A Look at the Village

This quilt depicts scenes from my childhood spent on the island of Barbados during World War II. Although the British had imposed their language, education, and sports on the island, a deep trace of African culture remained. For instance, the dialect spoken by the general populace is Gullah which has its roots in West Africa and is still spoken in Sierra Leone. I felt compelled to use this fabric to immortalize that part of my life.

At no time was African culture more manifested than during the holiday season. African-style dancers in colorful costumes danced throughout the various villages. The "jumbie" man and his dancers made their way into our village on Christmas Eve with the tingling of small bells and songs meant for you to give them money, fruits, or sweeties. One song, carved into my memory, went like this:

"Boun' wid a napkin

Tied wid a string

Get up Mis' Cumberbatch

An' gi' ma sumtin' "

The song told how items donated by the villagers fit into the "jumbie" man's bags carried by small ragged boys.

The "jumbie" man's costume was made from a "croocus" sack and colorfully decorated. The sack had brought rice from Demarara (now Guyana) and had been fashioned into his costume. The dancers' skirts were made from "silgrass".

"Silgrass" was a fiber produced from the huge aloe plants that grew on the island. A branch was cut off and the outer green skin stripped revealing white layers inside which would be shredded to create the dancers' skirts.

The women with the baskets and trays on their heads are known as "hucksters". They carry very heavy loads of produce with apparent ease. First a large portion of cloth is rolled into a circle and the basket is placed on the wrap so that it is not resting directly on their heads.

Most "hucksters" harvested the produce the evening before carefully and skillfully packing it for sale the next day. Some would leave their homes at daybreak, walking along selling as they went to market. If the tray emptied before they got to town, they would return home to prepare for the next day's journey.

Others would take the "jitney" bus to town to sell their goods in the general market thereby attracting business people and tourists.

The marketplace as seen in the quilt's border was so very typical of the markets in Barbados where the hucksters not only convened to sell their wares, but where they exchanged gossip, both local and international. The most often could be heard trading stories about their boychildren and girlchildren "away" in "Amerka" or "Englun".

The quilt shows the close interaction between adults and children. That was another carryover from Africa. Grandmothers, mothers, and children were bonded from cradle to grave. At that time, there were no day care centers or old folks' homes, the village took care of its own. Traces of that practice are still prevalent among the people of Caribbean descent in the United States today.

African American Cultural Society, Inc.

Underground Railroad Quilters: Gertrude Blackwell, Jean Boone, Doris Boyd, Erma Brooks, Evelyn Corbin, Joan Dabney, Ann Garnette, Sondra Henderson, Nora Johnson, Earsel Wallace, and Emma Wilson.
Palm Coast, Florida
"Escape to Freedom"

Figure 43. Escape to Freedom quilt.

This quilt was handmade by the Underground Railroad Quilters who wanted to learn more about quilts, quilting, and the role that quilts played in the Underground Railroad during slavery times.

Inspired by the book, "Hidden in Plain View: The Secret Story of Quilts and the Underground Railroad" by Jacqueline Tobin and Raymond Dobard, beginning and novice quilters formed our group called "The Underground Railroad Quilters."

The fifteen blocks in this quilt represent the family tale introduced in the book – that the blocks are part of a code to freedom for those escaping slavery.

Although the code has not been completely cracked or authenticated, one family's story says: "The Monkey Wrench turns the Wagon Wheel towards Canada on a Bear's Paw trail to the Crossroads. Once they got to the Crossroads, they dug a Log Cabin on the ground. Shoo-Fly told them to dress up in cotton and satin Bow Ties and go to the Cathedral Church, get married and exchange Double Wedding Rings. Follow the Flying Geese. Stay on the Drunkard's Path and follow the Stars."

Lauren Austin

New Smyrna Beach, Florida
"Guardian Angel"

Figure 44. Lauren Austin

I have a guardian angel. My angel is a husky brown woman with broad shoulders and a big stomach. She has muscular legs and arms, used to pitching in with backbreaking work. She is no small person. She can't be if she is to keep me safe. My angel is my shield, taskmaster, and conscience.

My angel watched me at birth as I traveled through the birth canal with the cord around my neck, making sure it wasn't tight enough to strangle me. My angel hovered nearby when my 6-month-old self choked on a cracker. She whispered in my young mother's ear to hold me upside down and whack my back hard. She kept sharp objects up high, and away from my blue, blue self.

My angel got busy in my teen years. The stuff I tried, the tears mom cried, the words I lied, all wrapped and carried by my angel out of harm's way. The walks aloe, the

170

boys I'd known, none of it touched me in places that hurt. Could have, would have,

should have – how do I explain that it didn't?

My angel. Oh, my angel you must be TIRED. Well, now I am old, maybe you can

rest. Oh, no you can't rest now! I don't want to fall down the stairs again. I need you

still. My husband, my sons and I all need your gaze and strong arms moving all danger

out of the way.

Figure 45. My Angel quilt.

Juxtaposed alongside the fabric quilts and text panels was the Digital Story Quilt kiosk installation (Figure 46).

Figure 46. Haile Ferrier, foreground, and Sierra Ferrier enter a patch into the Digital Story Quilt kiosk.

The installation included two touch-screen computers with the kiosk software, a digital projector with a computer CPU and a quilt screen developed by quilt artist Lauren Austin of New Smyrna Beach, Florida (Figure 47).

Figure 47. The quilt screen, created by Lauren Austin, is an embellished, quilted frame onto which the patches are projected.

Patrons were encouraged to select digitized fabric swatches, type in a message and have a digital photo taken by a camera mounted on the touch-screen monitor. These images were then dynamically displayed on the quilt screen by the projector, creating a virtual community quilt of the patrons and their stories. Patches in the virtual quilt were

dynamically captured and composed the latest patches added to the software allowing

patrons to explore questions of community and identity in the display (Figures 48-50).
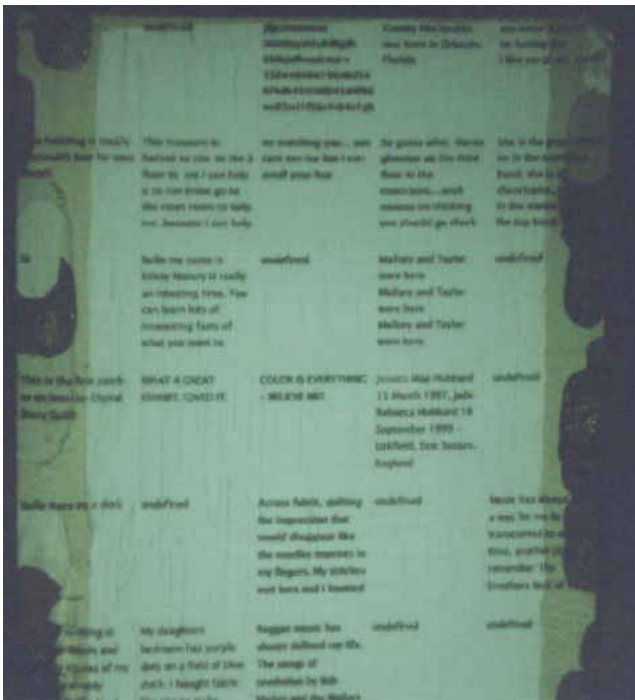
Figure 48. The quilt screen shows the text view of the dynamic community quilt.

Figure 49. The photo view of the dynamic community quilt.

Figure 50. The composite view with fabric, photo, and text layers juxtaposed onto the quilt screen.

In addition, a public program held in conjunction with the Florida Folklore Society annual meeting on March 3, 2006 invited the public to a panel discussion of the exhibit's themes of community, identity, storytelling, and memory. Quilt artist Lauren Austin, University of Central Florida scholars Dr. Craig Saper and Dr. Natalie Underberg, and I rounded out a panel discussion that examined the exhibit's goal of speaking back to history through quilt-making activities.

The Kiosk Software

I worked with my software developer to create the kiosk software. Much of the work had been completed prior to the Katrina site launch, so the Katrina site acted as the beta test of the new kiosk software. The beta site worked beautifully, combining the

aesthetics from the web site prototype developed by my student team, with the

functionality that allowed patrons to actually compose three patches – another giant step

toward my more complex vision.

I developed the visuals for each screen and worked with my developer to create

the database to support the visuals. The opening screen on the kiosk calls patrons to

contribute a story by using a Flash program to design a dynamic, changing patchwork

display (Figure 51):

Figure 51. The introductory kiosk screen shows a dynamic quilt display of recently added
patches created using Flash.

After the invitation to begin, users select the fabric for the top layer of their patch.

I encouraged the developer to add a way that users could scan or crop their own fabrics to

include in the database. One hundred fifty swatches are still not enough. (Figure 52).

177

Figure 52. More than 150 swatches of fabrics are displayed on the pick fabric screen.

Initially I had wanted patrons to be allowed to use a drawing tablet or a microphone to capture their messages. The drawing tablet, I thought, would allow younger users unfamiliar with a keyboard to write their message or draw a picture. The sound files were to be played around the exhibit, like ghost whispers in the air. These two technical requirements were dropped because of financial constraints. However, users are invited to enter their 50-word text message (Figure 53):

Figure 53. Patrons were limited in the number of words they could include in their patch – a choice that limited their time at the kiosk.

Patrons were asked to include limited demographic data so that I could tell who was using the kiosk and what type of messages they chose to leave (Figure 54).

Figure 54. Patrons were asked basic demographic data.

One of the most critical components of the kiosk software was the digital camera.

Regardless of whatever other data patrons put into the kiosk, the digital camera would

take their photo and compose it as part of the community quilt (Figure 55).

Figure 55. A Logitech digital camera was used to capture the patron's image.

Patrons were asked to think about what their patch meant and what the virtual community quilt showed them. This particular screen stumped many patrons as they thought about what they had just completed. Because of the time involved in composing a thoughtful answer, I allowed patrons to skip this screen. However, they had already been exposed to the questions and I hoped they would continue to think about them as they viewed the exhibit (Figure 56).

Figure 56. These thought questions asked patrons to reflect on the kiosk and exhibit experience.

Finally, patrons were allowed to see fragments of the three patches they had selected as a reminder, before they were directed to view the virtual community quilt (Figure 57).

Figure 57. Patrons can see the three patches they've made.

The final screen of the kiosk invites patrons to visit the Digital Story Quilt web site for more information on the project (Figure 58).

Figure 58. Patrons are invited to visit the web site for more information.

Museum Observations

Before I had arrived on the second floor, the museum staff had warned me that the projector bulb had blown and when they had replaced it they couldn't get the virtual quilt image back in the fabric quilt frame. Words, images, and fabric flowed across the borders of the quilt screen, bleeding into the quilt frame's embellishments. However, I was more disturbed to find both kiosks down – one had lost its connection to the wireless projector server and the other had frozen the digital image box in place over the screen. How long had they been out of commission? I wondered. Both kiosk systems needed to be rebooted in order to restore them to working order. The projector's screen resolution needed to be adjusted to fit the images into the fabric quilt screen's borders.

As the museum staff and I worked to fix the kiosks, a group of 25 students and 5 adults came through the exhibit floor. After several hours of observation, I had come to anticipate the docent's comments about the African-American exhibit next to the quilts. Of the quilts, they said nothing, shepherding the school children and their mothers and teachers around the curved glass cases toward the orange jungle gym in the center of the hall. One young girl of about nine or ten, looked at the Work Projects Administration-tied quilt in the exhibit case as she walks by. "My mom's got a quilt like that," she says as she points, directing a boy next to her to follow her glance. "Who cares?" he answers, "It's just a stupid blanket."

To me, and perhaps to this young girl and her family, a quilt represents so much more than just a covering. A quilt speaks of its maker's creativity, patience, endurance,

and sometimes its maker's soul. The patchwork quilt also speaks of a community, made up of various fabric patches, that yields its stories as fingers traverse the landscape in their laps.

The exhibit challenges how we may think of quilts and how they function. To some, yes, they are a covering, no more, no less. But to those who can read its elegantly stitched hieroglyphics, a patchwork quilt stands as a witness, a testimony of its maker, its community, its time and place, and its uses. This quilt exhibit and the Digital Story Quilt technology dare to ask the question "Who speaks a culture's history?" And it answers that question by honoring the feminine needlecraft of the quilt and translating its tactics and feminine ways of knowing to preserve a community's culture.

Over the course of the three months of the exhibit, I observed visitors to the exhibit on three occasions for more than 10 hours total. During that time, several school groups came through the exhibit hall totaling nearly 250 students and adults. In addition, other older museum visitors came through during my observations.

Sadly, I observed only three groups of people using the kiosk to create their patches. Once, a docent directed the group of students to walk ahead to the next exhibit. He then pulled aside two girls and their adult chaperone and pointed to the kiosk. "In a few minutes, I'll take you over there and you'll get to create a patch that will go up on this virtual quilt," he said pointing to the quilt screen. True to his word, he guided them to the kiosk and walked them through the software. If I had the exhibit to do over again, I would include docent training to ensure the docents felt comfortable with the technology and that they could clearly explain the purpose of the exhibit.

186

Another time a chaperon and two of her charges created a patch, with the adult standing back to allow the children to be photographed. Another time, a family visiting Orlando tried to create a patch on the kiosk, but the software rebelled when the man tried to type in more than 50 words. Instead of a warning, the system forced the family to start over creating a new patch. After the second attempt, I stepped in and guessed that they needed to shorten their message. I called the software developer after they left to tell him about the bug in the system.

Often during my observations though, school groups were rushed through the exhibits, with barely enough time to interact with the artifacts. I created a joke about my observation, calling it the "museum technology" disciplining the students to behave in a certain way to get through the schedule on time. To be fair, having been a chaperon for several field trips, I'm often loathe to let children linger too long for fear of losing the main group. But I was disappointed that more children were not able to interact with the kiosk, at least from what I could see. Perhaps its physical location – nearly hidden from the main exhibit cases – made it inaccessible simply because it couldn't be seen. I could only infer from the final data collected from the patron patches as to whether the program allowed people of all ages to deposit their message in this cultural memory technology.

The Kiosk Patches

I was surprised to find that in all, 555 patches were created during the three-month exhibit period – far more than my observations had led me to believe would be in the database. Of the 555 patches in the database, 73 were test patches created by me and

the developer to seed the database. Of the remaining 482 patron patches, 30 percent, were

created by patrons in the 10-19 year range. The second largest group was those patrons of

0-9 years, at 17.2 percent of the total. Based on my observations, the age groups of pupils

participating in field trips at the museum fall into these two age ranges (Table 3).

Table 3: Age breakdown of kiosk patrons

Age	Number	Percentage of Total
0-9	83	17.2
10-19	145	30.1
20-29	44	9.1
30-39	19	3.9
40-49	18	3.7
50-59	20	4.1
60-69	10	2.1
70-79	5	1.0
80-89	2	0.41
90+	1	0.21
Undefined*	112	23.2
Bogus**	23	4.8
TOTAL	**482**	**99.82*****

*Undefined means the patron left the age field blank.
**Bogus means the patron entered letters or three-digit numbers like 999..
*** Due to rounding, percentages do not add up to 100%

While most of the patrons hailed from Florida, specifically the Central Florida

region, several of the patches were from visitors from other states, such as Utah, North

Carolina, Virginia, Maryland, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Kentucky, New York, New

Jersey, Georgia, Illinois, Texas, and Nebraska. There were also visitors from

Washington, D.C. Visitors from London, England, Kuwait, Germany, and Brazil also

created patches in the kiosk.

Like digital graffiti, many of the messages sought to mark an existence — "I was here" "Mallory and Taylor were here" "My name is Isaiah." Some sought to just say "Hi" "Yo" "Shout out to everyone" "Whatsup?!?!" "Word up" "LOL" ":-)" or "Hello."

Many patrons offered a bit of insight into personal lives by listing sports and activities that were of interest to them, the people they love and even the names of pets. One patron named Carl created a half dozen patches in tribute to his deceased cat "Casey" who had just passed away that first day he made a patch Dec. 27, 2005. He continued entering patches for several days. "I hurt" "I miss my cat not being around anymore" he wrote about what his patch says about him. For more than two weeks after his pet's death, Carl returned to create patches in tribute. His last patch, created Jan. 15, 2006 offers a message to others. "Live today like there is no tomorrow, we do not know if there is. Do not judge others when you do not know thier (sic) experiences." While several patrons created multiple patches on the same day, Carl was the only patron to chronicle his grief over time with the community on the virtual quilt.

My own 18-year-old cat had died right before the holidays. Like Carl, I had shared my grief with the public through my column in the newspaper. I received more cards and e-mails from that column than to any other I had written. I could only hope that the community Digital Story Quilt had comforted Carl in his grief as sharing my story had.

Others offered personal wisdom, such as "Live long and prosper" "Believe in yourself and you will succeed" "Carpe diem each and every day" "Be a lifelong learner,

find time to read each day" or "You pooted" and "Was good niggaz." The thoughtful and the profane existed side by side in the digital community quilt.

Several patrons offered messages directly related to the quilt exhibit:

On sewing and quilting:
- My mother taught me how to quilt when I was younger.
- My mother taught me how to sew. I was fascinated by her sewing machine and all the different delicate implements. When I visited Grandma in New Orleans, I loved to look at her sewing machine which had a nifty door to store all kinds of notions!
- Quilting is more than just sewing. It is gathering with friends to visit and share your thoughts and encourage each others creativity. Warm feelings and thoughts. It is feeling the cloth and putting the pieces together in a meaningful, colorful way.
- I remember my Grandmother Lacy sitting in her rocking chair after the supper dishes were done and working on her quilt. I only watched, but I never learned the craft. Now that she has died, I really wish I had asked her to teach me how to quilt.
- Quilting is cutting big pieces of fabric into little pieces and then sewing them back together into one big piece again, now with a variety of colors and patterns.
- There is Joy and Peace with each stitch made to see the beginning and the end of of what once was scraps, now it is whole. Maggie

On the Digital Story Quilt:
- This is Emma and Melanie. Were in fourth grade in Orlando, and were here on a field trip with our class. Were as excited as a kid who just got a new puppy to be here and be part of the community quilt!
- I'm an experienced quilter who loves this concept.

190

- Quilts are really unique and pretty to me. Making them seems like a great hobby to take up. Maybe someday I will. If you look at them closely, they really tell stories about our past and history. They were even used to help slaves escape. They are great and interesting!

- hi! my name is sam and i have lived in florida for about 3 years. i am in aim/gifted and am 8. online quilting rocks!

- History creates the fabric that makes up our lives. It is wonderful to be reminded of those who shaped our world today.

- Hi, I'm Susie from Lynchburg, VA and a dedicated quilter. Came to Orlando just for this exhibit.

- I think this is such a great idea!! I am so happy to be a part of this project. =D

And from friends and family:

- From my mentor and friend: A special day, after several years of discussion about the vision, the objectives, the prospects and far reaching implications of this medium, today I see its public announcement and have the opportunity to input my personal experience into this phase…

- From my daughter: I love this Exhibit in the museum! Its AWESOME! My mom is the best at making these kinds of things.(I am the daughter of Mrs. Ferrier) While I've been here, Its really cool to see all of the pieces fit with this exhibit finally finished. I know for a fact that this has taken a long, LONG time to perfect with lots of trials and errors.

But of all the messages in the virtual quilt, my favorite of all may be:

"QUILTS COMFORT AND HOLD DREAMS."

As I scan the photos and the messages of all the patches, I see people seeking to touch the future.

The Museum as the Site of Cultural Warfare

The "Quilts as Text" exhibit was staged at a history museum, precisely because of the cultural wars on representation that were waged on exhibits throughout the 20th century. No longer just a visual respite, the museum exhibit represents a unique site for the presentation and creation of history. Through the museum exhibit, the staff interpreted history based on the authority of staff or the will of its financial supporters. Patrons were to view and accept this interpretation of historical texts; the authority of the staff remained unchallenged.

What place does the individual story hold in a larger, chronological "official" narrative? The museum staff at this particular museum had struggled to bring together the authoritative with the personal stories of Central Florida history. They were interested in how the exhibits could become more interactive, not just presenting the historical content in multimedia ways, but to actually allow patron voices to be infused with the exhibit. History Center staff often used an advisory board in preplanning stages to determine what types of artifacts to use. Even this method of information gathering, however, often led to competing interests promoting their version of history. Comment cards, solicited from patrons after the fact, only impacted future planning, not the current exhibit on display.

The "Quilts as Text" exhibit was the first foray into a blend of first- and third-person voices where the quotes and thoughts of patrons were instantly available to successive patrons as part of the exhibit. The Digital Story Quilt exhibit allowed patrons to alter the exhibit, each with his or her own thoughts, thus altering the official text at the

code and content layers. Multiple voices expanded the interpretive possibilities of the museum exhibit.

Even with the limits of this prototype in terms of the number and type of patch layers each patron could create, the resulting dynamic composition allowed each participating patron to insert themselves into a larger discourse, in the cracks and interstices of the official narrative.

CHAPTER 6   CONCLUSION

This is the aesthetic inheritance of quilting, a meditative practice that brings focus, stillness, and concentration. This is the aesthetic inheritance of quilting, a spiritual practice that renews the soul. This is the aesthetic inheritance of quilting that names names, that tells stories, that reclaims a history worked by the hands. The cultural practice of quilting offers an openness and creates a space haunted by memories and inhabited by everyday wisdom.

From its quotidian, pedestrian roots in the 19th century household, women took the humble, utilitarian quilt and transformed it so that they – and the quilts – became active agents in important historical changes. The Digital Story Quilt honors and builds on this heritage, creating a praxis through recycled narrative artifacts as a new way of knowing for the postmodern world.

Bill Ivey and Steven J. Tepper suggest that America is on the threshold of a significant transformation in cultural life. They presage a participatory culture, one in which art is produced by amateurs and consumed in the home, where people contribute and learn from each other and much of what is made is considered community property (2). In an forthcoming anthology they are editing, contributor Henry Jenkins calls this movement "a revitalization of folk culture," where citizens are seriously engaged during their leisure time in creative pursuits (2). This grass-roots rise in vernacular creativity challenges existing cultural producers. New participatory technologies of information access, knowledge exchange and content production are facilitating this cultural shift.

194

These technologies – such as digital video, blogging, podcasting, and others – have reduced the barriers to production. These amateurs have the means to disseminate their cultural products far and wide, challenging the traditional media and cultural sources. They want to "co-author" meaning, as Lynne Conner suggests, becoming part of the cultural experience. This democratization of cultural production has also brought about a subculture of connoisseurs who actively engage these domains, cultivating rich musical, artistic, and cultural experiences that they share by linking up with committed fans, family and friends (3). The Digital Story Quilt further pushes this paradigm, creating inventors and "co-authoring" knowledge producers through its interstitial methodology.

Quilting, in its traditional fabric form, doesn't require literacy, or knowledge of "high arts" or politics. This fact is important for establishing an intervention in the digital realm that works for everyone – young and old, educated and street wise. Narrative stitching becomes a habit of the mind, a ritualized practice that creates a field of action. The Digital Story Quilt operates to create a poetic dwelling that by juxtaposition of stories becomes a semiotic playground. The Digital Story Quilt becomes what Gee describes as a semiotic domain – a practice that recruits one or more modalities (e.g. oral or written language, images, equations, symbols, sounds, gestures, graphs, artifacts, etc.) to communicate distinctive types of meanings (18). As Gee suggests:

> Semiotic systems are human cultural and historical creations that are
> designed to engage and manipulate people in certain ways. They attempt
> through their content and social practices to recruit people to think, act,
> interact, value, and feel in certain specific ways. In this sense, they attempt

to get people to learn and take on certain sorts of new identities, to

become, for a time and place, certain types of people. (43)

In reflection, the user recycles imagery and text and concretely reclaims these in

personal stories. If the Digital Story Quilt project ended with the creation of the

mystorological patch, there would be no more reflection than personal navel-gazing and a

retreat into a nostalgia for the past. However, in an act reminiscent of Jameson's

cognitive mapping, writer/readers identify, negotiate, and challenge postmodern cultural

conditions by casting that patch into the interstices of the postmodern pastiche. In

dialogue with others, the writer/reader in the Digital Story Quilt seeks patterns of

metaphors, language, themes, and imagery that have shaped perceptions of self,

community, and the characteristics of culture. Writers/readers of the Digital Story Quilt:

- Learn to experience (see and act on) the world in a new way.
- Gain the potential to join and collaborate with a new affinity group through sharing his or her individual patch and by working with others to compose a Digital Story Quilt "narrative."
- Develop resources for future learning and problem solving in the semiotic domain of "real life."
- Learn how to think about semiotic domains as design spaces that engage and manipulate people in certain ways, and
- Help create certain relationships in society among people and groups of people (Gee 45).

By allowing users to enter a semiotic domain where they can manipulate the

symbols that define their culture, the Digital Story Quilt fulfills the goal to create a place

for advocacy. This interstitial praxis provides a means of subverting the disciplining

196

technology of historical production. Poetic, personal knowledge is reinvested into the historical record, healing the rifts between the scientific and the secular. As Sandoval asserts, "The effectivity of this cultural mapping depends on its practioner's continuing and transformative relationship to the social totality. Readings of this shifting totality will determine the interventions – the tactics, ideologies, and discourses that the practitioner chooses in order to pursue a greater good, beginning with the citizen/subject's own survival" (29).

The task, through the Digital Story Quilt praxis, is kinship. Says Haraway, "Kinship is a technology for producing the material and semiotic effects of natural relationship of a shared kind" (53). The Digital Story Quilt operates as free-form signifiers, animated by the writer/reader into a pastiche of possibility. Thus the quilt, originating as "women's work," is transformed in its cybernetic form into a generative space.

Recycled narrative artifacts in the digital quilt takes that which has been shunned and discarded and reconstitutes it. Potent mystorological gems resurrect ghosts in the machine, called forth to haunt scientific discourse and historical narrative. In the Digital Story Quilt, subjects find "a new representational space, that of fiction, populated by everyday virtuosities that science doesn't know what to do with and which become the signatures, easily recognized by readers, of everyone's micro-stories" (de Certeau 70).

By adopting the practices of the interstitial methodology, users of the Digital Story Quilt gain familiarity with the tactics that will serve them as they enter and negotiate semiotic domains:

197

- **Fragmentation:** By breaking down the whole narratives of their own lives, users use even smaller fragments to piece together their life stories. This process frees the various signifiers to attract new meanings, creating a space for insights and possibilities.

- **Condensation:** Each fragment becomes an emblem of a larger concept or meaning, representing complex symbolic data in an iconographic form.

- **Juxtaposition:** By rearranging the condensed fragments into a quilt-like mosaic, users place static meanings into play, forcing a different perspective on the icons as they interact and influence their neighbors. Users experience a flash of insight as new meanings are revealed in this jostling.

- **Improvisation:** The random actions, seized in the moment of selecting fragments and creating quilt compositions, opens unexpected visual avenues that yield insights. Also, users take content and recycle it in unexpected and novel ways.

- **Endurance:** Through the persistent actions of the user to create and revisit their digital patch, the user is constantly negotiating identities in an ever-shifting digital landscape. As the user explores the patches of other users, the embedded narratives influence the user to reflect again on his or her own patch and the stories it tells.

These narrative tactics, used within the Digital Story Quilt, engage readers in making meaning for themselves:

1. Recognize and seize the revealing of technology onto the path of poesis through narrative as a focal practice;
2. Use narrative to found a theater for action in the interstices.
3. Through a process of iterative "unpicking" and insurgent "relinking," displace and "seize the apparatus of value-coding." (Bhabha 184)

Not only are users learning to create voice, they are also shaping their identity and are actively engaged in the development of the culture around them in a collaborative, "intercreative" space much as the World Wide Web inventor Tim Berners-Lee envisioned.

198

The Digital Story Quilt becomes a Foucaultian "phenomenology of ghosts" – that is, as described by Joe Kincheloe, "a study of human consciousness removed from the tyranny of temporal or spatial ordering (73). The quilt embodies "hybridity" as Bakhtin describes – the development of a hybrid, multilingual, and multicultural consciousness in order to maintain a surplus of vision, a liberating perspective (qtd. in Kincheloe 73).

Extending the Digital Storytelling Movement

According to the Center for Reflective Community Practice at MIT, the community digital storytelling movement brings powerful, storymaking technology to practitioners and residents in communities that wish to tap the potential of story for surfacing local knowledge, connecting experiences across diverse individuals, and moving those individuals to collective action. While the sharing and distribution of stories has been central to efforts to date, the Digital Story Quilt builds on this work by providing a powerful research tool for visualizing, analyzing, and using community knowledge for advocacy.

Several recent national storytelling efforts, such as the Center for Digital Storytelling in California and the Center for Reflective Community Practice at MIT, have sought to help individuals tell their stories. Other national efforts have sought to capture stories around specific events -- like the Voices of Civil Rights project of the AARP or Ellis Island Oral History Project in New York. The Digital Story Quilt project solves the retrieval and presentation issues of these projects as they seek to make the stories available to, and usable by, a wider audience.

199

The Digital Story Quilt is a dynamic mapping device for digitally creating, storing, and sharing personal stories. It is also a software program that allows for the geospatial analysis of digital stories. The Digital Story Quilt technology provide cutting-edge data analysis services to the digital storytelling movement, extending the movement's capabilities to deliver on its promise for personal, corporate, and community action.

The Center for Digital Storytelling in Berkeley, Calif. uses multimedia tools to tell personal stories through photos, video clips, music, voice, and text. Research has demonstrated the power of testimony to create empathy and build relationships through intimate storytelling. Traditional journalism acts as the first draft of history, providing a gate-keeping mechanism for determining what is newsworthy. The Digital Story Quilt project honors the personal stories of individuals, rewriting what is considered "history." By providing a tool for creating and sharing stories, the Digital Story Quilt takes the stories that have traditionally been discarded and gives them a place of honor in a cultural memory device. A new knowledge economy is created that gives advantage to the situated knowledge of individuals.

To that end, the Digital Story Quilt project extends existing capabilities in the digital storytelling movement. Digital storytelling efforts typically provide the tools for creating and storing personal stories. What these efforts have lacked is a compelling, visual display that invites exploration, experimentation, and connection. By using the Digital Story Quilt patch as a visual representation of a user's story, multiple users can interact with a created quilt narrative for community problem-solving.

The Digital Story Quilt project also serves the needs of journalists. As more newspapers attempt to infuse stories with the viewpoints of local people, the Digital Story Quilt provides a cultural memory that may be searched as the starting point for this process. The intimacy and authenticity of the personal voice strengthens the notion of an open, accessible community press. The Digital Story Quilt provides media organizations with a tool for collecting these types of stories.

The community storytelling movement is a worldwide one. Many efforts capitalize on honoring the situated knowledge of individuals for community action. Critical issues remain around how these stories can effectively be shared to leverage localized knowledge. The Digital Story Quilt technology answers these questions.

The Digital Story Quilt provides a way to correlate individuals' stories in a visual, geospatial display. By combining personal narratives with mapping software or the Global Positioning System with demographic, geographic or psychosocial variables revealed by the storyteller, the users can gain tremendous insight into their personal issues or those of a community. The composed quilt-like display of a collection of individual stories can then be used as part of an ongoing process of personal or community change.

Mystoryquilt.com and Social Networking Web Sites

Concurrent with the digital storytelling movement is the development of other digital genres that allow for personal expression such as blogs, podcasts, social networking technologies such as Friendster and Instant Messenger, and personal web

journals. Even companies like Apple are bringing together their separate digital content tools like iTunes, iPhoto, and iMovie, etc. to allow people to create, catalogue, and save their preferences in digital scrapbooks. These technologies are converging to create applications like Apple's iLife that allow all the digital content to be manipulated into digital journals, podcasts, and other multimedia formats that can be shared around the world.

According to Nielsen/NetRatings, general community web sites such as MySpace.com represent a small segment of the online advertising market, but it is also the fastest growing sector. In ClickZ Internet Advertising News, a Nielsen/NetRatings analyst suggests that this sector is attractive to advertisers because of its higher levels of engagement and interactivity with its users. At MySpace.com, personal profiles, blogs, chatrooms, classifieds, music, and other content can be created and shared with a global social network. At Friendster.com, users congregate in this online social network like a virtual party line. The latest iteration, Friendster 2.0 expands the social networking aspects of the site to include: Friendtracker with real-time profile updates from friends and the Friendster Graph, a map of relationships of users on the site. Each development in the social networking genre strives to enhance the connectivity and relationship-building of its members.

The Digital Story Quilt technology and its website MyStoryQuilt.com (or digitalstoryquilt.com), take the social networking aspects of these community websites even further. Writers create a more intimate, telling profile using the Digital Story Quilt patch-making functions. One advantage of the Digital Story Quilt method is its

fragmentary nature. Writer/readers can add to a scrap bag ideas, images, pieces of quotes

or songs that aren't part of a larger, linear narrative that "makes sense." These can still be

pieced in the Digital Story Quilt technology into a meaningful use of what has typically

be thought of as refuse. Because of the depth and intimacy of the stories themselves,

users learn from one another's experiences…beyond the typical favorite music group or

movie. Users may share their Digital Story Quilt patch with friends and acquaintances,

building a "scrap bag" of patches that they organize in a visual map of connections and

patterns. This "narrative" map creates an easy interface for navigating the patches of the

users and sorting and analyzing them. Other functions in the Digital Story Quilt allow the

users to move beyond creation to invention. Through the Digital Story Quilt interface, the

software brings users together in a unique social network that fosters deeper dialogue

around language, cultural icons, and cultural memory. The user expands and contributes

to a new representational space that transforms the in-between into a liberating space.

 The Digital Story Quilt reinvests history with the lost narratives of a culture,

fulfilling the qualities and functions of a deconstructive hypertext. It also, as required of

poststructuralist feminist theorists, provides a space for multiple voices to rise up to

challenge polarizing, codifying discourses with a chorus of situated and/and/ands. Thus,

the Digital Story Quilt constitutes a new knowledge economy. Its discourse provides, by

means of a theory of practice, representation, and signs, by the fragments and bits of

everyday life, a sort of general recipe for a new exercise of tactical power, with narrative

as its tool; the resurrection of the body; and the juxtaposition of representations to create a new body of knowledge.

Fostering a rich folklore that honors the unique creative contributions of each contributor, the Digital Story Quilt draws our gaze inward, then outward as we ponder our interrelatedness and our knowledge. Folding geographies and linking generations, each patch becomes a digital ambassador in a postmodern techno-cultural consciousness. In this contemporary period, the small acts of everyday life, endowed with great power of diffusion and subtle arrangements of narrative, mutate – in quotidian, pedestrian ways, the oppressiveness of the history's production. The Digital Story Quilt takes that which has been discarded in the discourse and reconstitutes it as a memorial. Memories return, surreptitiously and virally, to infect the discourses of the historical record.

> The dust of their bodies passed long ago into flower and tree as the strength of their bodies passed into the making of a nation. Their names are forgotten and unrecorded, except on a fallen, lichen-crusted stone in an old burying ground or a dim page of family records which their children of the third and fourth generations are too busy to search out and read. But in nearly every American family there is a certain heirloom which is a memorial to the sturdy foremothers of the nation – a handwoven coverlet of which the very old will say in a tremulous voice: "My Mother spun and wove it." (Elsley 38)

The African women quilt I made now travels from bed to bed in my home, each of my children begging to be allowed to sleep under its warmth. I have yet to tell my children what the fabrics mean and why I call it my "It takes a village to raise a Ph.D." quilt. Someday they'll want to know what they can do to make a place for themselves in the world – with a voice that matters. But for right now, the quilt serves to warm my lap during the day as I think and write about quilting traditions, and their place in a digital world. And at night, my youngest daughter cuddles beneath her African and African-American protectors.

"I feel safe here, Mama" she says, "it's got your love in it."

Figure 59. Seven-year-old Haile Ferrier hand stitches her first quilt patches in 2006 during a quilting session with her mom.

APPENDIX: COPYRIGHT PERMISSION

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January 22, 2007

Michelle Ferrier
6213 Tortoise Creek Lane
Port Orange FL 32128
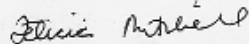
Dear Michelle:

Thank you for your interest in using "How to Read a Quilt" in your dissertation on the quilt as knowledge architecture. You have my permission to quote from and/or use this poem in its entirety, with acknowledgement of the author (Felicia Mitchell) and the original print source (*Words & Quilts. A Selection of Quilt Poems*, edited by Felicia Mitchell, The Quilt Digest Press, 1996). This permission extends to your use of the poem with acknowledgement in publications related to the dissemination of your dissertation project (for example, articles, web projects, and so on).

I'd be happy to provide you with a digital recording of the poem as well. Just let me know.

Best wishes for your project!

Sincerely,

Felicia Mitchell
Department of English

Home address: P.O. Box 976
                        Emory VA 24327

Phone: 276-944-5776 (home)
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A College of Uncommon Character

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