Photography Interrupted: A Hypermodal Assemblage

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Abstract
As the possibilities of hypermodal inquiry intensify against the boundaries of qualitative research, a hypermodal assemblage performs an unfolding–refolding of layers within the space of Deleuzian thought. By exploring a literary question asked by F. Scott Fitzgerald and later repeated by Deleuze, a Deleuzian lens transports the ontologically real into the realm of the postmodern, expanding alternative conceptualizations of the conventional question, “What happened?” Here, layered text, images, and sound flatten into a hypermodal intensity of passageways through poststructural philosophy, literature, and visual art. By exploring hypermodal reading and writing practices, this assemblage reimagines prohibitive thresholds within qualitative inquiry.

Keywords
hypermodal writing, hypermodal reading, photography

A Question Folded
This hypermodality emanates from the intensification of a literary question. Addressing the confessional writings of F. Scott Fitzgerald (1925/1995), Deleuze and Guattari (1980/1987) observe that Fitzgerald “asks himself, Whatever could have happened for things to have come to this? He is the only one who has been able to carry this question to such a point of intensity” (p. 194, emphasis in original). In this assemblage of text, sound, and images, the question “What happened” forms an intensity that flows through Fitzgerald’s experiences, Deleuze and Guattari’s writings, and a hypermodal event. In the process, multimodal forms of academic production create methodological openings for how hypermodal inquiries might be created, organized, written, and read. Specifically, Deleuzian assemblages and lines of flight respectively provide means of creating and organizing hypermodalities, whereas hypermodalities potentially engage readers and writers in immanent, intensive, and affective practices that involve thinking within artistic, hypermodal media.

A singular literary question, therefore, sparks lines of flight regarding — literature, graffiti, photography, and blues —
—— a digital assemblage of Deleuzian intensities —
—— layerings of poststructural thought —
—— re-envisioned qualitative inquiries into “what happened” —
—— reading as a productive practice —
—— and writing through photographic and hypermodal venues.

Hypermodality 1
An Assemblage of “What Happened”

Hypermodal Elements
Within this hypermodality, digital photographic images form the foundational plane; musical and written text are then layered both on and through the photographs. More specifically, hypermodal elements include music (“Hidden Blues,” Pixt, 2010), brief interruptions from the writings of Fitzgerald (1925/1995) and Deleuze and Guattari (1980/1987), and digital photographs from the exhibit Entry Interrupted (Ulmer, 2012). Although images, music, and text might be viewed as discrete forms of writing (per Barthes, 1977), taken together, the same elements form a hypermodal assemblage. As Lemke (2002) observes, it “is
not simply that we juxtapose image, text, and sound; we design multiple interconnections among them, both potential and explicit” (p. 300). It is in such interconnections that these materials become hypermodal—interconnections between and among “what happened” in each component.

**Music.** Notably, the song “Hidden Blues” continues to form new assemblages. Through a Creative Commons license, with attribution, others may use the song as a soundtrack (as is the case in this hypermodality) or make modifications. Different iterations and applications of the song bring forth new creative possibilities with each permutation. The inclusion of “Hidden Blues” not only illustrates how the collective use of artistic digital materials mutates and reassembles across online environments but also establishes a setting for selected images and text. The choice of blues offers a troubled yet hopeful narrative backdrop for the photographs; the “hidden” elements problematize the unknown contextual elements and precipitating events in the images.

**Images.** The 12 images in the hypermodality originally were displayed within a photography exhibit, *Entry Interrupted* (Ulmer, 2012). The exhibit was curated from a series of photographs poised on the threshold of prohibitive passageways (see Table 1) in towns and cities across northeast and northwest Florida. Taken in the wake of the economic recession, most—though not all—of the buildings are in various states of disrepair and abandonment. Layers of paint peel from buildings. Many windows are cracked, broken, boarded, or missing; other windows have been opened simply to prevent further decay. “Palatka Graffiti,” the photograph at the center of the hypermodality (Figure 1), captures the question(s) underlying the images in *EntryInterrupted*: “What?? What? What happened?” (Ulmer, 2011k).

**Text.** The question “what happened” encompasses different textual aspects of the hypermodality. Deleuze and Guattari (1980/1987) address the question in the eighth section of *A Thousand Plateaus (ATP)*, which is partially titled, “What Happened?” (p. vi). In *ATP*, they draw from a short story in which Fitzgerald (1936/1993) confesses the details of how he “cracked” (p. 70); Deleuze and Guattari use Fitzgerald’s tragic autographical account to illustrate how Fitzgerald (1925/1995) intensified the question “what happened” in relation to the events of his own life (of which he may have felt both “within and without” [p. 40]). “What happened” thus has two primary ramifications within Deleuze–Guattarian philosophy: For Deleuze and Guattari, the question not only marks the various lines of crack, break, and rupture that course throughout our life narratives, but the question “what happened” also marks the initiation of an event.

Given that events are singularities that “communicate in one and the same event” (Deleuze, 1969/1990, p. 53),

### Table 1. Images in Entry Interrupted.

| Images | Ulmer, R. D. (Photographer). (2011a). Abandoned building in Palatka [Photograph]. |
|--------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|        | Ulmer, R. D. (Photographer). (2011b). Broken window and wood [Photograph].       |
|        | Ulmer, R. D. (Photographer). (2011c). Colorful frames [Photograph].               |
|        | Ulmer, R. D. (Photographer). (2011d). Flower shop [Photograph].                  |
|        | Ulmer, R. D. (Photographer). (2011e). For rent [Photograph].                     |
|        | Ulmer, R. D. (Photographer). (2011f). Got the blues [Photograph].                |

(continued)
hypermodalities may function as an event plane upon which singularities interact and communicate. Notably, the intensification of singularities within an event produces something that is both new and always different (Boundas, 2005). Within this hypermodality, production stems from an event and then builds upon an intensity of “what happened” that begins with, but moves beyond, this particular author.

A Visual Event

Interconnections among images, music, and text concern how elements of the hypermodality are constructed in relation to one another. Yet, with regard to the question of why this piece is hypermodal, the hypermodality emanated from a singular, intraactional (Barad, 2007), multimedia event. The event appeared as an unexpected flash of thought—as a visual intensity. Wandering through the house, an encounter with a familiar photograph gave me pause. In that moment—that event—time and space flattened. Viewing “Palatka Graffiti” through Deleuze, Guattari, and Fitzgerald produced a visual event: I saw not only the photograph, but also Fitzgerald’s writings and Deleuze and Guattari’s (1980/1987) table of contents (Figure 2). The scrawl of chalk on the door in the photograph seemed to simultaneously occur with, alongside, and through not only a 1936 confessional tale and a philosophical translation published in 1987 but also a photograph taken in 2011, exhibited in 2012, and reencountered in 2013. The conjoining of photographic, literary, and philosophical texts formed the beginnings of a hypermodality; the hypermodality continued to assemble alongside the addition of the other 11 photographs in Entry Interrupted and “Hidden Blues.”

If hypermodal intensities generate singularities, then hypermodal approaches to writing and reading might emphasize how writers creatively produce and readers individually experience hypermodalities as events. Within this vein, poststructural theorists offer several ways in which hypermodalities might be assembled, organized, written, and read.
Theoretical Intersections and Implications

Hypermodalities engage several possibilities regarding intersections with, and evolving applications of, poststructural theories. In addition to connections made with intensities in this particular hypermodality, more generally, hypermodalities also intersect with several other Deleuzian concepts, including assemblages. Whereas Lemke (2002) describes hypermodalities as multilayered and interconnected, for example, Deleuze and Guattari (1980/1987) describe assemblages as sites “upon which reciprocal presuppositions and mutual insertions play themselves out” (p. 90). Following Deleuze, hypermodalities are a vibrant assemblage of text, sounds, and images. Given that assemblages create different means of conceptualizing research through openings and questions rather than providing closures or answers (Koro-Ljungberg & Barko, 2012), hypermodal assemblages extend beyond issues of construction into different modes of writing, reading, and organization, as well. Lines of flight offer one such possibility.

Organizing Hypermodalities Along Lines of Flight

Discussions of lines extend across Deleuzian philosophy. For example, Deleuze and Guattari (1980/1987) write,

> Lines of writing conjugate with other lines, life lines, lines of luck or misfortune, lines productive of the variation of the line of writing itself, lines that are between the lines of writing these lines (p. 194, emphasis in original). In this sense, writing maintains an “intrinsic relationship with lines of flight.”

(Deleuze & Parnet, 1977/2007, p. 43)

To write within Deleuzian systems of thought, therefore, may be to write simultaneously along, between, and within variations of the lines upon which our writer- and reader-selves are composed. The importance of lines within hypermodal contexts relates not only to Deleuze but also to the functions of hypertexts and hyperlinks. To read digital material—particularly hypermodal material—oftentimes is to be faced with elements of nonlinear choice not readily available within traditional print form. In contrast, hyperreaders may click through elements of interest along individual lines of flight. Rather than attend to traditional manuscript form, therefore, subsequent writings in this article follow Deleuzian ontology and occur along lines of flight.

Writing hypermodally

Derrida (1967/1976) approaches writing broadly, conceptualizing of writing as “all that gives rise to an inscription in general, whether it is literal or not and even if what it distributes in space is alien to the order of the voice” (p. 9). “Pictoral” writing holds one such potentiality; he further observes that the etymology of “photography” involves the writing of light (Malabou & Derrida, 2004). If photography is writing, then perhaps photographic writing may be written within hypermodal contexts. For Barthes (1977), in comparison, “Writing begins at the point where speech becomes impossible” (p. 190), and the photographic image is “a message without a code” (p. 17). Within poststructural modes of production, perhaps hypermodal writers might adopt parallel approaches to the following suggested hypermodal reading practices: Writers might produce through immanent and intensive compositions: affective and effective texts; and writings through photographic images.
Reading hypermodally

Because hypermodalities contain multimodal elements that may involve nonlinear experiences, hypermodalities also invite different modes of reading. As Deleuze and Guattari (1983) observe, “Reading a text is never a scholarly exercise in search of a signifier. Rather, it is a productive use of the literary machine” (p. 106, as cited in Baugh, 2000, p. 34). This perhaps is heightened within hypermodal reading practices. Within the Deleuzian machine, hypermodal encounters may produce three separate but related types of readings: (a) reading for affect (Massumi, 1987, 2002) and effect (Baugh, 2000; Bogue, 2003), (b) reading intensively and immanently (Masny, 2012, 2013), and (c) reading through photography and literature as art. Examples of each are provided within, but are not limited to, the context of this hypermodality.

1. Reading for Affect and Effect

A hypermodal reading that focuses on production and affect emphasizes connectives and “creative mutations” (Lorraine, 2005, p. 147). By conceptualizing reading as an ongoing, dynamic, productive experience, affect creates effect, and effect displaces meaning. Given that the question explored in the hypermodality pertains to ‘what happened,’ the displacement of meaning with possibility is of particular interest. As Baugh observes, a Deleuzian reading emphasizes the production of the new rather than a reproduction of something previously created. In this mode, experimentation “comes first, and involves playing and working with the text in order to see what effects it is capable of producing, without being constrained by what someone or something else (author or text) intended” (Baugh, 2000, p. 38). Thus, this hypermodality may be read not for authorial intent, but for the production of individual affect and effect. As a result, readings of ‘what happened’ will vary.

Example 1. A productive, or affective, approach to reading echoes Massumi (1987) in his translator’s forward to ATP. Hypermodal readers might consider the following set of questions when reading for affect and effect: “The question is not: it is true? But does it work? What new thoughts does it make possible to think?” (Massumi, 1987, p. xv).

2. Reading Intensively and Immanently

Within Deleuzian approaches to Multiple Literacies Theory (e.g., Masny, 2012, 2013), reading becomes both intensive and immanent. Reading immanently “refers to the virtual thought of . . . in reading and it is from investment in reading that a reader is formed” (Masny, 2013, p. 342). Reading intensively, in contrast, is drawn from Deleuze’s assertion that when reading, either “something comes through or it does not. There is nothing to explain, nothing to understand, nothing to interpret” (Deleuze, 1995, pp. 8-9, as cited in Masny, 2012, p. 75). Within Multiple Literacies Theory, therefore, reading as a productive experience defies singular explanation, understanding, and interpretation. Such immanent and intensive approaches mark a departure from more literal readings, particularly with regard to readings grounded in more traditional forms of visual analysis. Moreover, an immanent philosophical approach requires a separation between thought and representation; according to Due (2007), it is a philosophical engagement with art that enables this separation.

Example 2. Reading this hypermodality intensively and immanently (per Masny, 2013), readers might adopt different reading practices. For example, instead of asking what any given hypermodality means, readers might ask:
- How does the hypermodality function?
- What does the hypermodality produce?

3. Reading through Photography, Reading through Literature

Reading as a textual experience transforms into an intertextual (Kristeva, 1980), multimodal reading event within hypermodal realms. Importantly, the role of literary, visual, and musical art forms shifts in the move from textuality to intertextuality. The intersection between philosophy and various forms of art produces a form of effective reading that involves thinking through art. Here, “art at its most creative mutates as it experiments, producing new paradigms of subjectivity” (Parr, 2005, p. 149).

Example 3. In this hypermodality, effectively reading through art involves thinking and reading through – rather than about – photography, music, and literary text. For example, the fictional narrator in The Great Gatsby (Fitzgerald, 1925/1995) observed that he both “was within and without” the scene at hand (p. 40); hypermodal readers might ask how they themselves similarly are “within and without” hypermodal elements. Reading hypermodalities (continued)
Reading art/literature/photography/music enables the productive reading of hypermodal singularities, intensities, and events.

through photography, music, and literature positions readers affectively within, and analytically without, the hypermodality.

Figure 3
An assemblage from 'Entry Interrupted' (adapted from Ulmer, 2011e, 2011f, 2011g)

Coda
In contrast to traditional investigations into event happenings in this hypermodality, abstract queries into “What happened?” unfold and refold along lines of flight within this Deleuzian assemblage. Graffiti, photography, and blues culminate in a performative assemblage of text, images, and sound as a seemingly innocuous, answerable question inhabiting qualitative research transforms into a hypermodal assemblage of graffiti, music, and digital photography. Like the doors and windows portrayed in Entry Interrupted, a number of passageways similarly exist within the research enterprise (Mazzei & Jackson, 2012). To stand in the openings of such prohibitive passageways—much less pass through them—may be to transgress through traditional writing, reading, and research practices. To explore movements within and through such prohibitive passageways, therefore, hypermodal writers take off on their own lines of flight and produce new intensities—new hypermodal inquiries into “what happened.” In so doing, however, perhaps “what happened” is not a question to be answered but an opening to be explored.

Acknowledgment
The author would like to thank Robert D. Ulmer for the use of photographic images.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests
The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding
The author received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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