Where's that Confounded Bridge? Performance, Intratextuality, and Genre-Awareness Transfer

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This chapter contends that transfer of genre awareness can be improved in composition classrooms through understanding the rhetorics of popular music. Drawing on scholarship on transfer and genre theory, the authors present original study results and pedagogical recommendations based on their experiences leading upper-division student writers in the analysis and performance of musical texts. The chapter maintains a conceit based on the performative rhetorics of James Brown and Led Zeppelin. In addition to making the often-abstract rhetoric of transference and genre more accessible to students, the authors' approach suggests the relevance of multimodal and interdisciplinary performative strategies in the theory and practice of transference and genre awareness.

James Brown's "Get Up (I Feel Like Being a) Sex Machine," (Brown, Byrd, & Lenhoff, 1970) can be considered a metacognitive song. It is explicitly and consistently aware of itself *as a performance* of the moves it is making as it makes them. Brown begins the original 1970 recorded version bantering with his band: "Fellas, I'm ready to get up and do my thing!" Bandmembers respond, "Yeah! That's right! Do it!" Brown adds, "I want to get into it, man, you know?" The band replies, "Go ahead! Yeah!" (Brown, et al., 1970). This continues until Brown counts off the first beats. About midway through, this call and response returns, with Brown invoking bandmate Bobby Byrd for encouragement in leading the group to the bridge portion of the song: "Bobby, can I take them to the bridge?" Byrd affirms, "Go ahead!" and the process repeats with variations until the band transitions into the bridge. The track closes similarly, with Brown calling on his bandmates seven times to explicitly acknowledge that they will imminently "hit it and quit," which indeed they do as the song ends. These vocal cues supposedly first served Brown and his bandmates as spontaneous directions during improvisational recording sessions. But that originating moment henceforth became a trope for Brown and his band, as well as for other musicians.

One reappearance is in Led Zeppelin's 1972 song "The Crunge" (Bonham, Jones, Page, & Plant). In this track, however, the bridge never arrives, despite being invoked in Brown's style. Instead, singer Robert Plant explicitly remarks that the song's culminating section cannot be found, perhaps insinuating that Zeppelin cannot pull off what Brown and his band had mastered. Plant's delivery of the final

set of lyrics steadily degrades from soulful singing: "Take it home. Take it, take it, take it. Excuse me. Will you excuse me? I'm just trying to find the bridge. Has anybody seen the bridge? Please," to plaintive speaking, "Have you seen the bridge? I ain't seen the bridge," and finally to avowal of confusion extending past the point of the music's abrupt ending, "Where's that confounded bridge?" (Bonham et al., 1972). "The Crunge" not only shares "Sex Machine"'s explicit self-awareness of its own moves in real time, but also adds an additional layer of metacognition by articulating awareness that it is reiterating a pre-existing trope.

Given the popularity and influence of James Brown's classic, it is reasonable to claim that Zeppelin *transferred* elements of "Sex Machine" into their own performance. Moreover, they did not merely replicate these elements, but rather repurposed them into a distinct composition that both shares and extends the meanings of the original trope. Seen in this light, "The Crunge" successfully performs an act of genre transfer, a process that is vital to student writing development yet challenging to teach. Many writing scholars have noted that successful transference of generic tropes transcends mere formal mimicry by active participation in the social contexts that underpin those tropes (Bazerman, 1994, 2013; Bawarshi, 2003; Bawarshi & Reiff, 2010; Miller, 1984; Nowacek, 2011; Russell, 1995, 1997; Yancey 1996). We add that such participation seems more likely when a given context is familiar and engaging to those who would transfer it to another context. What makes "The Crunge" enjoyable, and thereby effective as a text, is not Zeppelin's compliance with generic codes lifted from Brown's original context, but rather the band's compelling performance and repurposing of those codes. In other words, Zeppelin knows what it's doing and what it's doing differently, and appears deeply engaged in those acts. That, in turn, engages their audience.

Postsecondary and secondary writing teachers can try to inspire such high degrees of awareness, engagement, and performative agency in students while helping them to learn to transfer genre knowledge. One means of doing so is to invite students to get inside of and to examine the workings of a genre in which they are already deeply engaged, an act we call *intratextuality*. This way students may better see that the relationship between composed texts (i.e., songs in this chapter's case) and their genres is not rigid and fixed, that what we call *genre* is really a marker of performances, trails of moves made by people who have genuine reasons to make them and to make them their own.

Intratextuality rehearses students in the performance of genre traits in contexts already familiar and engaging to them. If students can understand what it means to perform the moves of a genre and what it feels like to be genuinely engaged in that act, that embodied awareness can serve as a metacognitive heuristic for future transfer needs of other kinds[1] and a benchmark by which to register the value of

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1   See Marquez (2015) for excellent similar claims about dramatic performance.

such acts. Given the unfamiliarity of many writing tasks to students, it seems advisable to establish motive prior to or along with methods for transferring across them. If compelling reasons to invoke prior genre knowledge cannot be established, then we cannot reasonably expect students to transfer such knowledge into less familiar and more challenging academic contexts. These challenges multiply when we expand the range of transfer beyond the sequential learning contexts and expectations within a single class or discipline to include relationships that cross curricular boundaries, an increasingly critical consideration for teachers of writing in contemporary high schools and colleges.

Figure 19.1. That Confounded Bridge (digital collage by the authors).

We find songs to be effective for practicing genre performance because of their appeal and accessibility. Students can easily identify songs that have significantly affected them, and tend to be willing and able to explore the songs' generic patterns. Students also often enter and exit our classrooms with music in their earbuds, and music plays during much of their time outside of class. This constant exposure

endows students with a native fluency in musical performance that can function as a rich precedent for genre-knowledge uptake, or an alternative version of what Amy Devitt calls an "antecedent genre" (2007). So, as a pair of music-loving writing teachers, we determined to gather theories and to develop practices that pertain to these attributes, which we present below. Following a quick review of some key ideas in writing transfer theory, we explain our methodology and methods, and we introduce some resources for teachers and evidence for researchers to consider putting to their own uses.

The most influential scholars in transfer studies have been coauthors David N. Perkins and Gavriel Salomon. They state that transfer occurs "when learning in one context or with one set of materials impacts on performance in another context or with other related materials" (1992, p. 3). Perkins and Salomon delineate two basic modes: *low-road transfer*, which "reflects the automatic triggering of well-practiced routines in circumstances where there is considerable perceptual similarity to the original learning context," and *high-road transfer*, which depends on "deliberate mindful abstraction of skill or knowledge from one context for application in another" (1988, p. 25). These contrasting modes of transfer are also called *hugging* and *bridging*, the latter of which comprises our chapter's conceit and chief concern.

The challenges of teaching for transfer tend to arise with contextual relationships of the bridging variety. With hugging, the proximity of the new circumstance to the prior learning context is so close that the process of transfer occurs naturally, almost automatically, due to the resemblances of context clues operating in both performances. Bridging, by contrast, involves building connections between contexts that are less obviously similar, and employs a level of deliberation, metacognition, and awareness of abstractions and analogies that are absent from low-road transfer. Bridging is by far the more fluid and challenging of the modes of transfer to define, teach, and assess. As a result, subsequent scholarship has attempted to develop and clarify bridging-style transfer in various ways. King Beach (1999) rejects *transfer* as too static a metaphor and offers *generalizing* in its stead, preferring its emphasis on the role of social contexts in learning as well as the fact that the types of learning covered by transfer includes transitions that go beyond changes in context: for example, changes in individuals affected or involved, or the types of relationships emphasized by the old and new learning performances. Elizabeth Wardle (2012) and Kevin Roozen (2010) suggest *repurposing*, which emphasizes both the rhetorical nature of sites of writing operating within different learning contexts as well as the role of problem solving in any act of transfer. Rebecca Nowacek's (2011) revisioning of transfer as *recontextualization* is noteworthy for its emphasis on the interplay between transfer and genre recognition and awareness. She explains: "Because they serve as the nexus between stability and change, genres are powerfully positioned as a means of identifying and responding to a sense that there is a need that must be met or an opportunity that can be realized by making connections

between various contexts. A genre's constellation of associations provides ready avenues of connection" (2011, p. 20).

Ellen Carillo (2015) provides compelling primary and secondary research to support her view that without an accompanying mindful framework, students are less likely to transfer their learning gains. Her definition of transfer follows Beach's partial overlap with Perkins and Salomon: "when students *recognize* and *generalize* something in one (perhaps previous) course in order to allow for application in a different course" (2015, 105). Carillo says that metacognition, "literally thinking about thinking—is the hinge upon which transfer depends" (2015, 105). This view underwrites the theory on which we ground our method: it is not so much the content of any given genre but "*awareness* [itself that] is the transferable element" (Carillo, 2015, p. 107).

The metacognitive tropes inscribed into the text of the performances of James Brown and Led Zeppelin enact Carillo's process of genre awareness. Once recognized by the listener/learner, "Sex Machine" and "Crunge" provide models of metacognitive practice operating within familiar musical genre contexts. However, we must remember that such recognition is facilitated by our deep familiarity and engagement with the artists and the genres within which they composed and created. Without this familiarity, the transference of metacognitive practices cannot occur. Perkins and Salomon recognized that many apparent failures of transfer were due to this lack of prior understanding: "We can hardly expect transfer of a performance that has not been learned in the first place!" (1988, p. 28). This is why an essential part of our approach is that our students choose their own songs.

In our writing programs, and likely many others across the country, textual analysis is the activity that correlates best with transferable genre-knowledge learning. Textual analysis assignments of various kinds operate on the premise that understanding how one generic text works prepares students to understand how other texts work. Intratextuality offers a performative approach to this goal. The method entails moving around inside of a text to observe and understand its genre traits in action, and to perform those traits by literally and figuratively giving voice to the text. As students' engagement in the task is sustained by their fluency and relative authority in relation to content, opportunities to develop metacognition multiply—not (only) as a condition of transferability, but (also) as a habit of mind that can itself be transferred into different learning contexts. These students may never again have cause to analyze a favorite song's genre traits, but they will need to grasp and perform the social functions of various composed genres in other learning contexts. Our assignment is available in the appendix, and other materials are below.

Once students have spent considerable time inside of their songs, examining the features that have the most significant impacts on them and speculating about their significance within a given framework, we discuss these elements more specifically as genre traits, per se. We believe this approach yields a valuable and

lasting benefit (i.e., bridge) toward genre-awareness transference. It is not difficult for students to connect musical features to the social activities they reflect, when prompted by questions such as: How do you know it's a metal, R&B, or folk, etc., song? Which traits signaled that? What are the expectations that come with them? How are those confirmed, challenged, or denied in your song? What values are at play in this exchange? What tweaks to the song would change its genre designation? How would those tweaks, in turn, alter the song's effects on you and your expectations? How do questions of race, class, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, age, and regionality affect these effects and expectations? What if your context for listening to the song were changed spatially (e.g., at a bar, in a TV commercial), temporally (e.g., Friday night, Monday morning), or socially (e.g., alone, with friends)? Which genre traits serve as cues for determining the text's appropriateness and effectiveness in the given situations?

These discussion topics reveal the necessarily social nature of genres, which indicates that their constituent traits are active and changeable, literally and figuratively *performed*. A given rock song succeeds, for example, not merely by conforming to some ideal protocol for Rock-ness, but because it yields significant effects on audiences in relation to their contexts, subjectivities, and expectations. Performance and reception are thus necessarily implicated in the production of a song's meaning, a condition also true of writing in academic disciplines. Whereas a power ballad performs verses, choruses, and bridges, a scientific paper performs introduction, methods, results, and discussion sections. A country song employs first-person voice to increase expressiveness, and a history paper, the passive voice to prioritize validity. A pop hit becomes the nexus for exchange of capital, and a case study organizes exchange of information. These genre traits are all markers of values and their attendant social activities. Our anecdotal and empirical evidence suggests that the challenging concept of genre performativity is easier to understand, enact, and transfer if one can rehearse such performances on familiar texts, whose content and contexts are highly engaging.

In fall 2015, we invited a section of an upper-division writing course to complete an anonymous, optional survey about their experiences with the intratextuality project. Seventeen of 20 completed it. Two separate Likert scale questions asked "how confident in performing the following acts were you," both before and after the intratextuality project (see Table 19.1). Because the sample size (n = 17) is so small, standard deviations around the mean are large, and statistical reliability of the data cannot be established. Nevertheless, the directional indication indicates positive changes in students' confidence resulting from participation in the intratextuality project. All categories saw notable decreases in the bottom two self-ratings (not at all confident, not very confident), with all but one of them going down to zero. Meanwhile, the top two self-ratings increased across all five attributes. The two lowest rated *before* categories generated the strongest advances in terms of both

means and frequencies.[2] The indication is that the issues students felt to be most challenging benefited from the project.

Table 19.1. Before/After Intratextuality Project Confidence Likert Scale Results

n = ~17	Five-point scale: 5 = Extremely confident, 1 = Not at all confident								
	Before Project			**After Project**			**Before/After Change**		
	Mean SD.	**Bottom 2 Ratings**	**Top 2 Ratings**	**Mean SD.**	**Bottom 2 Ratings**	**Top 2 Ratings**	**Mean**	**Bottom 2 Ratings**	**Top 2 Ratings**
Analyzing what a text does	3.35 / 1.08	6	10	4.18 / 0.62	0	15	+0.83	-6	+5
Evaluating how well a text does things	3.35 / 0.84	3	8	4.12 / 0.68	0	14	+0.77	-3	+6
Writing from a POV inside a text	2.82 / 1.10	7	5	3.76 / 0.64	0	11	+0.94	-7	+6
Recognizing traits of a text's genre	3.12 / 1.18	5	7	3.63 / 0.78	1	9	+0.51	-4	+2
Identifying activities/ values	2.88 / 1.13	7	6	4.00 / 0.77	0	12	+1.12	-7	+6

If these observed positive change levels were to hold up under the condition of larger base sizes, then the noted mean changes would prove to be statistically significant and the reliability of the positive effect could be stated with more certainty. Also, although confidence in one's own task completion—better known as perceived self-efficacy—is not the same as the task's actual completion, many valid and reliable studies have demonstrated positive correlations between self-efficacy and performance in various writing tasks (see Pajares, 2003). The following selected qualitative comments on the before/after question are also not generalizable, but they are descriptive of students' transfer-related metacognition in action: "I have

2   This is an especially encouraging result since the assignment was designed specifically to increase understanding of genre as human activity by means of going inside of texts, the two lowest-rated before categories.

been analyzing literature since high school . . . kind of like a muscle I learned how to analyze things . . . [but] I never really thought of what a text can do to me." "I still need to work on writing from inside a text, but I am definitely more comfortable with the idea now." "I feel more confident about recognizing a genre's traits and how a text can relate to different people."

Of the seventeen students who responded, eleven reported being *much more* or *more* engaged in this task than in all of their other college-level writing; two said they were *much less* or *less* engaged. When compared specifically with other college-level textual analysis work they had done, their levels of engagement remained consistent with the above results. In addition, the students' qualitative feedback provides insights into common tropes that can be used to acknowledge, teach, research, prepare, and enact transfer of learning. Three of the more prominent tropes, with examples, are 1) *Continuity*: "[Intratextuality] has somehow linked into all music I have been listening to for the past month I have been aware of this assignment." "The experience of intratextuality is something that I plan on incorporating into the old system of things I used to do when I used to read in high school … definitely a more memorable experience." 2) *Sociality*: "When I was completely finished, I was very excited and had my friends listen to it, though it was a bit awkward. I am proud of what I did." "When I began to get the hang of it, it was quite enjoyable. Especially the looks I got whenever someone caught what I was saying." And 3) *Pleasure*: "I was more engaged in [the intratextuality project] than other textual analyses I have done in college … music and writing are two of my favorite things, so the project was naturally a lot of fun for me." "I find it interesting that we finally get to take a text and relate to it rather than tear it apart and analyze it piece by piece … After doing [that] for so long you forget to actually enjoy literature."[3]

Although the results of our modest pilot study are not generalizable, they offer reasons to hope that heightened transferability may result from teaching strategies that incorporate performative intratextuality, and so warrant further investigation. However, it is important to remember the very real environments in which transfer takes place, and the challenges such environments present. As teachers, we want to perform the James Brown moments, spontaneously calling out to our students as fellow players to help take it to the bridge, to transfer funky collaborative riffs to new contexts, to make intuitive leaps from here to somewhere else without ever leaving the space of the jam. But our reality is more akin to Led Zeppelin; even when we know that we should have reached the bridge by now, we are often not sure where to find it. And in a sense, we never really do. As teachers, we try to create opportunities for our students to experience a-ha moments. But we cannot do this by only presenting them with recordings of our own breakthroughs and

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3   This is an instance of negative transfer, "where knowledge or skill [or habits, in this case] from one context interferes in another" (Perkins and Salomon, 1988, p. 22).

going-overs. Nor can we pretend that the authentic moments we suspect are keys to finding that confounded bridge are anything but scattered and scarce in today's environment of educational standards and assessments. We recall Adam and the Ants' lament: "It's so sad when you're young to be told: 'You're having fun'" (Goddard & Pirroni, 1980). Our work offers not a solution to these very real impediments, but a reminder to ourselves and others that we must always be on the lookout for these mysterious sources of authentic performance. Without them, we may have nothing to transfer but rote mimicry.

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Appendix: Intratextuality Assignment

In a written script, please analyze how your chosen song[4] achieves a specific valuable effect on you, and argue that and how other people can benefit from this knowledge. Note: the focus here is more on what your song *does* than on what it *says* or *means*, though there will be some overlap among these phenomena. Record an audio performance of your script (i.e., voice over) that variously interacts with key features of the song in order to explain your experience of that text from "inside" of it. Manipulate your song's audio file with editing software like Audacity or GarageBand, including by pausing, excerpting, repeating, quieting, or slowing down the track, *and by singing along with it*.

You might think of yourself as a tour guide, leading your audience through highlights of your unique and significant experience of the song, pointing out the moves this text makes *as they are happening* in the recording, and analyzing the effects of those moves on you and potentially on other audiences. Your role in this composition, then, is active and performative; you are interacting with your song and your listeners. Among other possibilities, your aim may be to invite, inspire, and "teach" your audience to similarly experience the song's effects. Be sure to argue for *why* your audience should consider what you're offering them with your project: how what you have to say can benefit *them*. The more significant the effect(s) of the

4   Your choice of song must have lyrics in English, either originally or through translation. You may appeal for permission to substitute a poem for a song.

song, the better; imagine a spectrum of significance ranging from entertainment (lesser) to life-changing epiphany (greater).

Keep in mind that almost none of your listeners will be interested in knowing *merely* how your song's features work, and only a very few of them will want to know how it affects *only* you. So it will help to frame your analyses and experiences with some kind of proposal, invitation, challenge, argument, etc., that raises the stakes for your audience. Here are some examples of propositional frameworks to use or on which to potentially model another framework:

- My song can improve your love, etc., life, and here's how and why.
- How and why to be productively angry with some help from this song.
- Case study: hip-hop (or rock, pop, etc.) versus racism (or classism, etc.).
- Introducing the anthem of my generation (or race or class or gender, etc.).
- Caution: this is a dangerous song (and how and why to listen to it anyway).
- Just one line of lyrics (or one musical phrase, etc.) can change your attitude.
- My song may be more significant than your favorite song is, and here's why.
- The saddest (or happiest, etc.) song ever sung, and how and why to listen to it.
- Think that this song (or genre) is just a bunch of noise (or fluff, etc.)? Think again.
- Instructions for listening to this song to restore your faith in humanity (or love, etc.).