

### 3 The Florida School's Legacy, or The Devil's Millhopper Joke Revisited

*Craig Saper*

*No avant-garde group has ever achieved major acceptance without a catchy name: think of Futurism, Structuralism, Situationism, the Yale School, Fauvism, La Nouvell Vague, and even Dada, a parody of such names, meaningless, or at least intended to be. The name provides a group identity . . . The final stage of this group identity generally results in the formation of some official institute or association. . . .*

—Robert B. Ray,  
*How a Film Theory Got Lost*

*If Saper hadn't met the Florida Research Ensemble (FRE), he would have had to invent it. Just as Hamlet invented his Father's ghost for the sake of Shakespeare's adaptation of the old myth, Saper's projective, or FRE associated, reading gives birth to the legacy he inherits.*

—Richard Burt, performing in the film,  
*The Florida School's Legacy*

*Not entirely without merit!*

—Greg Ulmer, a blurb for the film,  
*The Florida School's Legacy*

*What tiresome and laborious folly it is to write lengthy tomes, to expound in five hundred pages on an idea that one could easily propound orally in a few minutes. Better is pretending that the books [or films] exist already and offering a summary or commentary.*

—Jorge Luis Borges

*When you come to a conference on APPLIED YOU, it is as if you're dead. I would like to see what it is like when I am dead. That's why I came.*

—Jacques Derrida

*Writing has been bottled up in books since the start. It is time to pull out the stopper.*

—Bob Brown

*Devil's Millhopper gets its unique name from its funnel-like shape. During the 1880's, farmers used to grind grain in grist-mills. On the top of the mill was a funnel-shaped container called a "hopper" that held the grain as it was fed into the grinder. Because fossilized bones and teeth from early life forms have been found at the bottom of the sink, legend has it that the millhopper was used to feed bodies to the devil. Hence, Devil's Millhopper.*

—Florida Park Service

*Nobody ever tells jokes for the first time.*

—G. Legman

In the late 1980s, Greg Ulmer produced a video, *Ulmer Reads Reading on TV*, with Paper Tiger TV, a group of media makers and critics who produced television programs for public access channels. In each program, a media critic analyzed mass media in almost funny and sometimes insightful ways. For example, one program, *Joan Does Dynasty*, included hilarious rants, mixing sophisticated Marxist analysis with catty snipes about the characters' make-up and costumes. That critic,

Joan Braderman, used low budget blue-screen technology to insert her face into the actual scenes. In that context, Ulmer's program was one of the most elaborate productions, including multiple settings, a cast of actors, many clips, and an ambitious argument. The video was framed as an episode of *Believe It or Not*, and appeared to claim that a wacky Professor believed that a sinkhole in Florida (called the Devil's Millhopper) was the meaning of (Shakespeare's play) *Hamlet*. When it first appeared on public access stations, the audience share was unusually high for Paper Tiger TV. Public Access, first mandated by governments allowing cable companies to carve out territories as monopolies in most markets, was a fleeting space for low-rent diversity and experimentation that *Wayne's World* lovingly parodied. Ulmer's video, and Paper Tiger in general, tried to use that liberating low budget sense of expression, and its atmosphere also attempts to recreate a Freudian joke-logic. One could not financially live up to broadcast quality standards; so humor, montage sequences of clips, and using the stuff available for the audience-member-as-critic-host made the do-it-yourself programs inspiring. For example, Herb Shiller, in his Paper Tiger TV series of programs simply read the New York Times and, like someone sitting at the breakfast table, literally yelled at the paper his criticism of the editors' biased and surreal associative connections. Paper Tiger wanted to help broadcast programs that intelligently criticized particular programs and series. Ulmer took up the challenge. Although his published books and essays on his theories of *heuretics* and tele-theory are well known, the promise of a genre of video theory (i.e., theory-on-video, in new media, or online) is only now emerging.

Ulmer's video examined, and parodied, the Annenberg/CPB (Corporation for Public Broadcasting) Project's "Voices and Visions," an attempt to televise how to read (poetry) on television. Ulmer's video suggested that the well-intentioned and ambitious reading on TV project depended exclusively on one discredited model of interpretation: the only meaning of a poem was a product of the author's life and place. These psychobiographies, common in PBS documentaries on authors especially, have a neat and tidy melodramatic tautology: author's meaning completely explained by personal childhood strife, trauma, and nostalgia (for a fleeting happiness). Over and over again, the programs focused on places, like where Emily Dickinson lived, to explain the meaning of poems. The PBS project even attempted this stunt with poets, like Wallace Stevens, widely regarded as pro-

ducing works tangled in metonymic analogies eluding any singular reference. The visual track of the “Voices and Visions” programs made the poem’s meaning a literal interpretation of the poet’s surroundings. Ulmer’s video offered an alternative model of interpretation: to pull the (Mill’s) stopper and let writing out of the logocentric book-logic. One could appreciate the meaning of even a masterpiece of literature and drama in terms of the reader’s setting and situation. This was not a “reader response” version that sees a particular reader’s interpretation as a window on to a singular (and usually neurotic) psychic formation. This was not simply a “cultural studies” version that contextualizes the meaning in terms of the situation of consumption and production. Rather, Ulmer suggested that the meaning of *Hamlet* in terms of a reader’s geographical location also suggested ways to solve disciplinary problems. That is, readers could use literature to help solve social, cultural, and even specialized scholarly problems. Of course, the rhetoric of literary and humanistic disciplines has always claimed that the importance of great works resides in their ability to help readers solve these problems, but projective readings (using literature to solve problems) also finds itself mythologized as dangerous. Ulmer’s video cites the case of Mark David Chapman, who assassinated John Lennon, as an example of the warnings media teach us about projective readings: they lead to murder and death. The non-projective readers usually find meaning in a process that discounts theoretical (or re-contextualization in terms of a reading) in favor of the theatrical (interpreting the author’s intention and performing the author’s meaning). Critics, like Joan Braderman, could talk over the media they study making the production something like video art or experimental media itself. Ulmer tells a visio-verba-semantic joke in the style of Freud’s Marriage Broker joke.

The cinematic essays of Robert Ray, the videos and writing primers of Greg Ulmer, and the essays of many others associated with the Florida Research Ensemble did not merely talk about, but through and with, media. As Ray asks if “film theory can imitate filmmaking and recognize that, at its best, the cinema requires . . . a subtle mixture of logical structure and untranslatable allure. . . . Can film theory . . . write differently, to stage its research in the form of a spectacle?” He goes on to connect this new media theory to Ulmer’s work and suggests that it can “provide a complement to critique”(Ray 13), and later that these new types of reading associated with the Florida School,

“show us how we might use them to think” (54). The first published discussion of the Florida School was in the late 1980s in the introduction to a special issue of *Visible Language* on “Instant Theory” (). Since its publication, the School’s shift away from traditional media studies toward new institutional practices (e.g., pedagogy, scholarship, publication, curriculum, and cultural change) continued and intensified. In that shift in ground, a variant of poststructuralism marked the emergence of *infrastructuralism*. ()

In speculating about ways to teach reading and interpretation using television, Ulmer’s video also hinted at ways to construct pedagogical infrastructures and delivery systems as well as deal with theoretical legacies. Like Ray’s work (and many of the contributors to this volume), Ulmer has couched his investigations of film and media in terms of pedagogical innovation. Specifically, Ulmer and Ray have suggested that one can simulate the invention process found in both the achievements of creative geniuses (e.g., Darwin) and vanguard artists (e.g., Picasso, the Surrealists, etcetera). As Ray explains, “Surrealist film-watching tactics, for example, were designed to reassert the autonomy and ambiguity of images: think, for example, of Man Ray’s habit of watching the screen through his fingers, spread to isolate certain parts of the screen”(Ray 4). Robert Ray goes on to connect the invention process to Ulmer’s *theory joke*, whose “prototypes are Duchamp’s readymades” and “in fact, all radically new knowledge seems like a joke (think of Darwin and the monkeys). As Freud saw, the joke is a denial that also functions as a means of access, a channel capable of being confronted directly”(Ray 49). The joke and vanguardist experiment are played out on something Ulmer calls a *mystory*. Others in this volume will, no doubt, discuss in great detail these strategies (the use of personal memories, entertainment citations, and problem solving strategies to solve social and disciplinary problems). They do not ask one to solve personal problems by voicing personal memories. Instead, Ulmer and Ray describe in great detail how artists and other significant cultural innovators use personal stories, neologisms, coincidences, and details drawn from areas apparently unrelated to specific disciplinary problems. They then go on to demonstrate that process themselves in *mystories* on, for example, Ray’s widely respected examination of the emergence and disappearance of the cinema’s (unrecognized) inventor. Ray uses his own personal trauma, a friend and mentor’s disappearance, to connect to a way to understand the future of media

theory in its (missing) crucial precursor in the work of Walter Benjamin. He later uses that idea of a film theory lost as the basis, and title, for his third book of experimental film theory in which he wonders why the theory of “photogenic” (photogenia) had long ago vanished from most serious writing about film, and how we can construct a new legacy built on that lost theory. To follow the “cinematic detail whose insistent appeal eludes precise explanation,” and to “follow this detail wherever it leads and report your findings,” (13) forms the method of this theory. It is based on Roland Barthes’ notion of the *punctum*, the photographic detail that points to a lost Kierkegaardian absurd residue of existence precisely because it resists social or aesthetic explanations and captures a reality that is now gone. Barthes describes and invents the *punctum* in an extended essay, *Camera Lucida*, that examines how to build a theory from these contingencies of loss and mourning that the *punctum* marks. These details (images, words, phrases), for Ray, are “precisely not yet ideas, but rather maps for which the territory must be, not found, but invented; incomplete allegories, clues . . . swiveling back and forth between the desire to know and the desire to remain ignorant” (51). As the citations from Ray above demonstrate, loss and the effort to use loss (of ego, mentors, life, and even a firm ground of denotation) are the themes that flow through the Florida School’s work. In fact, the titles of my own earliest essays express in condensed form this angst of loss and pedagogical redemption: “Learning From Being Lost” and “A Nervous Theory.” Much of Ulmer’s work concerns mourning, memorialization, and specifically the memories of his late literal father Walter Ulmer and figurative father of media theory Walter Benjamin. Because the Florida School presents these allegories of loss in terms of the surrealist jokes described above, many will miss the Devil’s Millhopper aspect of the School’s legacy.

To simulate innovation, one needs to use personal analogies, popular icons and stories, and specific strategies. Once personal analogies, especially traumatic childhood memories, enter the scene, the issue of (and the suggestive mana-word) legacy becomes paramount. Of course, *Hamlet* is the story of a vexed legacy, a theme common in many of Shakespeare’s plays. It is even the crucial issue surrounding the on-again off-again controversies about who actually authored the plays, and Ulmer’s video, on reading, jokes suggestively that it was Edward DeVere; whose legacy? The sinkhole, a literal part of Ulmer’s setting. The countless millions of sinkholes in Florida are waiting to sink cata-

strophically or already mark the shifting ground. My relatively new Florida University is in a sinkhole zip code: built on a sinkhole literally and perhaps, in terms of its uncertain future, figuratively as well.

Sinkholes also function as an analogy for legacies. In Ulmer's case, it references working in his father Walter's gravel plant in Montana as well as the Norse myth about Hamlet's Mill being built on a plug (or sinkhole). It is time, to borrow Bob Brown's phrase, to pull out the stopper that has kept writing bottled up in books and to televise reading. Walter Annenberg of Philadelphia, wanting to legitimize his father's legacy (his father made a fortune as a bookie), invested heavily in improving education in America, including sponsoring the "Voices and Visions" series on reading on television. In a series of similar surreal connections, his video also includes Marie Osmond reading a Hugo Ball Dada sound poem (for a *Believe It or Not* segment) as a symptom of her own literalism. She finds the meaning (it is nonsense) in a literal interpretation of the poem ("it doesn't make any sense"). This literalism appears throughout contemporary culture, not just in the "Voices and Visions" program, and finds itself entangled in narcissistic fantasies where one goes beyond taking responsibility for one's actions to take a paranoid responsibility for self-invention as in Osmond playing her own mother in the "Osmond Story," in which no meaning escapes the desire of an ego (giving birth to itself). The metaphoric or analogistic sensibility allows for a leakage. In psychoanalytic and surrealist terms, that which exceeds the ego, the unconscious or the Symbolic realm, appears in everyday discourse as a startling association, an odd unintended pun, and in the logic of a joke. While self-invention, along the lines of Osmond's role playing her own mother, depends on erasing any (analogistic) leakage, one could see it also as a model for a theory joke on a School's legacy. Legacy suggests that the myth of self-invention and pulling yourself up by your own bootstraps always depends on someone else's legs to hold you up as in Jacques Lacan's image of the metaphorically suggestive mirror stage. We see ourselves as complete and standing up on our own only as a parent figures hold us up: self-reflection and the formation of the ego depend on a projection, a fantasy, of a moment in the future when one walks without strings attached. Collaboration and group identity depend on recognizing strings of associations; in Ulmer's case, using the stories about Walter Ulmer's stone mill to examine Walter Benjamin's theory of historical progress, and to use that string to re-open Hamlet's mythic

connections to the Norse Water Mill that drains through a sinkhole near Ulmer's home. One could dismiss these associative strings as absurd residues of an absolutely particular reading, a surrealist joke that never rises to the truths of literal attribution, legacy, and empirical fact, or a legacy that seems to willfully resist, in its ever spreading webs of associations, progress toward, for example, efficient use of media technology for assessed learning. The Florida School simply recognizes that its legacy, its meanings and methods, depends on ana-logic and a responsibility to those overdetermined associative strings.

Ulmer's video begins and ends with Laurie Anderson's music video, broadcast on the PBS program "Alive, From Off Center," in which she sings the words to Walter Benjamin's (another Walter) "Thesis on History." The poetic thesis describes how an angel wants to "go back and fix things, but there is a storm blowing from paradise pushing the angel backward into the future and that storm is called progress" (257). It is a thesis on the tension between responsibility to a historical legacy and the destructive forces marching on into the future in the name of progress. Layers of meaning, trauma, monumentality, and the puzzling question of what to do with great literature and literary analogies (sinkholes, legacies, etcetera) all circulate in that ecology. There is a sinking feeling pondering how to sift the rubble of the past and build on a legacy.

Although all the commentaries on the Florida School, and the work of its affiliates, discuss the ways that the poststructuralist legacy has left its mark on their work, no one has as of yet mentioned a more personal legacy especially for Ulmer's work: Leslie Fiedler. Fiedler, recognized as a leader and innovator of the literary and cultural essay form, had long ago used personal analogies about his life as a Montanan to examine literary and cultural issues: "one becomes a Montanan in strange ways," (331). His essays, widely regarded as the epitome of insightful and lively literary analysis, debunk the myths of innocence in American literature and culture. His most famous essay, "Come Back to the Raft Ag'n, Huck Honey," (*Partisan Review*, 1948; written when he was 31), did not claim that Mark Twain had written this line or that Tom and Huck were even flirting with gay sexual encounters. Rather, Fiedler showed how the myth of 19<sup>th</sup> century American innocence made the suggestion of a sexual encounter particularly unpalatable and scandalous. His somewhat parodical posturing also took aim at the stuffy sanctimoniousness of mainstream literary and cultural

criticism. Likewise, his three controversial essays on Montana attacked the myth of white Montanans as the protectors of a naïve American innocence. He worried that the “Montana face,” blank and friendly, actually expressed xenophobia, and that his own “dark, nervous, over expressive” “New York face” (euphemism for Jewish) was distrusted by Montanans who demanded a more grounded, literal interpretation of the world, and expressed this in their faces. Fiedler later wondered (after many loud complaints from Montanan’s about his attack) if he should have called it the “Gary Cooper Face,” as Ulmer (unwittingly?) alludes to in his use of the *Beau Geste* film (and Gary Cooper as that movie’s star) as an analogy to unpack his own legacy of Montanan’s knightly honor and smug simpleness. Montana was for Fielder, instead, “a by-product of European letters, and invention of the Romantic movement in literature” with a past “artificially contrived for commercial purposes” as a tourist’s Frontier (131). Ulmer inherits Fiedler’s deMon(tana)s and haunting devils. Ulmer does not express an innocent nostalgia for a Montana of his rock-pile youth or the literal demands of his father’s generation to do the honorable thing and get a real job, but Fiedler’s demythologized Montana. For example, Ulmer spoofs, and is spoofed by, a “community pageant” that presents in “dramatic form” the perverse identification with the Indians’ predicament (Fiedler 138–139). Ulmer, who writes about finding his way to Jacques Derrida through his research on Rousseau, knows that in the mythic-Montana the “corpse of Rousseau is still twitching” (Fiedler 139). The other Montana, the *artificial myth* where the Noble Savage is a lie and Huck Finn went to die, came from the East. It came not from Gary Cooper’s face, but from Fiedler, who died in 2003 at the age of 85, and was “the last—or rather the first—of the wild-man literary critics . . . the original chest-thumping extrovert of American criticism, and no one ever did it better” (Tanenhaus, n.p.). Fiedler, credited by the OED with the first instance of someone applying the term “postmodernist” to literature, celebrated the demise of modernism. In that sense, he is closely aligned with the Florida School, and, in fact, Fiedler visited Florida in the 1980s as part of a lecture series organized (as I recall) by Ulmer that also included Harold Bloom, Hayden White, and (later) Jacques Derrida. Fiedler wallowed in hyperbole and his most famous pronouncement that the classic white male American writers return “in a compulsive way to a limited world of experience, usually associated with childhood, writing the same book over and over again until he

lapses into silence or self-parody” (Tanenhaus n.p.). At around the same time in the 1980s, Ulmer gave one of his best public lectures, in which he talked about innovative forms of writing essays about architectural theory and legacies. During the entire talk he held a concrete block on his shoulder. He talked about working at his father Walter’s gravel and cement mill and about key issues in architecture. The block, a central image in most modern and contemporary buildings, sat there weighing on his shoulder. Finally, at the end of the talk, he talked about what to do with a legacy and he put the old block down.

Fiedlerian deMon(tana)s of paranoid hostility toward otherness and outsiders migrated on the highways throughout the United States since the 1950s as transience became a generalizeable condition. In fact, Ulmer’s sinkhole is called the “devil’s millhopper.” That wandering created the context for another aspect of the Florida School. In the context of central Florida, Aileen Wuornos’s story about her life and execution as a serial killer suggests that the tragedy—the particularly central Florida tragedy—appears when family and community connections break down. When one lives in a transient place, characterized by shifting ground, truckers and travelers, grifters and drifters, orchid thieves and hanging chads, and the newly arrived (and soon to depart) resident aliens, then tragic consequences find opportunities. Oddly, the traditional notion of tragedy, based on ancient Greek drama, and a cornerstone of the Western philosophical tradition, suggested that the strangle hold of tradition and family ties led to tragic results. The code of tribal blood vengeance, the revenge of the son for wrongs done to the father, has led so many tragic heroes to their demise. Hamlet is a particularly apt example. He is a serial killer caught-up in seeking vengeance for his haunting family ties. Wuornos is the Florida Hamlet.

In this version, Florida tragedy becomes a marker, an analogy, for a shift in philosophical traditions away from the cathartic model of Greek tragedy. The Florida or floral philosophical tradition depends on the Greeks recruited to live here by the British (because the Brits thought Florida was the new Greece). And, names like New Smyrna Beach or the sponge divers of Tarpon Springs, constantly remind visitors of that link. Instead of catharsis, closure, and conclusion, the floral tradition produces enervation, enigmas, and exceptions. It is a theory more suited to understanding the Florida hamlet, the notion of community and an electronic village, and the tragic consequences

of its dissolution. The Florida philosophy uses the phrase, "it takes a village," a hamlet, a *sociopoetic* network, to appreciate a new terrain for cognition, thought, and what Ulmer calls "mentality" in general.

In his video, *Mr. Mentality*, Ulmer once again produced a work of video conceptual art that crossed over becoming theory; that is, it demonstrated how the false opposition (or at least distinction) between art, as conceived as an academic discipline, and theory prevents theory from incorporating vanguard problem-solving strategies and art from experimenting with conceptual issues. Like the Paper Tiger TV video, *Mr. Mentality* borrowed a popular culture format, in this case a corny teaching video in which kids visit the teacher who explains some issue. Ulmer plays the role of Mr. Mentality and explains theoretical issues to two young boys. The three sit down and talk over the problem of why people have pets, and Ulmer explains that it has to do with monumentality that pets dying "teaches you about how to mourn: how to deal with the loss of something you love and identify with." On a more general level, a nation has to learn this same lesson: how to deal with the loss of one generation after another. That is, we use monumentality as part of national identity to remember that although the "founding fathers are long dead," we still have national identity. Ulmer explains that he's been working on a monument that "recognizes the contribution our pets make to our American national identity." We need a surplus of available animals to allow for everyone to have a pet and to practice mourning. In a version of a Bataillian analysis (with a mix of Derrida's work on archive fever and memorialization), Ulmer explains patiently that the left over has to be wasted (1 pet is euthanized every 1.5 seconds or 8 million a year). The pets make a sacrifice for national identity, and wasting the pets is the price we have to pay for the practice of having a pet: "It shows we are sincere." At one point, as he explains monumentality, the visual track shows an old movie scene of a human sacrifice where the shamanistic priest rips out a young woman's heart. We still make human sacrifices and recognize those in memorials to soldiers killed in war. A reluctance to make sacrifices could either mean a contradiction in our values (sympathy and love for available pets versus the need to avoid having animals overrun cities and towns) or it might mean we do not know ourselves as a nation. "We don't realize that our existence depends on an enormous amount of waste." Loss is complicated as part of a circuit of waste to sacrifice to mourning to identity formation, and that loss cycle depends on the sincere effort to

carry on a legacy. Reluctance to accept any legacy—to give birth to yourself as an original thinker—ignores, but does not eliminate, that sinking feeling: progress pushes the angel backward into a future without past, without mourning, without pause.

In the Introduction to *Sound Tracks: A Musical ABC (Volumes 1–3)*, Michael Jarrett discusses a method of using personal analogies, of a self-revelation used for narrative, expository, and poetic effects. He quotes Ray: “An author producing a text always finds himself, like someone playing a video game, provided with three knobs, labeled narrative, expository, poetic. At any point during the text’s creation, he can adjust the balance (as one would adjust a television’s colors), thereby increasing (or reducing) the level of any of the three” (5; quoting Ray, 1995, 200). The legacy of the Florida School has to do with this mode of the essay that telescopes the personal anecdote through narrative, exposition, and poetic shifts. Jarrett’s Florida School approach, like Ray’s in the essay Jarrett cites, constructs innovative essays that both describe and use music and popular musical culture. You can see this musical essay approach in many of the Florida School works; the other approach involves the joke: jokes and music demonstrate how entertainment becomes the popularizing institutional setting for pedagogy.

Many have argued that those, like Plato and Aristotle, who inherit a legacy and follow, often get it wrong, distorted, reversed, or, for example, convert radically defiant pedagogy into the arms and legs of complacent power. Aristotle, Alexander’s tutor and mentor, became a parody of Socrates who taught in the streets and died for corrupting young minds. The birth of children is the death of parents in a Hegelian formation. Likewise, the Florida School’s legacy continues only in its disciples’ (mis)recognitions (to borrow the psychoanalytic term) and projective understandings. While you cannot take your legacy with you, others will read what is left behind as best they can from where they stand—mispronunciations, puns, misunderstandings, and all. The personal analogies function in a web of comparisons and *differences*. As Barbara Stafford explains in her brilliant *Visual Analogies*, explicitly building on Ulmer’s *heuristic* strategies, analogistic reasoning functions as a method of scholarship, a process, something that calls one to think and does not limit thinking with an end product. *Allegoresis*, rather than allegory, to borrow a comparison from Maureen Quilligan, does not ornament for a popular consumption an algorithm-

mic solution, nor does it find a singular ground of meaning, but uses analogies, including those drawn from personal, popular, and expert discourses as method rather than mere expression. Making was always an end to the process, but Ulmer's epistemology of doing situates making, theory as hobby, as a pedagogical relay in which students learn a method of scholarship—the method of the humanities—by trying it on and running with it. It is not the study of creative geniuses, but an artificial or prosthetic version of the processes involved. Once the issue shifts from using analogies to consider literature, film, or culture in general to ana-logicistic thinking, then the question concerning infrastructure emerges. The *sociopoetic* work of networked art suggests that one might organize a productive system that uses the consideration of the infrastructural, School formation, for example, as a poetic analogy. The changes to scholarship, in turn, function as analogies for new ways of thinking. If this is the legacy of the Florida School, from media studies and poststructuralism to *sociopoetic infrastructuralism*, then the problem of legacy returns to find its resolutions in analogy: not in the abstract view but in the absolutely particular. What follows, then, is a reading of this legacy using the mystory. One could then re-read the explanatory essay above as emerging from the ana-logic experiment that follows here.

Recently, my old and ailing father, part of Leslie Fiedler's generation, told me that he was worried about his death, not scared of dying, but worried that no one would carry on his legacy; that his life would be for naught, insignificant. He showed me a group of boxes filled with papers, notes, outlines, and photocopies. He told me that he wanted me to write that book (on Jewish jokes in the context of a psychological theory of humor and healing). He asked me to finish what he had only started. "All you need to do," he pleaded, "is write the book" using the notes and outlines. I hemmed and hawed, and remained uncommitted to making any promises. This was a kind of pun on the traditional Freudian Oedipal conflicts (the tradition describes the allegory of damaging the child's foot to keep them at bay and to not interfere with the father's desire; only creating resentment of the constraints as the child becomes conscious of the family drama). To use these stories differently, as an allegoresis instead of traditional psychoanalysis, scholars use personal stories as the tropes for new theories. This sometimes twists the stories and imbues them with the air of parody as they become grist for the mill rather than significant in and of themselves.

The boxes are still in his house. My wife gently protested that I was not solicitous enough, and should have humored his wishes; the promise to carry on the legacy would be enough. Anyone given that task, the task of an apprentice learning the family trade—and in our job specific world, it is a task too few experience—anxiously worries not just about the umbilical ties of influence, as in Harold Bloom's Romantic conception, but more intensely about not living up to the demand. For, legacy always has the stench of parody floating around even the most conscientious inheritors. If history repeats itself: the first time as tragedy, the second as farce, then legacy never seems to find its intended destination. My father later gave my son a group of videotapes and books on the same topic, and instructed me to put all of them in a bookshelf across from his bed, "So that every morning, he would wake up and see those books and videos." Of course, the Jewish joke usually contains guilt, food, therapy, and wordplay, and sometimes the fool's quest. Read through Fiedler and mystory, the Florida School's legacy looks more and more like a Jewish joke—not just any joke, but a surreal mix of Talmudic word play and somewhat forced Borscht-belt type of joke. Just as some might complain that Ulmer's experiments often conclude with a clever, cute, pun filled, and merely joking mystories, my stories and word-play may fall on deaf ears mistaking the artificiality of the unfunny joke on personal tragedies about family legacies as merely a literal story. Certainly, this is the only volume that would even consider, perhaps begrudgingly, to accept this type of *mystoriological* experimentation, and to allow (as Ulmer's works do) for the reader to connect the *scenes of discovery*, below, to the arguments and justifications, above, in this essay.

My father-in-law, whose avocation is growing heirloom apple trees and studying the history of apple growing and cider making (he also has an unfinished manuscript), also talks of his historical scholarship and actual orchard as his legacy to my children (skipping a generation). Through his efforts (collecting specimens all over the country, grafting, cultivating, and protecting the trees until they bear fruit), he has compiled the most complete group of Pennsylvania apple trees (hundreds of types). He is particularly proud of one accomplishment. He recently donated a group of pear trees he grafted from the only remaining stock of John Bartram's pear trees (he found the specimen in Maryland) to Bartram Gardens (a park celebrating Bartram's naturalist journeys). Of course, Bartram was the naturalist who traveled

from his gardens adjacent to Philadelphia (where I lived and where generations of my in-law's family lived) to Florida (where I now live) and stood at the very spot where Ulmer made his video about reading on TV. Ulmer explains that Coleridge had based his notion of Edenic paradise, Xanadu, on Bartram's descriptions of north central Florida (coincidentally, I gave my son the middle name Eden to honor his birth on a farm near Bartram Gardens). Hamlet, Prince Hal, Lear, Macbeth, and many others find themselves caught in the problem of legacy; they want to escape their legacies, or to pass it on to children, so that they may idle away their hours in an Edenic (childlike) paradise. But, to their dismay, and the delight of the audience, they find themselves haunted to death by the problem expressed in the old saying, the apple always falls close to the tree. These are the mundane personal analogies and entertaining mythic versions, played out everyday in countless family and scholarly dramas, that also illuminate the profound legacies that mark not just School formations, like psychoanalysis following after Freud, but whole epochs of thought, from Aristotle building on Plato, who before had built on (a fictionalized) Socrates.

The thinking about how to handle legacy reminded me of an earlier scene in my life: my primal scene of legacy. When I was a bit younger than my son is now and a bit older than my daughter is now, my grandfather died. His name was Selig pronounced like the later famous character from Woody Allen's film *Zelig* (1983). I don't remember him ever talking; he would sit outside his apartment and watch life go by. Sometimes I sat with him. We went to his home, a two-room first floor apartment, in a run-down neighborhood of Brooklyn, New York. An uncle and his family lived upstairs, and when my father was a child, he lived there too (or in a similarly dilapidated apartment in Brooklyn) with at least some of his many siblings (some of the older ones had probably moved out already). He was born in Williamsburg and lived in East New York (Brooklyn) through high school. In this apartment, the first room was the kitchen. The second room was the bedroom with one bed.

After the funeral, the entire family was in the apartment sitting *Shiva* (Yiddish for a type of mourning ritual in which the participants sit on unevenly balanced three legged low stools so that they cannot sit comfortably). All the mirrors are covered; although I don't remember any mirrors in the apartment. Mourners sit for seven days, and visitors come by to sit with them all the while talking about the de-

ceased and praying and mourning. Earlier, at the funeral, all the men had their ties cut in half as part of the mourning ritual, and they still had their half ties on to remind them of their loss. Everyone was sitting in the cramped and dark apartment; my grandmother (although I remember calling her Gran(d)ma; she was to all of my many cousins, I imagine, *Bubbe*—Yiddish for grandmother) was cooking a big pot of something (although I may be conflating other memories since cooking, food, and guilt played a large role in my extended family). My immediate family was “modern,” educated, secular, more Philip Roth than Sholem Aleichem. We lived upstate; some of my uncles had never left the boroughs. The rest of the extended clan always worried that my family did not feed me, and would demand that I “eat, eat” whenever I appeared. One uncle owned a delicatessen, and I remember eating some delicious stuffed cabbages with a *mish mash* (Yiddish for combination, mess, hodgepodge, collage) of ingredients inside during another visit a few years later at my grandmother’s funeral. I wandered around the apartment like the boy in a Mordecai Richler story, “The Street,” who confronts the guilt and contradictions of mourning. The boy gets his room back after his grandmother dies, and he comes to appreciate the guilt that haunts the living as he wanders around the apartment while the family sits *Shiva*.

While my relatives were mourning and talking, I looked in a small closet and found something that disturbed me. The adjective to describe what I felt was *fahrblunget* (Yiddish for mixed up, bemused, confused) that later became a kind of mana-word for my earliest research with the Florida School on Moses Maimonides’s *The Guide Of The Perplexed* (yes, “of the perplexed,” not “for the perplexed”). I came back into the bedroom where everyone was sitting *Shiva* and talking. I tugged on my dad’s sleeve and told him “Grandpa left something behind.” Everyone stopped talking and looked over at me. Someone said, *oy vey* (Yiddish expression for dismay, pain, grief, but also, with *vey* pronounced by Sephardic Jews as *way*, poetically connected to *wah*, the interjection on joyous occasions, leading to much wordplay in the Talmud to suggest the porous connection between woe and joyous tears). So *oy vey* marks those domestic troubles like “*Oy vey*, my kid only eats candy,” or “*Oy vey*, you’ll have your hands full with that one,” those certain types of parental and familial torments that we learn to prefer over the alternatives. My father asked me what grandpa had left behind. “Grandpa left his leg behind,” I announced, and I wondered to

everyone's stunned silence, how we would get it back to him. Someone gently told me that it was my grandfather's *false* leg and since he was dead, he did not need it anymore, and we should leave it in the closet. I did not know he had a false leg until that moment, and worried, in spite of the reassurances, that we should have done more to get him his leg back. It was a residue from the Devil's Millhopper kicked back out as a legacy just in time to pull out the stopper. Or, in Joycean terms Wah, wah, water, "riverrun, past Eve and Adam's, from swerve of shore to bend of bay, brings us by a commodius vicus of recirculation" (Joyce 1). It is, in other words, best described poetically by, for example, William Carlos Williams (uncatalogued page fragment, c. 1930–1931; cf. Dworkin 83 n. 14):

Come O orthopedic Muse,  
Analyze the funny feet  
That all the modern poets use.  
Put my senses all to rout  
And make my brain a muddy mess  
So I may trace and write about  
The gutter of my conscience.

This fragment has guided my analysis here on the Florida School's legacy, and suggests a new model of inspiration, a new Muse, and a new scholarship of footnotes.

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