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THE LIFE OF LIVES: FROM PAPER TO THE WEB

*Background*

Today the screen is the central medium of communication as the book has lost its dominant role (cf. Kress: 2003). Information technology related to computers and the WWW, in particular, have provided people with new expressive possibilities. After the advent of the Internet some already existing textual *genres* have migrated to the Web and have undergone a process of adaptation while other completely new *genres* have emerged; as a consequence, it is now possible to find a wide variety of texts on the Net. Autobiographical writings are fairly numerous and online diaries and personal weblogs probably represent the best example of this kind of texts. The earliest online diaries were started in 1995, whereas blogging sites were introduced in 1998 (Sorapure: 2003).

The latter are “frequently modified webpages in which dated entries are listed in reverse chronological order” (Herring *et alii*: 2005, 143) and which can cover a wide range of topics; interestingly, the most popular subject seems to be the blogger’s life and his/her experiences<sup>1</sup>. Further, the “personal blog” category is the one that has undergone the fastest development since 2001 (Crystal: 2006, 242).

Analyzing personal blogging sites and online diaries poses a preliminary definitional problem: not all scholars use these terms interchangeably because they stress the fact that the word “diary” refers to a more meditative and intimate kind of writing whereas personal blogs are a “kind of spontaneous online public journal” (Taylor:

<sup>1</sup> According to a telephone survey carried out by PEW Internet & American Project, “when asked to choose one main topic, 37% of bloggers cite “my life and experiences” as a primary topic of their blog. Politics and government ran a very distant second with 11% of bloggers citing those issues of public life as the main topic of their blog.” Lenhart, Amanda and Fox, Susannah, *Bloggers. A Portrait Of The New Storytellers*, PEW Internet & American Project, 19 July 2006.

2002). Since the diaristic component seems to prevail in both cases (McNeill: 2003), here autobiographical blogs and online diaries will be employed as (near-) synonyms.

### *Methodology and Aims*

Central to my analysis is the notion of *genre*; this concept, which dates back to classical antiquity, has undergone a remarkable development across the centuries (cf. Breure: 2001). One of the most influential thinkers of the twentieth century, Mikhail Bakhtin, has given an important contribution to the studies on generic classification. Initially a novel scholar, he then extended his research field to extra-literary texts to devise a theory about speech *genres*. According to Bakhtin “each separate utterance is individual, of course, but each sphere in which language is used develops its own relatively stable types of these utterances. These we may call speech genres” (1986, 60). He also underlines how “thematic content, style, and compositional structure (...) are inseparably linked to the whole of the utterance and are equally determined by the specific nature of the particular sphere of communication” (*ibidem*). Linguist John Swales’ definition of *genre* is heavily indebted to that given by the Russian academic, but he places more emphasis on the importance of communicative purposes and rhetorical moves in defining *genres*, as well as on their intermediary role between individuals and society. He establishes a connection between the concept of *genre* and that of discourse community, which indicates a group of people characterized by a common set of communicative purposes (1990). Scholar Vijay Bhatia draws on Swales’ theory and stresses that *genres* are not static, even though they retain a certain degree of fixity and stability (2004 [1993]: 23). Berkenkotter and Huckin underline the “inherently dynamic” nature of *genres* as well as the fact that they are “constantly (if gradually) changing over time in response to the sociocognitive needs of individual users” (1995, 6). This dynamism is very noticeable both in autobiographical writings and in web *genres* and has posed problems in identifying their defining features. In addition, autobiography (as well as *webgenres*) can “itself be broken down into a series of *genres* (...) each of them is likely to draw on other *genres*” (Chamberlain and Thompson: 1998, 11). Literary critic Paul de Man points out the difficulties arising in trying to classify autobiography as a *genre*: “Empirically as well as theoretically, autobiography lends itself poorly to generic definition; each specific instance seems to be an exception to the norm” (1979, 920). Philippe Lejeune (1980; 1982;

2000) has extensively studied the generic structure of autobiography and has concluded that what characterizes autobiographical life-writing is a tacit agreement between text producer and text receiver that the author, the narrator and the protagonist of the narrative are the same person (which he calls *pacte autobiographique* [1982, 14-15])<sup>2</sup>. It is the identity among these three figures and not a set of rules or features which contributes to defining the genre (Hobbs: 2005, 2).

This paper will investigate whether personal weblogs and online diaries belong to a new *genre* which is native to the Web or they can simply be considered the electronic counterpart of printed autobiographical forms; consequently, this study will focus on the possible impact the new *medium* exerts on life-writing activities. *Genre* theory will be applied both to webpages as semiotic objects and to the alphabetic texts deployed in them as language objects (Garzone: 2007, 16). In order to identify the generic status of online diaries and personal weblogs, their constitutive elements will be examined and comparisons will be made between the printed and the electronic medium from the standpoint of text, producer and receiver.

### *Text*

The first aspect to be taken into consideration when comparing autobiographical printed and online forms of writing is their materiality. Apart from being a text, an autobiography or a diary is an artifact, whereas a personal weblog or an online journal can hardly be classified as such as it is physically present only on the hard drive of a server. Therefore, scholar Madeleine Sorapure argues (2003), there is more distance between writer and textual artifact.

The electronic format also has important repercussions on text production since it allows users to publish their entries right after

<sup>2</sup> Lejeune postulates the existence of a *pacte autobiographique* between reader and writer. This pact entails the identity between author, narrator and protagonist but also introduces the notion of truthfulness which has been seriously challenged over the last few decades. Among the important scholars who have declared that autobiographical writing cannot be considered a truthful account of one person's life Georges Gusdorf deserves to be mentioned. As a matter of fact, he maintains that "We must (...) introduce a kind of reversal of perspective and give up thinking about autobiography in the same way as we do an objective biography (...) Every autobiography (...) does not show us the individual seen from outside in his visible actions but the person in his inner privacy, not as he was, not as he is, but as he believes and wishes himself to be and to have been" (1980, 45). The notion of truthfulness will not be analysed here, as in this respect there are no relevant differences between printed and online autobiographies.

they have been written and to perpetually modify them whenever authors are not happy with the first version, “with revisions leaving no trace” (*ibidem*). Differently from printed ones, autobiographical online texts are volatile and changeable, as they can be updated or cancelled any time the blogger desires.

Moreover, Internet diaries and blogs enhance greater freedom of expression because, unlike printed autobiographies, they lack any form of external moderation (*ibidem*: 2006, 241); thus, the personal element is probably more prominent and the writing more spontaneous and informal. Bloggers and online diarists communicate in what scholars refer to as “Netspeak” (*ibidem*: 2006, 19), that is the language of the Web. The register which characterizes Netspeak is much more informal than that of printed texts, because it displays features of orality blended with features characterizing the written mode. Online diary texts tend to be more dynamic and involving, although probably less carefully structured (Crystal: 2006, 45). Internet autobiographers try to write in an appealing way so as to capture as many readers as possible and keep their interest high. An auto-promotional component is rather noticeable in online autobiographical forms due to the fact that bloggers cannot count, like the authors of printed books, on publishers’ advertising strategies.

In terms of content organization, printed and electronic autobiographical texts are quite similar: they are accessible through indexes and archives respectively. The latter consist of a list of links that allow the reader to access the older entries no longer displayed on the homepage by selecting the date s/he is interested in. Typically, weblogs and online diaries present the most recent posts on top, following an inverted chronology. As Sorapure underlines, “rather than serving as the starting point, as they do in print diaries, past entries are relegated to the archives” (2003). A significant difference between the two media is represented by their diverse degree of intra- and intertextuality. All kinds of autobiographical texts contain both intra- and intertextual references, but in the online version these can be realized – apart from the use of traditional devices such as, for instance, the biographical citation – by means of hyperlinks which establish meaningful relationships between entries of the same blog or between two or more blogs/sites. In the first case, readers can navigate from one post to the other within the same Internet diary thanks to internal links designed by the autobiographer to create connections between different episodes of his/her life. Otherwise it is also possible for the blogger to establish comparisons or associations between his/her experiences and those of other bloggers by the use of external links. Tags, trackbacks and pings are useful to catalog posts

(both belonging to the same blog and to different ones) dealing with the same subjects.

Considering all this, it can be reasonably concluded that the most significant difference between printed and online autobiographical texts is that, whereas the first are linear and can be “read from beginning to end without interruption or digression” (Williams: 1992, 260), the latter are “hypertexts” and therefore allow for a individualized reading path (cf. Landow: 1992; Nelson: 1992).

### *Receiver*

As seen so far, readers of Web autobiographies have the chance to personalize their reading mode (which has been defined as hyper-reading), whereas this does not happen with printed autobiographies and diaries. Reading personal weblogs in chronological order, be it inverted or normal, constitutes just one possibility (for which the term “vertically reading” could be appropriate), but it is a very common practice for cybernauts to read personal blogs “horizontally”, that is by looking at entries posted on different online autobiographies on the same day. Some blogging platforms also offer the possibility of looking for keywords on search engines thus organizing and cataloguing posts according to one’s interests. The audience is therefore more actively involved in constructing meaningful relationships between the autobiographer’s life and experiences.

Since every single reader can decide his/her own reading path, it is impossible to identify a move structure in the traditional sense, as Bhatia intended it. Under this perspective cyber-autobiographies differ widely from printed ones. However, the greater freedom hyper-reading provides must not be overestimated. Although it is undeniable that online autobiography readers play a more active role than readers of printed books, there are severe limitations to what they can do. Their options are strictly connected to the possibility of following links and these can be designed or modified only by the author. As David Crystal points out, they have “total control over what we may see and what may be accessed, and also what links we follow (...) Although we may choose to follow an hypertext link that a designer has provided us, the decision over what those links should be is not ours” (2006, 211-212). Noel Williams similarly draws cautious conclusions, emphasizing the difficulties readers of online autobiographical forms may experience coping with the density and structural complexity of hypertexts, thus running the risk of “getting lost” in the narrated life of the author (1992, 261).

Even though readers do not have unlimited freedom to interface with the autobiographical text by creating links, they can interact with its producer, thus indirectly ultimately exerting their influence on what is written. As a matter of fact they can make their voice heard by writing comments to the posts or by emailing the blogger, acquiring in this way the multiple and active role of “listener/reader/confessor” (McNeill: 2003). Authors of printed autobiographies and diaries probably have a similar implied reader in mind, but it is only online that a real interaction can take place. Therefore it can be assumed that the reader of Web autobiographical forms “actively participates in constructing the text the diarist writes, and the identities he or she takes on in the narrative” (*ibidem*: 2003). It is to be noted that it is often the online autobiographer that asks for feedback and comments, contributing to making his/her writings “concerned not with solitary and private reflection, but with communication and community” (Sorapure: 2003). This may indicate that online autobiographical forms have acquired a communicative purpose that printed texts originally did not have. Under this perspective, the online life writing activity could have something in common with other *genres* such as, for instance, letter writing. However, not all bloggers and online diarists opt for having a highly interactive site, so most blogging platforms allow users to disable or to moderate the comments posted on their sites. Nevertheless, even those blogs where readers cannot comment contain voices other than that of the author. This is because the language of online autobiographies is characterized by a high degree of what Bakhtin defines “dialogism” (1981), that is to say the simultaneous and often dialectic presence of the voice of the writer and of the reader and the combination of the intentions of the bloggers and of their audience. If the language of autobiography is inherently dialogic, the language of blogs is even more so because of the indirect influence exerted by the readers (who play such a significant role online).

As already underlined, the concept of readership differ vastly in the paper and in the Internet environment. This is also due to the fact that new technologies have brought about an extension in the participation framework of online communicative events (Garzone: 2007, 20). Blogs can potentially reach a global audience and diarists now have to deal with two kinds of readers: those belonging to the discourse community determined by the *genre* used (Swales: 1990), and those who might discover the autobiography fortuitously and then become regular readers.

## *Producer*

In the same way that anybody can read about other people's lives and experiences online, anybody can write and publish his/her autobiography on the Net. As scholar Laurie McNeill points out, most bloggers are

individuals who, before the Internet, had few opportunities to publish their life stories on such a wide scale. Bypassing the commercial, aesthetic, or political interests that dictate access to traditional print media, and that decide whose life stories deserve to be told, online diaries can be read as assertions of identity and arguments for the importance of an individual's life (2003).

The Internet environment unquestionably provides autobiographers with possibilities of expression the printed *medium* does not offer; it is up to them to fully exploit the potentials (for which the term "affordances" has been proposed<sup>3</sup>) that are offered to their creativity.

First of all, they can make use of multimodal options much more widely than authors of printed autobiographies or diaries. Multimodality, that is "the combined utilization of different semiotic resources within a single communicative process" (Garzone: 2007, 21), characterizes both paper and web autobiographies but to different degrees. It is very common for traditional autobiographers to include texts as well as pictures in their books, thus making recourse both to verbal and to visual forms of communication. However, the predominance of text over image is undeniable. The Internet environment, instead, allows for a new balance between semiotic resources; whereas the printed word always represents the "core text" in traditional autobiographical forms, in blogs and online diaries it may acquire the status of "illustrative material" (Slembrouck: 1998). Videos, spoken texts, digital pictures or music can become the primary semiotic resource; if that is the case, then for this kind of autobiographical activity the term "life (re-) producing" is probably more appropriate than "life writing".

However, the greater creative freedom bloggers enjoy entails many textual options, as well. As a matter of fact, their main and first

<sup>3</sup> "The denomination "affordances", a term borrowed from the Human Computer Interaction Community [is used] to describe what a particular technology or piece of software affords or allows the user to do." (Garzone: 2007, 19).

choice when starting their online autobiography is whether to produce a hypertext or simply a traditional text. In the first case they make use of hyperlinks which “create significations” (Burbules: 1997) and establish relationships between the blogger or diarist’s words, entries or blog and other blogs or websites. Nicholas Burbules argues that links should be considered as “tools of rhetoric” contributing to making an hypertext “a semic web of meaningful relations” (1997). The possibility of designing hypertexts allows online autobiographers to enjoy a creative freedom which would not be imaginable for authors of printed books. Anyway, it is to be noticed that, in spite of this freedom, most bloggers feel “they must anticipate and meet audience expectations”(McNeill: 2003), so that their personal diary will be read by as many people as possible. What readers imagine to find in a personal blog is essentially the facts concerning the life and experiences of the author who is both narrator and protagonist. By conforming to these expectations, online autobiographers satisfy the main generic requirement identified by Lejeune, that is to say the fact that the three figures of narrator, author and protagonist coincide. The way in which this generic feature manifests itself is similar in the Internet environment and in printed books, that is to say by the display of the name of the writer. Lejeune underlines that, as regards printed autobiographical forms, the name on the cover of the book can count as a confirmation of the identity of author, narrator and protagonist (1982, 26). In blogs and online diaries the name of the blogger, which typically occupies a prominent position within the lay-out, serves the same function; moreover, on most platforms all entries are automatically signed. The fact that many autobiographers use a pseudonym or “nickname” does not change things significantly; according to Lejeune, a pseudonym is simply a differentiation which does not alter the fact that author and narrator/character are the same person (1982, 24). Anyway, many online diarists and bloggers make use of a nickname to guarantee their anonymity, which can be totally preserved only on the Net: it is almost impossible to ascertain the identity of people who write and publish their lives online, who may hide their real self under a virtual “mask”. Small traces of the author’s identity are constituted by the presence of very short (auto)biographical writings which provide the potential reader with a few details on the life of the writer. In printed autobiographies this kind of information is usually displayed on the back cover of the book, whereas blogs and online diaries usually feature a link to a “user profile” webpage.



*Riverbend and Cindy Morgan's Printed and Online Autobiographies*

Bloggers Riverbend and Cindy Morgan have kept online diaries where they narrated their lives during the first few months following the second Gulf War. Riverbend is a twenty-four-year old Iraqi girl whose main aim in writing is to let people know how it feels to live in a destroyed and occupied country. Cindy Morgan is an American woman who went to Iraq to drive lorries and raise money to finally be able to start a new life far away from her dangerous ex husband. Both bloggers have also published a printed autobiography: Cindy Morgan has written *Cindy in Iraq: A Civilian's Year in The War Zone*, whereas Riverbend's weblog *Baghdad Burning* has been printed almost in its original blog format (thus constituting a singular example of migration from the Web environment to the printed paper)<sup>4</sup>. The fact that there exist two media forms of Riverbend's and Cindy Morgan's stories (no matter in what order they were written) makes them excellent case studies for this analysis.

Cindy Morgan starts her blog, *White Rose's Adventures*, in September 2003 at the beginning of her risky adventure in Iraq. It immediately emerges that she is writing not only to narrate her life but also to keep in touch with her friends and relatives (who are her implied readers<sup>5</sup>). On many occasions it is evident that as a communicative purpose interaction is as important as narration. As a matter of fact, Cindy asks for feedback in various ways, directly ("So send those e-mails"<sup>6</sup>) or indirectly, by enabling comments, trackbacks (with some exceptions), and providing each post with a short multiple choice poll in order to know whether the readers have appreciated it. The fact that Morgan initially writes for her friends and relatives<sup>7</sup> influences her as she often feels the need to reassure her audience who might be concerned about her safety and health<sup>8</sup>. In her

<sup>4</sup> The spreading phenomenon of "back migration" will not be analyzed here. My main interest is to examine the editorial choices that have been made in order to convert the online version into the printed one because they well underline what changes between the two media forms and which properties, if any, are unique to the Web.

<sup>5</sup> Cindy takes for granted that the people who read her blog know her personally; this appears clearly in statements like, for instance, "As many of you know I don't breakfast." "Sick" in *White Rose's Adventures*, <http://blog.cindyiniraq.com/>, last accessed on July, 25 2008.

<sup>6</sup> "Getting Settled In", in *White Rose's Adventures*.

<sup>7</sup> She will soon realize that, due to the extension in participation framework *web-genres* have brought about, most of her audience is not composed by friends and relatives, and this will affect her writing.

<sup>8</sup> "Today was an easy day (...) But feel great today" in "Getting Our Shots", *White Rose's Adventures*.

printed autobiography, instead, Cindy recalls all the worries and anguish she felt during the period she spent in Iraq: “What if I didn’t make it home?... I had to put that possibility out of my mind. I would be coming back. I had to come back” (2006, 6) *Cindy in Iraq* appears as a solitary reflection about the narrator’s life, a way of re-thinking and metabolizing what she has experienced in the war zone: “It felt like I really was becoming that person I was looking for when I left Houston” (*ibidem*, 38).

Both Cindy’s cyber- and printed autobiography contain some photos of the protagonist (the book not so many as the blog) but, as already pointed out, the balance between semiotic resources varies widely from one media to the other. *White Rose’s Adventures* is rich in images and pictures; a slideshow of Cindy’s photos as well as her Flickr badge are displayed next to her entries. The whole left column of the template is occupied by widgets<sup>9</sup> linking the blog to other websites and giving the reader an idea of Cindy’s life and interests. Widgets and pictures are particularly important because they strike the reader’s attention and the information they contain is immediately available to those who visit the blog; on the contrary, one has to read pages and pages of the woman’s autobiography to be able to access the same amount of information. In addition, in *Cindy in Iraq* episodes are organized following the writer’s memory, whereas her blog entries can be categorized according to their topic through the use of tags; these also contribute to give a preliminary idea of what *White Rose’s Adventures* is about.

*Baghdad Burning* is a very different personal weblog. In many ways it is more similar to printed autobiographies, so the fact that it was turned into a book does not surprise. Riverbend rarely relies on multimodal options and her diary contains texts almost exclusively; her main aim is to narrate her story, a typical Iraqi story. For this reason she chooses to remain anonymous (“I’m female, Iraqi, and 24. I survived the war. That’s all you need to know”)<sup>10</sup> even though she

<sup>9</sup> A widget is defined as “a generic term for the part of a GUI [graphical users interface] that allows the user to interface with the application and operating system. Widgets display information and invite the user to act in a number of ways. Typical widgets include buttons, dialog boxes, pop-up windows, pull-down menus, icons, scroll bars, resizable window edges, progress indicators, selection boxes, windows, tear-off menus, menu bars, toggle switches and forms.” “What is a Widget?” in *A Word Definition From the Webopedia Computer Dictionary*, <http://www.webopedia.com/TERM/W/widget.html>, last accessed on September 29, 2008.

<sup>10</sup> “The Beginning...” in *Baghdad Burning*, <http://riverbendblog.blogspot.com>, last accessed on July, 25 2008.

shares her life and private thoughts with her readers (Laurie McNeill [2003] uses the term “anonymous intimacy” to refer to this kind of ambivalent relationship to one’s audience). Riverbend’s diary entries are organized in a lengthy list which displays them according to their chronological order. Under this perspective the blog is very similar to the book: readers are obviously free to choose what entry succession they will follow, but linear reading is usually the preferred option.

In spite of the fact that, compared with *White Rose’s Adventures*, *Baghdad Burning* presents more features that are common with printed autobiographies, the influence the Internet environment exerts on it is remarkable. First of all, even though Riverbend has disabled comments and trackbacks, her personal blog is very interactive. She asks readers to email her and the feedback she gets from them heavily influences her writing. Most of her audience is made up of English native speakers, that is to say by people whose countries are very different from Iraq. Consequently, Riverbend has to explain things she assumes her audience would not know (“For those who don’t know [and I have discovered there are many more than I thought], a hijab only covers the hair and the neck”)<sup>11</sup> or specifying things she feels are important (“I’m going to set the record straight, once and for all. I don’t hate Americans, contrary to what many people seem to believe”)<sup>12</sup>. The fact that most of her readers are American proves quite problematic: *Baghdad Burning* attracts many criticisms from those who support Bush and his policy in the Middle East. Therefore Riverbend sometimes finds herself in the position of having to defend herself and her blog, and she does so by addressing the readers directly (“You really don’t have to read my blog if you don’t want to and you certainly don’t have to email me telling how much you hate it. It’s great to get questions and differing opinions – but please be intelligent about it”)<sup>13</sup>; this would obviously be unthinkable in a traditional autobiography where readers cannot enjoy a direct interaction with the author.

<sup>11</sup> “We’ve only just begun...” in *Baghdad Burning*.

<sup>12</sup> “Setting the Record Straight” in *Baghdad Burning*. It is to be noticed that both Cindy’s and Riverbend’s blog represent highly dialogical online texts (in the Bakhtinian sense). Cindy reassures her audience anticipating potential questions about her health and wellbeing whereas Riverbend not only answers her readers’ queries submitted via email or comment, but often provides unrequested explanations or specifications because she is aware of the fact that most of the people who read her diary are not Iraqi like her.

<sup>13</sup> “Emails” in *Baghdad Burning*.

They do not have the option of choosing a personalized reading path either, due to the editorial choices that have been made to turn the blog into a book. In order not to lose significant parts of the cyber-autobiography, selected material from the numerous links had to be added to Riverbend's own words (displayed in boxes). Editorial intervention is remarkable in this operation and prevents readers from being able to choose what hyperlinks to follow and not follow. Moreover, they are guided in their reading by the editor's historical introductions to the sections into which the blog is divided. Whereas the online autobiography attracted a vast readership because it was a first-person account of the events that were happening to an average Iraqi girl, the book with its introductions appears to be a more indirect testimony of a young life severely tried by the hardships of the war.

### *Concluding Remarks*

New Internet *genres* tend to replicate old ones (Breure: 2001), but the combination with the flexibility of the electronic *medium* produces change. Personal weblogs and online diaries represent a case of *genre* migration, because, as demonstrated, they retain the main communicative purpose (i.e. narrate one's life in the written form) and the main generic feature (that is to say the fact that author, narrator and protagonist are the same person) of printed autobiography. Nevertheless, they cannot simply be considered the online counterpart of printed autobiographical forms, because, as Garzone points out, "the environment where they are situated and the *medium/media* they rely on add unique properties to them" (2007: 19). On the contrary, a close analysis shows that Internet technologies allow cyber-autobiographies to evolve into a more dynamic and interactive *genre* than traditional printed ones.

As we have seen, interactivity characterizes online autobiographies to the extent that they probably have acquired an additional communicative purpose (i.e. exchanging opinions about the blogger's life and experiences). The expectations and role of readers have undergone profound changes as well: they can now indirectly but actively exert their influence on the life-writing process itself (for instance by posting comments or emailing the author). The impact of technological potential on multimodality options is to be taken into account as well, since it can produce a new balance between semi-otic resources; whereas in written autobiographies text prevails, in personal weblogs and online diaries other forms of communication

are given equal status. Migrating to the Web, the autobiographical genre becomes characterized by life (re-) producing rather than life writing activities. The possibility of creating hypertexts is also to be mentioned among the most important repercussions that the electronic *medium* exerts on the autobiographical *genre*, thus favoring its evolution into a new one. Unlike printed books, online diaries and weblogs present rhetorical moves which are realized through the use of links. These not only establish associations between meanings, but also enable cyber-autobiographers to create new ones, providing them with unprecedented creative possibilities.

At present, not all bloggers seem to be able to fully exploit these options, thus contributing to making online autobiographical forms markedly different from printed ones. “Webliteracy”, intended as not just “the basic skills of web surfing and writing HTML” but also the understanding of “writing as a process of invention and composition, with electronic media and in a networked environment” is the key for cyber-autobiographers to have “effective web presence and web identity”(Breure: 2001) and to favour the evolution of the autobiographical *genre* in the Web environment.

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