This is to certify that the

dissertation entitled

Computers, Composition, and Rhetoric:
Rethinking the Subject
in the Digital Writing Environment
presented by

Paula Rosinski

has been accepted towards fulfillment
of the requirements for

Ph.D. degree in English

Major professor

Date April 26, 2002

O-12771

COMPUTERS, COMPOSITION, AND RHETORIC: RETHINKING THE SUBJECT IN THE DIGITAL WRITING ENVIRONMENT

By

Paula Rosinski

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of English

2002

ABSTRACT

COMPUTERS, COMPOSITION, AND RHETORIC:
RETHINKING THE SUBJECT IN THE DIGITAL WRITING ENVIRONMENT

By

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This dissertation conducts a rhetorical study of contemporary computer-composition scholarship, handbooks, and lore and argues that while the field promises to make students better writers, it still often takes students themselves as the subject of the writing course and represents them as in need of social empowerment or moral salvation through the rhetorics of fear, loathing, and promise. This study analyzes the ways in which current scholarship unevenly deploys the rhetoric of loathing student inadequacy, the rhetoric of fear over what may happen to students as a result of their deficiencies or their inability to survive in this increasingly complicated world, and the rhetoric of promise that computer technologies can help give students the vision finally to see the various types of oppressive economic, social, political, or educational forces that blind and control them. Furthermore, when otherwise valuable scholarship focuses on the student subject and draws upon narratives of social turmoil or postmodern crisis, its conclusions often become diluted into something more along the lines of a moral salvation tract and contribute little to the research on using Internet technologies to improve student writing or enhance writing instruction.

The introduction explores the ideological underpinnings of the field's problematic focus on the student subject and lays the theoretical groundwork for an alternative antifoundational rhetorical approach to computer-composition. Chapter 1 reviews the

history of U.S. writing instruction and suggests that computer-composition's tendency to frame students as intellectually inferior or in need of social guidance is indebted to earlier models of composition theory and pedagogy. Chapter 2 explains how the field's pervasive deployment of the rhetoric of the student subject can thrust students and scholars alike into a type of purgatory where modernist ways of knowing and writing conflict with liberatory narratives of newer technologies. Chapter 3 identifies the primary types of fear and "evil others" from which students must be redeemed, ranging from the degenerative forces of popular culture, to homogenizing capitalism, to the infective nature of computer technologies and cyberculture. Chapter 4 analyzes the promises that are often evoked in the scholarship, including claims that using newer Internet technologies can help students gain social or political empowerment, achieve a type of vulgar Marxist correct sight, or conquer new and potentially dangerous cyberfrontiers. The conclusion argues that it is important for scholars to understand better how these perspectives may create demeaning images of the student subject and suggests directions for future research.

By being mindful of the rhetorics we employ and the representations of students that we construct in our scholarship, the field can avoid debilitating visions of the student subject and move toward focusing more on student writing, on ways newer technologies can enhance writing instruction (i.e., encourage collaboration, facilitate peer-response, emphasize the value of visual literacy, information architecture, and web usability for producing user-centered texts), and provide students with more opportunities to produce context-specific and audience-appropriate traditional, online, and digital texts. This study also suggests that the field could benefit by developing alternative scholarly genres that take writing itself and the pedagogical activities enhanced by newer Internet technologies as the subject of research and debate.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many people have contributed their time, patience, casual conversations and intellectual assistance to the completion of this project. I want to thank each of my committee members for their assistance. I thank Dean Rehberger for introducing me to the field of computers and writing, challenging me to question my assumptions about teaching in computer-mediated environments, and giving me the opportunity to work at Matrix, an experience that has greatly affected the trajectory of my academic and intellectual pursuits. I thank Diane Brunner and Marilyn Wilson for igniting my interest in education, and I thank Kathleen Geissler and Sharon Thomas for our many discussions about composition, rhetoric, and teaching writing at MSU. I also want to thank Mike, my parents Elizabeth and Tom, and my sister Lauren, for their support and encouragement.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

> By divorcing the subject from prevailing notions of the individual, either the freely choosing individual of capitalism or the interpellated individual of Althusserian Marxism, postmodern theory understands subjectivity as heterogeneous and constantly in flux. The present frustration of those who have followed the course of theory I have just sketched . . . is where to locate agency in a postmodern subjectivity.
>
> — Lester Faigley *Fragments of Rationality* (1992)

> The dispersal of the subject in electronic communications technologies suggests that we need new ways of talking about subjectivity and raises the issue of what metaphor of the subject might be most useful for articulating a postmodern ethics.
>
> — Lester Faigley *Fragments of Rationality* (1992)

> I argue that the rejection of the individual-versus-community dichotomy for conceiving the subject and the recognition of heterogeneity and unassimilated otherness establish ethics as the central concern for postmodern subjectivity.
>
> — Lester Faigley *Fragments of Rationality* (1992)

Lester Faigley's call for a new postmodern theorization of the subject[1] of composition rings with excitement and potential. While I agree with his admirable call to action, with his enticing call for retheorization, I disagree with his hasty solution. For no sooner does Faigley tempt us with this rallying cry to alter the way we think, write, and theorize in the field of composition, to alter how we go about doing what we do in our field, or why we do what we do, than he retracts the possibility dangling in front of us and returns instead to a disappointingly traditional answer. The problem is that the turn Faigley makes is to the student—and not writing—as the "natural" subject of a course in composition. This declaration, this disappointingly vapid solution to an otherwise

titillating question, merely perpetuates what masquerades as a reflex-like automatic assumption on the part of practitioners and scholars in the field: that it is right and appropriate for ethics—for the students' beliefs, attitudes, and feelings—to be the subject of any writing course. This solution is problematic to the field of composition because it contributes to the hegemony of the deployment of the rhetoric of the subject and diverts attention away from teaching rhetoric and encouraging students to participate in rhetorical production.

The primary problem with Faigley's answer is that it amounts to a return of the liberal humanist subject as the site of authenticity and ethics. He concludes that

> [b]ringing ethics into rhetoric is not a matter of collapsing spectacular diversity into universal truth. Neither is ethics only a matter of a radical questioning of what aspires to be regarded as truth. Lyotard insists that ethics is also the obligation of rhetoric. It is accepting the responsibility for judgment. It is a pausing to reflect on the limits of understanding. It is respect for diversity and unassimilated otherness. It is finding the spaces to listen. (239)

While Faigley's reference to Lyotard provides him with a convenient way to think through the matter of teaching rhetoric within a postmodern pedagogy, it waylays his argument and dilutes his conclusion. In the end, the claim that an ethical rhetoric empowers students actually achieves the reverse. The incessant focus on morality and reflection and understanding and listening prevents students from getting to the point of production, to the act of writing, and hence makes it even more unlikely that they will achieve power in the form of rhetorical expertise. It leads to the continual deferment of writing and production on the part of students. At the same time it leads to the

reconstruction of the responsible, reflective subject.

Throughout chapters 1-7, Faigley strategically resists the traditional rhetoric of the student as the subject of composition. Yet in the last chapter, which is even titled "The Ethical Subject," he seems compelled to disseminate this rhetoric once again. Faigley latches onto Lyotard's notion of the differend because he sees it as an answer to the problem of the student subject in composition and provides a convenient way to realign composition's focus on ethics. In *The Differend*, Lyotard describes his concept of "regime of phrases," where phrases are the basic unit of discourse and the act of linking phrases becomes central. Lyotard explains that

> A phrase comes along. What will be its fate, to what end will it be subordinated, within what genre of discourse will it take it place? No phrase is the first. This does not only mean that others precede it, but also that the modes of linking implied in the preceding phrases—possible modes of linking therefore—are ready to take the phrase into account and to inscribe it in the pursuit of certain stakes, to actualize themselves by means of it. (136)

Yet because postmodernism has no absolute outside foundational point of reference or truth, phrases can be linked in different ways in different genres, leading to possible conflict. Linking phrases can therefore give rise to a *differend*, to a conflict between genres:

> The differend is the unstable state and instance of language wherein something that must be able to be put into phrases cannot yet be . . . What is at stake in a certain literature, in a philosophy, or perhaps even in a certain politics, is to bear witness to differences by finding idioms for them. (*The Differend* 13)

Faigley reformulates Lyotard's linking of phrases and the primacy of the "unstable" differend to mean that before the act of composing or production can take place, great thought, ethical deliberation, and attention must be paid to what linkages should be made between phrases. Although Lyotard is concerned all along with notions of justice, Faigley twists his concepts into a return of the ethical student subject in composition: "In a postmodern theory of rhetoric, there is no legitimate preexisting discourse of values for rhetoric to convey. Ethics becomes a matter of recognizing the responsibility of linking phrases" (237). In other words, the writing subject becomes entrusted with the ethical task of making responsible linkages between phrases, and in turn the practice of linking phrases becomes inextricably associated with morality.

Faigley senses that he may be stretching Lyotard's meaning and justifies his revisions: "Even if Lyotard in the end still does not offer more than a call for justice, *The Differend* remains important for composition theory because it points to a missing ethics throughout the activities of composing, for all are involved in linkage" (239). Faigley is thus clear to argue the following:

> Lyotard would not have writers look to an external theory of ethics but would encourage them to consider the implications of their linkages. (238)
>
> To detect differends requires a momentary delay of those linkages and a questioning of their ethical implications. (239)
>
> [Ethics] is a pausing to reflect on the limits of understanding. (239)
>
> [Ethics] is respect for diversity and unassimilated otherness. (239)
>
> [Ethics] is finding the spaces to listen. (239)

Here then Faigley has composition asking students to consider the ethical implications of

their linkages, delaying those linkages, pausing and reflecting, respecting and listening. He does not have composition asking students to write. In the end, then, Faigley recreates the traditional student of composition: individualistic, objective, sensitive and tolerant, she is the perfect image of the bourgeois capitalist subject who willingly submits to the rational social order and consensually polices herself as well.

Scholars working in the field of computer-composition have more recently suggested that a turn to computer or Internet technologies can remove the emphasis on the student as subject and instead refocus our attention on writing and rhetoric as the subject of composition. That is, technologies as mundane as composing on the computer or as sophisticated and sexy as online communications in MOOs and MUDs can provide us with a different way to enact Faigley's call for a retheorization of the subject of composition. The student as subject is freed in cyberspace, we are promised, freed to multiply and shift, free to disperse and disappear. Therefore, writing itself can move into a position of priority and become the subject of composition. However, the hegemonic pull to regard the student as the primary subject of a writing course often appears to be too strong a force for computer-composition scholars to resist.

This dissertation conducts a rhetorical study of contemporary computer-composition scholarship, lore, and handbooks and argues that while this subdiscipline promises to make students better writers, it is still heavily indebted to traditional composition and disciplinary technologies that take the student as the subject of the course. This debt, which is repaid over and over again in contemporary computer-composition scholarship, most commonly manifests itself in an unacknowledged yet apparently uncontrollable desire to make students the subject of the course and discipline

their thoughts, beliefs, and morals, thereby returning them to reify that ghost of Western capitalism, the modernist individual humanist subject. As it currently stands, the field of computer-composition remains too focused on the student as subject, which makes it too easy for scholars to revert seamlessly back to fictive stories of student redemption or, in the newest tracts of computer-composition, technological determinism. The danger of making students themselves the subject of any writing course is that it can quickly and yet decisively frame them as in-need of some type of discipline or personal, political, social or cultural empowerment. Therefore, current theories of composition and writing instruction that deploy this rhetoric of the subject can be debilitating and may not be the most effective way to help student improve their writing.[2]

The analysis chapters of this dissertation examine these rhetorics in order to make their deployment in the field obvious again. Because they use commonly accepted and even expected tropes, we often draw upon them and disseminate them without question. Even Faigley, who issued a plea for a new postmodern theorization of the subject in *Fragments of Rationality*, was compelled in the end to draw upon the traditional rhetoric of the subject and fashion students into ethical bourgeois individuals. Yet this dissertation argues, along with Crowley, that such representations of students are contradictory and dangerous: "[i]f I am right that students' subjectivities are the material of contemporary writing instruction, their (and our) location in these spaces utterly compromises the liberal depiction of students as free and self-sovereign individuals" (Crowley *Composition in the University* 221). The rhetoric of the subject becomes particularly problematic in computer-composition because the rhetoric deployed in the field is often more exaggerated and hyperreal as it strives to make claims about the

promise of new technologies. It is important, then, that we come to understand better how we create perspectives in our fields and the problems that arise from these perspectives. In doing so, we can work to avoid debilitating visions of the student subject and move toward focusing more on student writing and rhetoric as the subject of writing courses.

One recent and popular trend in the effort to re-imagine writing instruction has focused on post-process theories. The theme threaded throughout each of the essays in Thomas Kent's *Beyond the Writing-Process Paradigm: Post-Process Theory* (1999) is that the heyday of process pedagogy is over. While the essays fail to reach a consensus about how best to move beyond rigid approaches to process pedagogy, that process pedagogy has been solidified into ineffective rules is generally agreed upon by each of the contributors. Kent very usefully summarizes that "Most post-process theorists hold three assumptions about the act of writing: (1) writing is public; (2) writing is interpretive; and (3) writing is situated" (1). Because post-process theorists believe that writing is a public act, always interpretive, and always situated, then it cannot be "reduced to a generalizable process" (5). And Kent, along with many of the contributors, places extra emphasis on the situated nature of writing:

> [t]his claim is a commonplace idea nowadays; no one denies that writers are situated—that writers must have something to communicate in order to communicate—and this idea is accepted by process theorists just as much as by post-process theorists. However, most post-process theorists represented in this book want to make more out of this claim; they want to ride it a bit harder than do most process theorists. (3)

While the contributors to Kent's volume agree that process pedagogy has been frozen into unproductive rules, their solutions to this problem vary and often turn to promises of empowerment and democratic liberation. For example, Clifford and Ervin conclude "By rethinking the guiding idioms of our discipline, sociopolitically alert rhetors might be better poised to resist domination and exploitation" (197); and Barbara Couture argues that writing is best taught as subjective expression bent towards "discovering who we are," and that "[w]e become better at this, better at being subjective agents among other agents—better persons among other persons—through relating to others with caring attitudes" (47). As these selections from Kent's collection indicate, it seems that composition scholarship which concerns itself to any extent with the nature of the student subject cannot resist the pull to represent that subject as lacking and in some way in need of improvement.

Although post-process theories of writing instruction seem to offer a way to avoid the rhetoric of the student as subject, they tend to revert precisely to this same type of debilitating rhetoric. A more fruitful alternative is found in scholarship that is grounded in antifoundational theories of rhetoric. While aspects of antifoundationalism can be found in classical texts, this study is informed by the contemporary theory made popular by Richard Rorty, Stanley Fish, and Terry Eagleton and discussed in Michael Bernard-Donals and Richard R. Glejzer's *Rhetoric in an Antifoundational World: Language, Culture, and Pedagogy* (1998). Fish's definition of the term *antifoundationalism* is "that matters [of fact, truth, correctness, validity, and clarity] are intelligible and debatable only within the precincts of the contexts and situations or paradigms or communities that give them their local and changeable shape" (Fish 344, quoted in Bernard-Donals and Glejzer

1). And an antifoundational world regards language "not as a transparent medium but as a construction that itself was the result of a combination of material and discursive forces" (1). Combining the idea that all knowledge is situationally produced with the concept of language as a mixture of material and discursive forces, an antifoundational approach to rhetoric is therefore concerned with how language works in different situations. If we accept an antifoundational understanding of the world as discursively organized, then the scholarship and teaching of writing in general, and computer-enhanced writing instruction in particular, should take a rhetorical and situational approach to writing instruction.

In 1979, Richard Rorty introduced the theory of antifoundationalism to American audiences with the publication of *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. He argued that, for hundreds of years, philosophy had been asking epistemological questions which muddled the relationship between "world" and "truth." Bernard-Donals and Glezjer explain that for Rorty, "[i]t is impossible . . . to be able to say anything about a world 'out there,' separate from the sentences we use to describe it, and so it is equally impossible to say anything about truth, since truth is always relative to a scheme which is itself an artificial construct" (2). Rorty calls for a "world without mirrors," where epistemology is replaced by hermeneutics, "an expression of hope that the cultural space left by the demise of epistemology will not be filled—that our culture should become one in which the demand for constraint and confrontation is no longer felt" (Rory *Philosophy* 315, quoted in Bernard-Donals and Glejzer 3). Epistemology is the study of how the mind makes meaning; it presumes the mind is a stable unit, that there are ahistorical dimensions to the way people learn and think, and it establishes laws of how the brain

creates knowledge. In contrast, hermeneutics is the study of how meaning-making is grounded in specific historical contexts and discursive practices of the times. A hermeneutical approach is therefore grounded on the premise that "[p]eople change their minds—and descriptions of the world can be said to progress—not when they are convinced that one set of statements more closely approximates a state of affairs unmediated by language, but when the equation can be restated in terms recognizable enough by both interlocutors . . . " (3). In a sense, then, one could argue that the same debate between epistemology and hermeneutics has been replayed over and over again in composition, only with different terms.

According to Bernard-Donals and Glejzer, compositionists are attracted to an antifoundational approach to rhetoric because it provides a reason to relinquish the search for objectivity yet still provides a mechanism for communication, improvement, and progress:

> it gives up the difficult (if not impossible) task of finding objective criteria with which to adjudicate truth claims without giving up on a notion of progress and emancipation. Truth, in other words, becomes a set of practices in a world of descriptions rather than an object of discovery, and at a stroke the threat of chaos resulting from a world without foundations is dispelled in favor of a more humane world in which order is available though contingent, and in which understanding is reached through debate and something that looks like communication . . . If knowledge is formed by language (not the other way around), and if language is constructed socially out of contexts, situations, and communities, then what is needed for antifoundationalism is a methodology that understands language as

constructed, contingent, and constitutive of social orders. (3)

In an antifoundational world, truth is not "an object of discovery," but rather something negotiated and contingent and perhaps only momentarily agreed upon through the use of language, debate, and communication. This is of primary importance in a field like composition, which in certain manifestations have become inextricably associated with current-traditionalism and its obsession with objectivity. By presenting "truth" as something that is arrived at in communities through debate, antifoundationalism appeases composition's anxiety over the chaos that is introduced when foundational principles are undermined. In an antifoundational world, then, rhetoric is the means for negotiating and controlling this debate, it is the means for containing this threat of chaos. As Bernard-Donals and Glejzer emphasize, "[w]hat is important to note in this understanding of rhetoric is that it takes as axiomatic language's capability to exert power in observable (and reproducible) ways, that as a form of praxis it can produce real social change, and that rhetorical analysis can yield information about language's power and its relation to the material world from which, in part, it derives that power" (4). The practice of rhetoric in an antifoundational world, then, is contingent upon the belief that language, as "constructed, contingent, and constitutive of social orders," can produce real material and social change in the world.

While many compositionists claim to be antifoundationalists, their scholarship is often based upon foundational concepts of humanism or returns to reify current-traditional ideas. While current-traditionalism is humanistic, there is no such thing as a "pure" form of current-traditionalism; rather, it functions more as a label that is applied to composition scholarship and pedagogy which relies upon the belief that truth resides

outside of language. As Crowley indicates, this [such scholarship and pedagogy] is problematic because: (1) humanism privileges reading over writing, (2) humanistic composition practices are more concerned with asking students to *analyze* already-completed texts, as opposed to asking students to *produce* texts, (3) humanism enforces a narrow type of humanist subjectivity, and (4) humanism has more in common with metaphysics (the study of reality without observable evidence to back it up) than it has with rhetoric (*Composition in the University* 13-14). While James Berlin's later work in social-epistemic rhetoric is often regarded as antifoundational, the fact that his work draws upon the metaphysical concept that the world can be divided into those who are immersed in ideology and those who are beyond its grasp indicate that his work is still dependent upon foundational concepts. Consider Berlin's argument that "[t]he liberated consciousness of our students is the only educational objective worth considering . . . . To succeed at anything else is no success at all" ("Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Class" 492). John Trimbur makes a similar gesture in "Consensus and Difference in Collaborative Learning" when he suggests that "the point of collaborative learning is not simply to demystify the authority of knowledge by revealing its social character but to transform the productive apparatus, to change the social character of production" (612). The problem here is that Trimbur, similar to Berlin, draws upon the foundationalist concept that teachers are outside ideology while students are immersed in it; that teachers know what students should be arguing before they even begin to produce texts and without considering the social or historical context. Dasenbrock further critiques Trimbur's approach because "[it] presents itself as freeing the student's self-expression. Demystification, transformation, and change—these are the signs in this view of a

'liberated consciousness,' self-evidently so since any student preferring things as they are must still be mystified by ideology, *unlike us*" (8).

Several key compositionists have also reworked antifoundational approaches to writing instruction in attempts to foreground the role of rhetoric in discursive practices. In "Beyond Antifoundationalism to Rhetorical Authority," Patricia Bizzell argues that a hard-line antifoundational approach does not carve out space for agency or authority, and instead posits a theory of positionality. This theory of positionality both acknowledges the "shaping power of current cultural interpretations" and the power of rhetorical practice to transform negative cultural interpretations. Bizzell proposes that teaching the rhetorical process should be informed by a theory of positionality, which means that instructors need to "to aver provocatively that we intend to make our students better people, that we believe education should develop civic virtue" (384). Teachers should therefore make their ideological goals explicit to students: "I am suggesting that we must be equally forthright in avowing the ideologies that motivate our teaching and research" (385). In arguing for a perspective of positionality, Bizzell aligns herself with Richard Lanham's claim that the ancient world believed education served the common civic community and with Eagleton's claim that rhetorical analysis can transform students into better people. According to Bizzell, Eagleton's first concern is making students into better people: "Eagleton says that he wants the rhetorical analysis of textual power to '[make] you a better person' (207), and he insists that 'better' must be understood to encompass civic as well as personal morality. . . [he] argues that we should first ask how to make our students better people, and then decide what to teach and how to teach it on the basis of what best answers the initial questions" (384-385). But in the final analysis,

Bizzell's theory of positionality is suspect not only because it builds upon the humanist concepts of individual subjectivity and metaphysical truth, but also because it focuses more on already-produced texts as opposed to texts currently being produced or texts that will be produced in the future.

Being careful to avoid the humanistic principles that mar some attempts at antifoundational rhetoric in the U.S., this study argues that an antifoundational rhetorical approach to computer-composition should teach students how to create and situate *texts* (and not their *true humanist selves*) within specific historical and social contexts; it eschews the *analysis* of preexisting texts in favor of *producing texts*; and it focuses on rhetoric, as opposed to humanist metaphysics and its interest in "determining how a given text either questions or upholds a supposedly permanent or quasipermanent set of human values" (Crowley *Composition in the University* 14). Computer-composition scholarship that is informed by an antifoundational rhetorical approach uses Internet technologies to help students understand how language functions in different situations and to help students gain experience producing situationally appropriate and persuasive arguments. It is essential that Internet technologies do not become imbricated with foundational or humanistic values, because this leads to epistemological claims that the technologies themselves are imbued with objectivity and can somehow bring students to truth or some type of correct insight.

Over the past thirty years, a variety of other contemporary approaches to writing instruction have also claimed to embrace ideas about the socially constructed and contextually-bound nature of meaning-making. However, as Chapter 1 "The History of the Subject" will show, these approaches often return to foundational ways of thinking

about meaning-making and writing and so in the end return to a routine of standardizing the student subject once again. One reason why this may happen is because the notion of subjectivity is like the last strong-hold of modernism, and while compostionists may embrace poststructuralist or social constructionist ideas about language as a social construct that both affects and is affected by materiality, they seem loath to relinquish the power attributed to them with the promise that writing instructors can morally redeem students by helping them to become better writers.

This study draws upon several scholarly definitions of the term *rhetoric*. I rely on Aristotle's definition of rhetoric as "an ability, in each [particular] case, to see the available means of persuasion" (*On Rhetoric* 36). I co-opt Terry Eagleton's claim that the term *rhetoric* "today means both the theory of effective discourse and the practice of it" (Eagleton 87). And from Sharon Crowley I employ the concept that modern rhetoric instructors, like the ancients, should "[teach] their students how to analyze the contexts for which they composed and how to adapt their composing processes to fit those contexts as closely as possible. They never assumed that a given discursive situation could be adequately met by the employment of generic formulas" (*Ancient Rhetorics for Contemporary Students* xiv). This study also differentiates between the terms *writing* and *rhetoric* insofar as the former takes a cognitive approach to language use and teaches composing as a series of steps or rules to be followed, while the later takes a situational approach to language and teaches composing as a process of determining the best means of persuasion for a particular context. I align myself therefore with Bernard-Donals and Glejzer's argument that what is important about an antifoundational approach to rhetoric is that it takes for granted the ability of language to get things done and make changes in

the world: "this understanding of rhetoric . . . takes as axiomatic language's capability to exert power in observable (and reproducible) ways, that as a form of praxis it can produce real social change, and that rhetorical analysis can yield information about language's power and its relation to the material world from which, in part, it derives that power" (4). The sum result of the above appropriations means that this study uses the term *rhetoric* to refer to the study of language, how it functions in different situations, and its ability to create real change in the world. In this scheme rhetoric teachers study "the theory of effective discourse" and guide students in their "practice of it" so that students can determine the available means of persuasion in different contexts and adjust their writing processes and arguments accordingly.

While composition technology promises to liberate passive students by shifting them into more active, rhetorical, and historical spaces, it is also fraught with contradictions capable of defining and framing students in rather traditional ways. Although the popular discourses surrounding computer-mediated communications and online writing environments perpetuate our desires for technology to reconstitute students as active rhetoricians, they also obscure our awareness of how the rhetoric of the student as subject may hijack computer-composition scholarship into controlling students instead. This is not to say that there is a complete lack of effective research and scholarship in computer-composition geared toward helping students become more effective writers. Rather, what makes the rhetoric of the student as subject so dangerous is that it emerges and undercuts otherwise valuable scholarship; when computer-compositionists pick up bits and pieces of this rhetoric, it veers otherwise effective scholarship into the realm of disciplinary-technique. Computer-composition is unevenly dispersed with the rhetoric of

loathing for student incompetence, the rhetoric of fear over what may happen to students as a result of their inadequacy, and the rhetoric of promise that computer technology can help students overcome their naivete or give them the vision finally to see the different types of oppressive discourses and the various economic, social, political, or educational forces which blind and control them. The problem is not that scholars completely fail to talk about how to teach writing in computer-mediated environments, but rather that these discussions get overlaid with the rhetorics of fear, loathing, and promise, which in turn limit student opportunity to gain rhetorical expertise. Instead of focusing on how to discipline students' thoughts, beliefs, or moral attitudes, this study argues that the field should focus on how to use Internet technologies to help students discipline their rhetoric. This study explores the problematics of focusing on student subjectivity in computer-composition and offers an alternative which takes the focus off of the subject altogether and redirects it toward antifoundational ideas of rhetoric.

The fact that I do not develop my own theory or rhetoric of the student as subject is essential to the validity and value of my argument. One of the more important implications of this study is that we do not need a rhetoric of the student, that we should wean ourselves from our reliance on such rhetoric, because it is debilitating to scholars and damaging to students. To come up with a theory or a new rhetoric of the student as subject puts both compositionists and students back into the same conundrum I critique in this study. When an instructor views his or her students as the subject of the writing course, he or she must suddenly become an expert on class, race, sexuality, and gender issues. When instructors design a course around the theme of gender and sexuality, race relations, or class conflict, they often deliberately make the student's own gender,

sexuality, race, or class the focus of the course. In such courses students are often asked to read a novel or shorter piece of literature on the given topic and then asked to give personal responses to questions like "How do you feel about this particular issue? Have you ever experienced a similar situation?" or, in a variation which gives a nod to contextual and historical pressures, "How is racism today similar/different to racism in the 19th century?"

An alternative approach might entail designing a course around studying and *producing* the language, the rhetorics, and the contexts in which these rhetorical moves function, that give life to the themes of gender and sexuality, race relations, or class conflict. In such a course students might still be asked to read a novel or shorter piece of literature, but then they would be asked to study the types of words it uses, the language or rhetorical patterns employed to produce particular affects or to invoke particular thoughts or emotions in the reader. But the class would not stop there: students could also be asked to produce these patterns of language as well, with any number of variations on the assignment. There is a subtle but nonetheless important distinction between these two types of courses, a distinction that makes all the difference; it makes the difference between whether students are asked to explore the inner depths of their psyches in order to figure out *their* beliefs or feelings about their gender or race—asking students to make a self transformation—or whether students are asked to identify and critique how language works to activate these rhetorics, how rhetorics of gender or race function in different contexts, such as in magazines, television sitcoms, or online shopping sites, and then *practice manipulating* this language and these rhetorical patterns themselves.

When composition instructors take the perspective that students themselves are an appropriate topic for a writing course, it demands that the instructor relinquish his or her role as a writing teacher and instead become a social scientist, a cultural historian, a psychologist, and even a social worker. Instructors are entrusted with the momentous task of diagnosing the problems with an entire classroom full of students' subjectivities, and then they are expected to help students fix their problems by either looking inward or outward for a remedy. It is in this respect that computer-composition tends to frame the instructor as an ideologically-neutral and powerful hero who can guide students away from intellectual darkness and towards social, political, or personal enlightenment. If an instructor takes an expressionist approach, students are guided to look inward in order to locate their true voices or beliefs. If an instructor takes more of a social epistemic or social constructionist approach, students are guided to look outward toward social and cultural contexts and discourse practices in order to escape social conditioning. Reed Dasenbrock argues that social constructionism in the end authorizes a very traditional and narrow type of humanist individuality and places the instructor on an ideologically-neutral pedestal:

> Given this objective, not only does social constructionism collapse back into something not very different from Emersonian celebrations of the minority of self-defining individuals, social constructionist pedagogy becomes little more than a more sophisticated version of subjectivism, with a slightly stronger emphasis on what is wrong with those people over there who are socially conditioned, and a slightly weaker emphasis on how we are not. (6)

While the problematics of social constructionism will be examined in more detail in

Chapter 1 of this study, what I want to emphasize here is Dasenbrock's critique that in a social constructionist framework, the instructor is still framed as *outside of* social conditioning. This paves the way yet again for the instructor, as the benevolent and unfettered hero, to lead the students out of their ignorant state of existence. As Dasenbrock so succinctly argues, the various approaches in composition which have emerged over time all still ultimately create a dichotomy between those immersed in ideology and those who are not: even with social constructionism, "we find here the same dichotomy, no matter how disguised, between the many whose selves are constituted by others and the few who are self-constituting and free" (5-6). As a result, "this vision of the world as divided into the elect and the conditioned allows no way to value or to explain in anything other than negative terms what we share with the rest of society or inherit from cultural traditions. It also, to put it bluntly, allows no way to value our students unless they agree with us, unless they share our (critical) views on society" (6).

Whichever the approach, the promise that instructors can lead students to greater understanding, fulfillment, or freedom is often infused with desire on the part of instructors to remake students into mirror-images of themselves, taking on their values, beliefs, and morals, not unlike the way some self-proclaimed antifoundationalist compositionists claim it is their responsibility to make students aware of their own (the instructor's) ideological orientations. James J. Sosnoski betrays a similar desire to act as the masculine hero who can function as a model for students as he extracts them from their painful oppression: "Though we are not accustomed to thinking of ourselves as healers, we do help reduce pain. Of course, we cannot reduce every pain conceivable,

but we can help with those pains having to do with discourse, that is, with rhetoric—namely, the frustration of not making sense, humiliation, insult, shame, and so on" (217). Besides the fact that it should be obvious that compositionists have neither the education nor the training required for such psychoanalytic delving into students' psyches, such procedures are far beyond the realm of the compositionist's supposed task—teaching writing and helping student gain rhetorical competency.

As for students, treating them as the subject of writing courses is nothing less than crippling; it tells them that they cannot write anything until they figure out who they really are and what they really believe, it tells them that the act of production and manipulating text must be postponed until they figure out all the connections of a given situation, solve the contradictions, and ascertain the truth. This deprives students of playfully practicing and experimenting with rhetorical possibilities. Students arrive in writing classes naively expecting to learn how to write, but instead discover that they must turn inward or outward (depending on their instructor's ideological orientation) to find themselves, their true voice, their true beliefs, or more commonly in the newer computer-mediated environments, their multiple cyber-selves. While many students unfortunately become what the instructor had in mind for them all along—most often mini-versions of themselves—there is perhaps nothing else that could be done to paralyze so completely potential writers and deprive them of the opportunity to gain rhetorical flexibility. The end result of deploying the rhetoric of the student as subject in our scholarship, and by extension, in our classrooms, is that students clearly get the message that until they achieve a type of critical consciousness, they cannot write. Besides failing our appointed task of helping students to become more effective writers, such scampering

about in students' psyches is especially dangerous because it occurs at a time in their lives when they are attempting adjust to a new academic environment

While some of the moves in the rhetoric of fear and loathing and the rhetoric of promise fulfill common expectations of academic scholarship (i.e., find a gap and fill it in), other moves seem peculiar to computer-composition. As with all ideological acts, these rhetorics do not enjoy a completely hegemonic position within the field. Rather, the discipline takes up the rhetoric of fear and loathing and the rhetoric of promise in bits and pieces and in sometimes overlapping or even contradictory ways; in other words, they are unevenly and inconsistently deployed throughout the field's scholarship, lore, and textbooks and handbooks. Nevertheless, it is possible to identify the interwoven nature and the trajectory of these rhetorics as corresponding roughly with this series of maneuvers and constructions:

(1) Fear that we are entering a postmodern epoch and/or that the world has become more complex and conflict-ridden. There are several "evil others" which make this world more dangerous:

a. popular culture / postmodern crisis

b. a generic "oppressive ideology"

c. capitalism

d. computer technology and discourses of technology

(2) A declaration of loathing over inadequate or failing students. Student lack can be constructed in a variety of ways, such as:

a. through an inability to decode the signs of cyberculture or postmodernity

b. through a failure to contain threats of cyber-contamination

c. through images of students as developmental, childish, or unable to think for themselves

d. through the negative example that students have to become mirror images of their instructors in order to survive in a technologically-enhanced environment

e. through images of students as prey to larger cultural forces

(3) An appeal to the rhetoric of promise—an explanation of how technology can empower students, get them "to see" some truth, get them to see the "evil other" for what it really is, or get them to resist some type of ideological domination. These rhetorics of promise may take a variety of forms, such as:

a. the promise of social, political, or personal empowerment, which is often accompanied with appeals to liberatory or critical pedagogy

b. the promise of achieving correct vision or correct sight, which is often accompanied with appeals to vulgar Marxism

c. the promise of liberatory technology to help students conquer the new empty cyberfrontier

(4) An appeal to the rhetoric of fertility, which functions as a way for teacher-scholars to evade the new type of ideological discipline being forced onto the subject.

Because various devices in the rhetorics of fear and loathing and the rhetorics of promise and fertility overlap, merge, and are used together in various combinations, I made deliberate decisions about which rhetorical devices to highlight and study in which resources.

I do not argue that the computer-composition scholarship which incorporates the rhetorics of fear and loathing and the rhetorics of promise and fertility fail completely to contribute valuable knowledge to the field. Rather, I am interested in showing how these

rhetorics—which emerge often, even if in uneven ways—displace attention away from helping students gain rhetorical experience in favor of disciplining students themselves as the subject of the writing course. And in these formulations, the student as the subject of the writing course is always already treated as duped by larger forces, blinded to the true nature of reality, and in need of salvation, standardization, or discipline. These formulations correspond with Susan Miller's argument in *Textual Carnivals* that the development of the freshman writing course in 1874 "established [composition] in its carnivalesque aspect to regulate writing that accomplished domestic exchanges among American citizens by placing it under the bourgeois gaze of an institution" (80). As a result of these inauspicious and ambivalent motivations, "[c]omposition students, composition teaching, and ways of organizing both have since then defined the space of a seemingly inconsequential sideshow" (79-80). I extend Miller's argument to contemporary computer-composition scholarship and argue that this sub-discipline tends to frame online writing environments and Internet technologies as the newest ringside attractions, the newest bread-and-circuses that represent and treat students as clownish dupes and deny them the opportunity to gain rhetorical expertise and power.

The reasons why computer-composition continues to show traces of disciplining students—in spite of the liberatory claims to the contrary—are of course overdetermined. Just like any other cultural formation, the discipline of computer-composition is affected by multiple and contradictory social and political influences, and in this case they converge to contribute to the view that students are deficient subjects in need of some direction and guidance. This study therefore analyzes the contemporary cultural conjuncture in which technology and the rhetoric of liberation are combined, where it is

often assumed that the computer-mediated subject in composition will automatically be freed from the humanist Enlightenment bonds of coherent rationality and the Romantic limitations of self-expression. Although the liberatory rhetoric surrounding computer-mediated communication perpetuates our hopes and desires for technology to reconstitute the student subject as an active rhetorician, it also obfuscates our awareness of how such technologies may colonize the student into passivity as well. In other words, computer-composition often becomes a site of colonization where teachers first represent students as lacking failures and then remake or refashion them into a likeness of their own more successful images.

One reason the field of computer-composition shows strains of disciplining students is because it is still very much entrenched in post-Freirian approaches to critical pedagogy. Ellen Cushman recognizes this ongoing influence in her critique that institutional language and "key critical pedagogues" assume inappropriately that certain populations labor under the burden of false consciousness. This debilitating assumption continues to be made by researchers in the United States when they update Freire's model and yet still engage "the assertion that oppressed people are naively conscious" (271). This study does not seek to completely undermine the work of compositionists working in the vein of critical pedagogy. On the contrary, it seeks to open up discussions on this potentially limiting aspect and bring a new perspective to the theory and practices of critical pedagogy.[3] In turn, the benefits of bringing such discussions to the forefront include developing more effective ways to use computer-enhanced and Internet technologies in the writing classroom.

This study also suggests that another possible reason why computer-composition

tends to standardize students and treat them as unknowing dupes is because—as Michel Foucault has shown in *Discipline and Punish* (1975)—the humanist self is at the center of Western identity and functions not only as a way to control people, but as a way to get people consensually to police themselves as well. Foucault's work has greatly contributed to by now well-known stories that certain classroom practices and procedures (such as grading, the physical layout of classrooms, and even process approaches to writing) act as disciplinary measures that call students into occupying a narrow type of rationalist subjectivity (Clifford; Dasenbrock). Foucauldian critiques of these practices point out that such classroom activities, assignments, and regimental approaches to writing instruction tend to do more for maintaining classroom order than for teaching rhetoric. Allucquere Rosanne Stone points out that Foucault's theoretical developments are appropriately applied to contemporary research on computing technologies and subjectivity:

> [Foucault] discusses the epistemological and social moves by means of which certain people were excluded from normal social intercourse. The result of these moves is the discursive space that simultaneously organizes and calls into being the rational social order. Later, in *The Birth of the Prison*, Foucault describes a method of dividing and organizing physical space so as to make the inhabitants of that space available for observation; this process is accomplished in ways that presage the gradual transformation of the citizen into streams of information, a process that Haraway identifies as part of the production of the cyborg. (42)

Foucault's argument that physical spaces have historically been organized in such a way as to increase optimal panoptical observation, thereby bringing about optimal social

control, could also be applied to the ways computer-compositionists organize space and time, or discuss organizing space and time, in computer labs. It is possible to hypothesize, then, that a more insidious type of social control may occur during "the production of the cyborg" when student identity and writing is increasingly associated with "streams of information" and Internet technologies.

The idea that social control also occurs in the discursive space of cyberspace corresponds with Stone's work that desire is at play in all technological innovations, in as much as they are also ideological formations (*The War of Desire and Technology at the Close of the Mechanical Age*). Relying on Stone's premise that human desire is imbricated in all technological change, I suggest that, when computer-composition scholarship represents students as failures, it reveals a desire on the part of scholars/ instructors to control students, refashion them into the more socially adept image of themselves, and accumulate institutional power. By claiming the power to define the nature of student subjectivity, computer-compositionists are invested with substantial institutional power (Miller *Textual Carnivals*; Berlin *Rhetorics, Poetics, and Cultures*; Crowley *Composition in the University*; Dasenbrock). If conceptions of selfhood are central to social power dynamics, and if to some extent they are discursively constructed in composition classrooms, then it is understandable how classrooms become sites of struggle. The question of who controls or orchestrates these struggles is indeed important because is also gets at the question of who is in a position of authority and power in the classroom. In this light, the act of representing students as passive and perpetuating related myths about the technological revolution serves multiple ideological purposes. It provides a rhetorical framework for the development of a hierarchy where knowledgeable

teachers reign over submissive students. This hierarchy "functions to reassure" composition teachers that they occupy a place of authority in the new technological academy and economy, because their guidance is essential to student success. Hence this hierarchy may ultimately function to reassure administrators that English or writing departments are preparing students adequately for the new technological future of electronic communication. And as Sharon Crowley explains, "the discourse of needs interpellates composition teachers as subjects who implement the regulatory desires of the academy and the culture at large" (*Composition in the University* 257). In this sense, then, the representation of student need and anxiety could also be read as a displaced marker of teacher need and anxiety.

* * *

Chapter 1, "The History of the Subject," reviews the disciplinary treatment of the student as the subject of writing courses throughout the history of U.S. writing instruction. This chapter therefore lays the foundation for my argument that computer-composition's tendency to treat the student as the subject of the course is indebted to much earlier and more traditional models of composition pedagogy and theory. Chapter 2, "Purgatory: The Impossibility of Writing My Dissertation," explains—through the lens of my own struggles as a graduate student and scholar—the problems caused by the field's pervasive deployment of the rhetoric of the student as subject. The dissemination of this rhetoric cripples students and thwarts scholars, which reinforces my argument that this rhetoric needs to be made obvious again and problematized in our scholarship.

The bulk of analysis of contemporary computer-composition scholarship, lore, and textbooks occurs in chapter 3, "The Rhetorics of Fear and Loathing," and chapter 4, "The Rhetorics of Promise and Fertility." In each of these chapters I outline the movement of these rhetorics in contemporary scholarship and analyze how they function to make the student, and his or her ethics, salvation, or empowerment, the subject of writing instruction. The former chapter surveys the primary types of fear and "evil others" that computer-composition scholarship evokes rhetorically. It is important to identify these fears and evil forces because they create the sense of postmodern crisis from which students must be saved. The latter chapter reviews the different types of promises computer-composition makes; these promises range from automatic technological determinism to more subtle forms of academic, social, or personal salvation. The ultimate goal of the various promises is the same, however: to use computer technologies in order to improve students morally or intellectually and to rescue them from their inability to survive in this more postmodern and complicated world.

The conclusion, "Reevaluating How We Create Perspectives in our Field: A Call for Vigilant Rhetorics," argues that it is important for computer-composition scholars to understand better how certain perspectives and rhetorics may create demeaning visions of the student subject. By being cautious about the rhetorics we deploy, the field can move away from the perspective that Internet technologies can redeem failing students from their own inadequacies or from an ever more dangerous and postmodern world and instead turn toward the perspective that these technologies can be integrated in ways that will assist students in gaining rhetorical knowledge. The conclusion recommends that

scholars in the field consider alternative ways to write computer-composition scholarship, ways that will focus on the types of writing and pedagogical activities supported and enhanced by newer Internet technologies (i.e., encourage collaboration, facilitate peer-response, emphasize the value of visual literacy, information architecture, and web usability for producing user-centered texts). To these ends, this chapter closes with a discussion of some ways that newer Internet technologies can be integrated into the writing classroom in order to provide students with additional practice producing situationally appropriate and context-specific traditional, online, and digital texts. In order to avoid technological determinism, this chapter carefully notes that a computer-assisted writing course in and of itself does not automatically use newer technologies in these more productive ways; rather, it is the *uses* to which the technologies are put in particular courses that amount to a turn in computer-composition away from the *student* as the subject of the course to *writing* as the subject of the course.

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[1] Chapter 2 will discuss the complications and contradictions that arise with the use of the term "subject" in composition scholarship. At this point, therefore, I only want to note that debates over student subjectivity can range from viewing the subject as autonomous and completely knowable versus the subject as completely constituted by language. These debates most often return to a conception of the modernist humanistic subject who can come to know him/herself by turning inwards.

[2] The panel chaired by Susan Miller, "Walking Down Theory Street: Reconsidering the Role of Theory in Composition Studies" at the 2002 Conference on College Composition and Communication included several participants who made similar arguments about the failure of composition studies to assist students in learning to write more effectively.

[3] The effects of computer-composition's reliance on Frierian-informed types of liberatory pedagogy are explored in more detail in Chapter 3.

Chapter 1
The History of the Subject

> To keep as closely as possible to this strait and narrow path is the plain duty of each of us. No one who knows how to frame a sentence with tongue or with pen but can do something in the right direction. Even the child who says "as I do" instead of "you was," "shall I?" instead of "will I?" serves the mother-tongue. So does the young woman who never says "My partner was awful nice," or "I love caramels"; the young man whose talk never smells of stable, billiard-room, or mid-night oil . . . Those who have great talents and unusual opportunities as speakers or as writers can do much for the good cause: but every man, woman, and child can do something; for every word tells for good or for evil on him who utters it and on at least one other person. (xiv)
>
> — A. S. Hill *Our English* (1888)

> You enter this course with the hope of becoming a better writer. To write well, however, is not merely a matter of learning a few tricks or skills. It is not a matter of memorizing rules. To write well you must think straight. And to learn to think straight is the aim of your education. (1)
>
> — Robert Penn Warren and Cleanth Brook *Modern Rhetoric with Readings* (1949)

> [f]or the essential purpose of this course goes far beyond the mere technicalities of grammar and rhetoric. Ultimately, this course engages your deepest needs and interests, your thinking, your feelings, your relationships with other people. These last assertions will not seem too sweeping when you realize that language is an indispensable instrument in the functioning of the human mind and personality. (2)
>
> — Robert Penn Warren and Cleanth Brook *Modern Rhetoric* (1961)

As these opening quotes indicate, the desire to make students the subject of the writing course in order to lead them down a path of moral or intellectual improvement can be detected as easily in textbooks from the late nineteenth century as in textbooks from the twentieth century. Students are entreated to stay on the "strait and narrow path"

so that their "talk never smells of stable, billiard-room, or mid-night oil," they are assured that in order to "write well [they] must think straight," and then promised that their writing course will go beyond simple grammar and rhetoric and instead engage their "deepest needs and interests, [their] thinking, [their] feelings, [their] relationships with other people." Taking its cue from the concern over student redemption revealed in these quotes, this chapter reviews how the rhetoric of the student as the subject of the writing course has been disseminated throughout the field since its first manifestation at Harvard in 1874 (Berlin *Rhetoric and Reality* 20). I first examine histories written by James Berlin, Susan Miller, and Sharon Crowley and show how they argue that early on, the field was designed to discipline students into particular ways of thinking, ostensibly in an effort to bring them up to par with their intellectually and socially superior peers. I then examine the work of later compositionists and show that subsequent forms of writing instruction starting in the 1970s—such as expressivism, process pedagogy, academic discourse, critical or liberatory pedagogy approaches, and social constructionist and social epistemic rhetoric—while supposedly designed to free the student from being the disciplined subject of writing instruction, often tacitly reinforced such rhetorical positioning of the student. This chapter therefore lays the groundwork for this study's larger argument that computer-composition's tendency to discipline the student as the subject of writing courses—to rhetorically frame and treat students as child-like, intellectually inferior, and in-need of moral or intellectual guidance—is very much indebted to earlier forms of writing instruction.

As a composition and rhetoric graduate student you quickly learn that there are popular stories about the history of the field that you should study and memorize. Most

often you hear about this in your composition theory course, and you quickly realize that one way to become initiated into the field is by becoming familiar with these stories. Yet these stories are just that, only stories.[1] Not only can we can learn from what they say on the surface, but we can also learn from *how* they are put together and what they focus on or highlight. In this respect, what is also relevant to this current study is how these histories about the early years of the discipline *themselves* convey a particular rhetoric of the subject: an undertow in each of the histories is that the student as subject of the writing course is squashed, controlled, or disciplined in the name of aesthetics, classism, or capitalism. It is as if Berlin, Miller, and Crowley assume that writing instruction must, by default, assert some rhetoric of the student as subject; and it is part of their task to identify and describe its earlier manifestations. The first section of this chapter therefore highlights how each of these histories reflect a strong desire to explain how students were represented during the early development of the field. The second section of this chapter shows how concern over standardizing the student still manifests itself in contemporary shifts in the discipline as well. So this chapter performs the essential function of showing that computer-composition's preoccupation with taking the student himself or herself as the "natural" subject of the writing course is actually a continuation of a long-standing trend in the field.

* * *

Berlin's *Rhetoric and Reality* (1987), Miller's *Textual Carnivals* (1991), and Crowley's *Composition in the University* (1998) each offer historically grounded and

theoretically sophisticated accounts of the development of freshman writing programs.[2] Each of these scholars also agrees that the discipline of composition appeared as a response to uncertain times and uncertain attitudes toward the new types of students—women, minorities, and the middle- or working-class—entering the university in the late nineteenth century. And they each argue that the early establishment of the field represents a major shift in the discipline of rhetorical instruction. This shift briefly goes as follows: up until the early twentieth century, rhetorical training was available to the typical student who attended college: white, upper-class, and male. As Crowley explains, "This education was designed for, and limited, to, men—specifically those men who qualified by virtue of family background or training to be called 'gentlemen'" (*Composition in the University* 47). When less-valued groups of students began to enter higher education (because of changes in the social structure and much later with assistance from the G.I. Bill) institutions stopped teaching them to discipline their rhetoric and instead started teaching them to discipline their beliefs, values, and morals (Berlin; Miller; Crowley). Crowley summarizes that "Classical education was challenged after the Civil War, when demographic changes and new cultural pressures threatened to put the old colleges out of business. More people, including women, demanded to study more subjects for other reasons than entering the ministry or teaching" (*Composition in the University* 54). In sum, institutions deprived these less socially and culturally valued students of the opportunity to gain rhetorical expertise. Such an opportunity could have provided these students with one way get things done in the world and advocate their own agendas.

But the stories that Berlin, Miller, and Crowley tell about the particular rhetoric of

the student as subject, which the early years of composition constructed, are also somewhat different depending upon their larger arguments. For example, Berlin's history emphasizes how different rhetorics teach a particular version of reality to the exclusion of other versions and therefore also tells the related story of how composition became imbricated in producing a new managerial class to support the new economy. Miller's history tells the story of how composition became situated as the intellectual inferior in the literature-composition dichotomy, and thereby explains how composition teachers and students likewise became situated as intellectual inferiors in this same dichotomy. Crowley's historical story shows how the development of composition occurred under circumstances that framed composition students as continually in-need. This story provides the backbone for her argument calling for the abolition of the Freshman English/Composition requirement because it does nothing less than label and represent students as limited and perpetuates class hierarchy and social distinctions (*Composition in the University* 241-243).

Berlin's history about the development of composition operates from the perspective that the discipline was keenly interested in creating a new type of managerial-class to help control the fluctuations of the new economy. Responding to the new scientific curriculum of the modern American University, the establishment of the first freshman English course at Harvard in 1874 ushered in a focus on current-traditional rhetoric, the most prominent of objective rhetorics. No longer were universities preparing only the elite for the church or state, they were now also preparing the upwardly mobile middle-class for "the new scientific specialties proven to be profitable in the world of industry and commerce" ("Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Class" 480). Hence,

Berlin argues that in the later half the nineteenth century, writing courses represented students as middle class subjects eagerly consenting to scientific and Enlightenment principles: "The new middle class of certified meritocrats had arrived . . . . current-traditional rhetoric with its positivistic epistemology, its pretensions to scientific precision, and its managerial orientation was thoroughly compatible with the mission of this university" ("Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Class" 480). Berlin's story shows composition reinforcing the new "mission" of the university—that is, subsidizing capitalistic social and economic structures—by calling students into occupying a rational modernist Enlightenment subjectivity thoroughly steeped in the scientific process.

Miller's history of the emergence of composition is interested in telling a story about how the discipline, its teachers, and its students became positioned as inferior to their counterparts in English studies. As a result of the ambivalence about the new kinds of students entering the university in the late nineteenth century, composition courses were developed "to test the suitability of a newly admitted group for an education that was still explicitly a privilege. The test of composition showed propriety and good manners in regard to the student 'body,' the surface of his writing . . . . the original student of composition was thereby defined . . . as the lower and in some ways the 'animal' order, in need of scrubbing" (*Textual Carnivals* 86). Hence the turn to current-traditionalist writing instruction, which emphasized to an extreme the surface correctness of writing, at the expense of the quality of the rhetorical argument being made. By focusing on grammar or spelling errors, usage choices, and syntax issues, the writing subject was constructed as continually in danger of offending accepted conventions and as continually "in need of scrubbing." According to Miller's interpretation, the fact that

these writing courses emphasized superficial correctness means that they represented the student as an immature beginning writer: "The student is imagined to be (and in participating in the course is generally *required* to be) a presexual, preeconomic, prepolitcal person" (*Textual Carnivals* 87). She concludes that "composition was established in its carnivalesque aspect to regulate writing that accomplished domestic exchanges among American citizens by placing it under the bourgeois gaze of an institution" (*Textual Carnivals* 80). In other words, Miller's own history about the development of composition itself shows a preoccupation with identifying and describing the type of student-as-subject early writing courses assumed and called into being.

Crowley takes a decidedly Foucauldian bent as she discusses the historical emergence of composition. She summarizes that "Freshman English was (and is?) a 'political technology of individuals,' a pedagogy designed to create docile subjects who would not question the discipline's continued and repeated demonstration of their insufficient command of their native tongue . . . " (*Composition in the University* 77-78). Creating "docile subjects," and in turn sacrificing rhetorical education, was acceptable given that superficial correctness and the use of "proper" English could be used to prove that these formerly unentitled students now "inhabited an appropriately developing character" that made them finally worthy of higher education (*Composition in the University* 78).

What is unique about Crowley's account is that she sees ethical instruction as a consistently common thread running throughout the entire history of writing instruction. Before the mid-nineteenth century, ethical training took place alongside rhetorical training. When classical rhetorical instruction was abandoned after the mid-nineteenth

century, ethical instruction did not disappear, but instead took on new life through the "guise" of improving students' aesthetic taste. Crowley explains that

> In a new aesthetic guise, ethical instruction was conducted under the pedagogical heading of taste, at first by rhetoric teachers, and later, during the last three decades of the century, by teachers of English-language literature. In other words, American colleges did not abandon ethical instruction when they abandoned rhetorical education; rather, they transferred instruction in the development of character to the study of English-language literary texts. What they did abandon was the ethical subjectivity that was maintained and disciplined within classical rhetorical study: the *vir bonus*. In his place appeared the genteel man of taste. (*Composition in the University* 35-36)

Crowley's story weaves a tale of historical continuity as she argues that the rhetoric of the student as the subject of the writing course can be identified even in classical education: "the Freshman English requirement retained something of the institutional function that composition exercises had fulfilled in the classical colleges: it remained the site wherein students' character could be subjected to the disciplining gaze of the academy, and that is, presumably, why it continued to be required of all matriculants" (*Composition in the University* 58). While ethical instruction remained consistent throughout the history of writing instruction, Crowley is also careful to note that something did change at the close of the nineteenth century: "in other respects freshman English was an entirely new phenomenon, constituting a radical departure from the pedagogy and rationale of the composition exercises practiced in the classical colleges . . . " (*Composition in the University* 58). The major difference between ancient and late nineteenth century writing

instruction was not that the latter lacked *ethical* training, but rather that it lacked *rhetorical* training. By rejecting the ancient canon of invention and situating it within individual minds, rhetoric became a handmaiden in the service of science: "When American rhetoric teachers finished their revision of rhetorical pedagogy in the late nineteenth century, the only bits of classical invention that remained were the topics, put to humble—and literate—service as a means for paragraph development" (*Composition in the University* 35). While Crowley's history does much to question the effectiveness of what has come to be regarded as the freshman writing requirement, it also reveals her own desire to determine how students were predominately represented in writing instruction in the late nineteenth century.

The above review of three influential histories about the development and evolution of late nineteenth century writing courses makes at least two points. First, it describes some of the major social, economic, and cultural forces at play which may have set a precedent for the field's propensity for representing students as lacking essential social and cultural capital. And second, it shows how each of these three histories *themselves* convey a desire to identify and describe the type of rhetoric of the student as subject conveyed by writing courses at the end of the nineteenth century. Whereas Berlin, Miller, and Crowley may have analyzed this historical moment of change in writing instruction from different perspectives, they each employ an approach which examines how students—as the subject of the course—were represented, discussed, and treated.

As these three academic histories indicate, the fluctuations in the nineteenth century economy which signaled a need for a new managerial-class, the emphasis on positivistic science, and the new types of students entering the university all contributed

to shifting the field's focus from rhetorical education to a focus on current-traditional rhetoric with its formalist rules. This approach to writing instruction prepared students to assimilate into established social and cultural institutions and to serve as the managerial-class in the new economy. In other words, students were represented and treated as autonomous and passive subjects, and they were expected to follow rules under "the bourgeois gaze of an institution." These new types of composition students were not expected to learn about the history of rhetoric or to participate in public forums, but instead were only expected to prove their worthiness by producing "correct" English and by showing their willingness to be subservient to the dominant class by valorizing its aesthetic tastes. What Berlin's, Miller's, and Crowley's histories each argue is that a current-traditional approach to writing instruction represents students as lacking individuals who can be refined and interpellated into capitalistic ideologies. Current-traditional trends can still be seen in composition resources, textbooks, and classrooms whenever there is a focus on testing, writing analytical essays, and obsessive-like concern with superficial correctness. In other words, current-traditional approaches to teaching composition make the student herself the subject of the writing course and discipline her into a modernist, rational, and Enlightenment individual. And in their very telling, Berlin's, Miller's, and Crowley's histories themselves also reveal a type of obsession with determining how the student-as-subject of the writing course was represented in the late nineteenth century.

* * *

Expressivist Rhetoric

> *Good writing has a voice.* Good writing talks to you with a real voice; it has the recognizable imprint of the author on it. Ken Macrorie calls this quality the "record of the authentic voice of another person," and Donald Murray says that "The writer's voice may be the most significant element in distinguishing memorable writing." (111)
>
> — Dan Kirby and Tom Liner *Inside Out: Developmental Strategies for Teaching Writing* (1988)

> Good writing is *honest* writing. Lynn takes a chance with her reader, sharing something very important to her . . . . My responsibility is to be receptive, to *listen* to her voice. And encourage her to use her voice when she writes. (112)
>
> — Dan Kirby and Tom Liner *Inside Out: Developmental Strategies for Teaching Writing* (1988)

> Because being aware of their voices in writing is so important to young writers, we don't believe you should try to move kids away from personal expression too early in their development as writers. Don't be too anxious to get them through the "personal stuff" and on to the "serious business of *real* writing." (139)
>
> — Dan Kirby and Tom Liner *Inside Out: Developmental Strategies for Teaching Writing* (1988)

> Most expressionist theories rely on classroom procedures that encourage the writer to interact in a dialogue with the members of the class. The purpose is to get rid of what is untrue to the private vision of the writer, what is, in a word, inauthentic. (241)
>
> — James Berlin *Rhetoric and Reality* (1987)

While the 1970s and 1980s experienced a proliferation of pedagogies and rhetorics aimed at democratizing education and revolutionizing pedagogy, the primary approaches emerging out of this era still tended to take the student himself or herself as the subject of the writing course. Expressivist rhetoric, the most popular of subjective

rhetorics, became especially prominent in the late sixties and early seventies amid the efforts to democratize education. This rhetoric is also firmly grounded in the Enlightenment liberal humanist assumption that the writing subject is an autonomous entity with an authentic consciousness that can be ascertained by looking inward for "the truth." It assumes a stable subject position, the existence of an authentic and original voice (and hence identity), and privileges the personal over the social and political voice. However, this approach narrowly confines the subject within artificial boundaries of a singular authentic personal voice, glosses over the violent power struggles such confinement demands, and ignores the problematic issue of *how* the subject writes itself into discourse within social, political and historical contexts. This rhetoric operates under the assumption that the subject freely makes choices unencumbered by social, political, or linguistic interference. Hence, expressivist rhetoric assumes that the autonomous and free writing subject can locate, or even be identified through, its "true voice."[3]

Because it ignores the social and negotiated nature of language, an expressivist approach to writing instruction is more concerned with *what* students have to say rather than with *how* they say it. It becomes clear how expressivist rhetoric—in its pursuit to help students express their thoughts, emotions, and desires—can easily fall into the pattern of taking the student himself or herself as the very subject of the writing course. As a result, this approach to writing instruction at times seems obsessed with asking students to explore their personal and individual feelings and then to express them in their "true voice." It is in this sense that expressivist rhetoric has a tendency to discipline students into becoming better people by holding the "correct" values and beliefs. For example, in *Inside Out: Developmental Strategies for Teaching Writing*, Kirby's and

Liner's explanation about their approach to writing instruction firmly places them within an expressionist framework:

> (Our approach to writing instruction) helps students to discover and strengthen their individual voices in their writing . . . . You should watch for opportunities to say things to your students like—"This is *you*" —and—"This *sounds like* you talking" —as you read their work. Mark their papers to indicate where they sound real, genuine, like themselves. Use every opportunity in class to point to passages in their writing that clearly reveal their voice. And have students ask themselves after they have completed a piece—"Does this sound like me? Can I hear myself in this paper?" Do whatever you can to create an environment in which students are aware of, and encouraged to use, authentic voices in their writing. (139)

The very language use and rhetorical patterns employed in this passage convey a sense that students must be brought to a better of understand of who they really are: teachers will help student "discover" and "strengthen" their "individual voices," and teachers are encouraged to use a type of dialogic questioning that will lead students to their true selves. In doing so, the teacher is figured as the arbiter and discoverer of the student's true self; it is the teacher who locates the student in the text.

Another important caveat on expressivist rhetoric is that it equates being a good person with being a good writer, and good writing is assumed to be truthful and honest writing about one's own ideas, beliefs, and values. As Reed Dasenbrock so succinctly states, "At the heart of expressivism is a desire to make the student a better person as well as writer: either we teach the student to express his or her self that has been repressed or we encourage the student to develop just such a sense of self" (7-8). While the idea of

asking students to pinpoint their "true" feelings is already problematic, expressivist rhetoric is further complicated by the fact that what is considered "true" and "honest" usually corresponds with the teacher's ideas and beliefs.

Antonio Gramsci's ideas about critical elaboration and the historical process sheds some light on why expressivist rhetoric may have taken on such a strong foothold in composition pedagogy. He explains that the "starting-point of critical elaboration is the consciousness of what one really is, and is 'knowing thyself' as a product of the historical process to date which has deposited in you an infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory" (*Prison* 324, as quoted in Lott 11). The hegemonic force of capitalistic liberal humanism has left "traces" of knowing oneself as an ethical and singular subject which can authentically write itself into discourse by embarking on an inward journey. And the idea that students can come to know themselves—with the help and guidance of a knowledgeable writing instructor—is seductive. Lester Faigley's discussion about the "truth producing" function of confession in the West helps develop this idea further. He explains that

> The practice of writing about the self in college composition might be viewed as part of a much larger technology of confession for the production of truth in Western societies—witness Foucault's description of the frequency of confession in legal, medical, and educational practice as well as in family and love relations and even in the popular media. Foucault argues that this production of truth is deeply embedded within relations of power where teachers are receivers of confessions as part of the institutional exercise of power. (*Fragments of Rationality* 23)

By combining Gramsci's notion of the hegemonic force of *knowing oneself* as an ethical and singular subject with Faigley's idea that truth is constructed in the West through confession, we can frame the ideological underpinnings of composition's expressivist trend of focusing on the ethical autonomous self which can arrive at the truth by turning inward and making public confessions in papers, journals, and free-writes.

The ideological notion of the independent individual who is only limited in success by his or her own shortcomings is imbricated in composition's expressivist construction of the freely choosing subject as well. It is in this sense that we can see how hegemonic forces at play in the field of composition can also work towards justifying existing social, political, and economic relations. For example, Faigley also explains that:

> This conception of the free individual is at the foundation of the dominant American ideology because it promises to empower individuals through their choice of consumer goods and thus justifies the existing social order. Because the individual is said to be free to choose her or his "lifestyle," politics, religion, and occupation, as well as which brand of soap to use, the poor are alleged to choose to be poor, or as Ronald Reagan said of the homeless, "They've brought it on themselves." (*Fragments of Rationality* 16-17)

By the very nature of capitalism, not everyone can be a capitalist. But the very ideological notion of the rugged individual who can become empowered through the consumption of consumer goods serves those in power by mystifying and erasing this fact. Because if we are all autonomous individuals—and therefore lack a collective voice—we cannot resist the hegemonic order. The hegemonic pull of this ideology can also be detected in composition's expressivist focus on the singular and ethical subject.

Just as capitalism pits a powerful few against the unknowing masses, expressivism frames powerful teachers as the elite few who can lead unknowing students to discover their true selves. The introduction of process pedagogy—the next major development in writing instruction after expressivism—can be seen as a kind of corrective to the extremes of expressivism and as an attempt to bring a more democratic perspective to writing instruction.

Process Pedagogy

> Many people are now trying to become less helpless, both personally and politically: trying to claim more control over their own lives. One of the ways people most lack control over their own lives is through lacking control over words. Especially written words. Words come at you on a piece of paper and you often feel helpless before them. (vii)
>
> — Peter Elbow *Writing Without Teachers* (1973)

> The students are individuals who must explore the writing process in their own way, some fast, some slow, whatever it takes for them, within the limits of the course deadlines, to find their own way to their own truth. (6)
>
> — Donald Murray "Teach Writing as a Process not Product" (1972)

> The student finds his own subject. It is not the job of the teacher to legislate the student's truth. It is the responsibility of the student to explore his own world with his own language, to discover his own meaning. The teacher supports but does not direct this expedition to the student's own truth. (5)
>
> — Donald Murray "Teach Writing as a Process not Product" (1972)

While the introduction of process pedagogy in 1970s was hailed as a liberating possibility for democratizing writing instruction and freeing students from the limits of

current-traditionalism, a Foucauldian disciplining of the student continued to pervade this approach as well. With its objectivist distinction between process and product, its idea that writing can be condensed into a series of identifiable and explainable "steps," and its idea that teachers can intervene in the student's writing process in order to improve it, process pedagogy reproduces the ideological tyranny of the institutionally sanctioned teacher who knows the "secrets" of writing that empty students must absorb in order to succeed. Process pedagogy ultimately defines the writing subject as rational and coherent because it expects the student to stand outside of and objectively observe his or her writing process (Crowley *Composition in the University* 212-213). Murray exemplifies this urge to prioritize the writing process and locate the truth above all else, including the ideological effectiveness of texts, when he explains that "We have to respect the student, not for his product, not for the paper we call literature by giving it a grade, but for the search for truth in which he is engaged" ("Teach Writing as a Process not Product" 5). Through its often elaborate series of complicated handouts for all phases of writing (prewriting activities and diagrams, outlines, multiple drafts, peer response, revisions, and editing), process pedagogy reveals its concern with bringing both the student and her or his piece of writing to a very specific and coherent form.

Somewhat paradoxically, process pedagogy is also subjectivist in its ties to self-expression. Teachers working from this approach want students to become empowered to write on their own, and a telling sign of self-expressionist and process pedagogies are their focus on "empowering" or "demystifying" students. This subjectivism also manifests itself in writing prompts and brainstorming strategies that ask students to turn inward, interrogate personal feelings and beliefs, and then write about them in an act of

purging (Clifford "The Subject in Discourse" 48). With its connection to self-expression, process pedagogy also ushered in a renewed interest in helping students locate their true voice and constructing ethical students. The work of major compositionists at this time —such as Dan Kirby and Tom Liner (1981, 1988), Ken Macrorie, C.H. Knoblauch and Lil Brannon (1984), Peter Elbow (1973, 1986), and Donald Murray (1972)—highlight how process pedagogy assumes a stable subject position, the existence of an authentic and original voice, and hence privileges the personal over the social and political. In *Rhetoric and Reality*, Berlin explains that "Elbow's purpose in (*Writing Without Teachers*) is avowedly to empower students, to enable them 'to become less helpless, both personally and politically' (vii). This power, however, is not political in any overt sense; it is instead conceived in personal terms—getting control over one's life through getting control over words" (154). Berlin's comments help us understand how such a perspective narrowly confines the student subject within artificial boundaries of a singular authentic personal voice, glosses over the violent power struggles such confinement demands, and ignores the problematic issue of *how* the subject situates its texts within social, political, and historical contexts. In other words, expressivist process pedagogies aim to empower students to interrogate their minds, follow certain proscribed procedures, and then perfectly convey their intentions without any linguistic, social, or cultural interference. This concern with empowering and demystifying students also carried over into academic discourse approaches to writing instruction, which was one of the next major trends following process pedagogy.

Academic Discourse

> In the course, and in this book, we are presenting reading and writing as a struggle within and against the languages of academic life. A classroom performance represents a moment in which, by speaking or writing, a student must enter a closed community, with its secrets, codes and rituals. And this is, we argue, an historical as well as a conceptual drama. The student has to appropriate or be appropriated by a specialized discourse, and he has to do this as though he were easily and comfortably one with his audience, as though he were a member of the academy. And, of course, he is not. (8)
>
> — David Bartholomae and Anthony Petrosky *Facts Artifacts and Counterfacts: Theory and Method for a Reading and Writing Course* (1986)

The academic discourse approach to teaching writing promised to empower students by letting them in on the hidden secrets of academia. It is also the approach that perhaps held the most potential for focusing composition studies more on student writing and less on students' sense of self. However, as Bartholomae and Petrosky illustrate in the above quote, this approach tended to assume that while the student is at risk of appropriating or being appropriated by academic discourse, he or she is always *already* failing at this task. Two of the primary ways this approach tried to bring students up to par were also fraught with limitations. One approach promised to "'remediate' students writing ability," improving their writing skills so that they could succeed in advanced and discipline-specific courses (Crowley *Composition in the University* 233). A second approach focuses on teaching students the guidelines of what Crowley refers to as "the myth of the academic essay," or "a euphemism for the five paragraph theme" (*Composition in the University* 233). The first approach is problematic because, in its declaration to remediate students, it frames them as lacking and failing subjects. The

second approach is problematic because "there is no such thing as 'the academic essay'" (Crowley *Composition in the University* 233). Each discipline has its own preferred genres, unique vocabulary and ways of using syntax, and its own conventions. Endorsing the idea of the academic essay also superficially assumes that the rhetorical expectations are the same over time and in different contexts, and that students can follow a set checklist in any writing situation (much like process pedagogy had previously advocated).

These two major limitations mean that the academic discourse approach once again invoked an Enlightenment rational student who must be filled with knowledge from "university-certified" experts by following a series of predetermined steps and producing academically-sanctioned forms of writing. Many approaches to writing instruction that take an academic discourse approach fail, in part, to live up to their promised potential precisely because they tend to take students themselves as the subject of the course and represent them as passive and in dire need of empowerment in order to participate in supposedly liberating academic contexts (Bizzell; Bartholomae and Petrosky; Chiseri-Strater, Herrington-Moran). And such an approach is also problematic because it reduces writing to empty forms void of meaningful contexts and real audiences. And finally, in a related vein, academic discourse is problematic because "[i]t is too vague, self-serving for teachers, and doesn't get at politics of location, class, gender, etc." (*Composition in the University* 233). What Crowley so tersely points out here is that academic discourse approaches to writing, far from helping students become more effective rhetoricians, instead frame the student as an ahistorical and apolitical entity in need of empowerment that can be bestowed upon him or her by an all-knowing instructor. Her comment is also suggestive of the struggles over power, authority, and control that get imbricated in

different types of writing instruction, a theme that is returned to throughout this dissertation. The tendency in academic discourse is to lapse into explanations about how students need to be empowered so that they are capable of engaging in different academic discourse communities. However, such scholarship fails to question whether a generic type of academic discourse or the academic essay even exists.[4] The desire to "empower" students, which is more of a secondary concern in academic discourse approaches to teaching writing, becomes the focal point in the related pedagogical trend of critical and liberatory pedagogy.

Critical & Liberatory Pedagogy

> [S]ocial practice is studied in the name of freedom for critical consciousness; democracy and awareness develop through the form of dialogue; dialogue externalizes false consciousness, changing students from re-active objects into society-making subjects; the object-subject switch is a social psychology for empowerment; power through study creates the conditions for reconstructing social practice. (98)
>
> — Ira Shor *Critical Teaching and Everyday Life* (1980)

Ira Shor's *Critical Teaching and Everyday Life* is not only concerned with education in general and writing instruction in particular, but it also serves as an exemplary model of liberatory writing pedagogy and has been widely quoted in composition scholarship. What is also important about his work is that it did a great deal to expose Western educators to Paulo Freire's theories of critical pedagogy for working with pre-literate peasants in the Third World. While Shor acknowledges that it is inappropriate to take Freire's approach out of context and apply it whole cloth to Western

students (127), he nevertheless uses Freire's theories in such a way that he ends up treating pre-literate peasants and Western students alike, as if they had the same problems, life-experiences, and material realities. Note how Shor's language and political sentiments in the following passage mirror almost identically Freire's discussion of pre-literate peasants, adjusted only for an assumed Western affinity for crude mass culture and technological innovation:

> Domination by mass culture, in an advanced society like the U.S., has left the population either functionally illiterate or uncritically literate, and politically undeveloped. The need for conscientization exists, to counter the interferences to critical thought in daily life. The questions of dialogic pedagogy, cultural democracy, critical awareness and structural perception are urgently relevant in this technically advanced culture. The extension of social control through state institutions like the schools, and the dissemination of commercial culture through electronic media, make the situation ripe for a humanizing pedagogy. . . . Critical education can be a compelling force for de-socialization. Both mass culture and false consciousness are strangely vulnerable to critical classrooms, here in the center of the First World. (127)

Western students are represented in a similar fashion as Freire's peasants: they are "functionally illiterate" and "politically undeveloped." Just like Brazilian peasants, U.S. students live in a society that is "ripe for a humanizing pedagogy." A technically advanced mass culture, which is even more insidious because it reproduces itself through the "dissemination of commercial culture through electronic media," is identified as the culprit responsible for the students' immersion in false reality. In this scenario, then,

mass culture and technological innovation are synonymous with false consciousness, which opens the door for educators to claim that large proportions of the U.S. student population are in need of conscientization. What is important to recognize is that not only does such a liberatory pedagogy lead to incongruent practices and conclusions, but it also leads to a situation where it is assumed without question that certain students lack critical consciousness and hence require empowerment and liberation.

The popularity of critical or liberatory pedagogy in writing instruction in the U.S. has contributed to a climate where it is appropriate to take students as the proper subject of the writing course by introducing several popular concepts which still appear with relative frequency in composition and computer-composition scholarship. These concepts include emphasizing the deficient nature of students, the important role of the teacher in bringing students to critical consciousness, and concern over the degenerative influences of popular culture.[5] Crowley agrees with this assessment:

> [t]he most sympathetic critic of composition instruction must admit, I think, that the aim of empowering students, however worthy, is so encompassing that it can never be reached, and so vague that to articulate any usable meaning for it is nearly impossible. Talk of "mastery" and "control" involves composition teachers in academic projects whose ethics and politics are insufficiently considered (Malinowitz; Stuckey). In addition, the argument for literacy as empowerment begs a number of important questions: . . . what sort of empowerment are we talking about—political? ethical? intellectual? financial? And if in fact literacy does empower people, for whose purposes does it do so? (234)

Not only is the goal of empowerment sufficiently vague that it is just about impossible to

describe, but Crowley implies that that this elusiveness lends itself to serving instructors more than it serves students.

Shor seems to have established a type of precedent with the condescending language he uses when describing students as in-need.[6] In the following passage, he carefully balances framing students as inadequate enough to require liberation, but competent enough to achieve this liberation once they receive the appropriate assistance from instructors:

> Caught in a hostile and disempowering culture they remain remarkable strong and good-natured. When treated with respect and equality, in class, their hidden resources open up. Savvy about life's nitty-gritty demands, they maintain a lively sense of friendship and comedy. They love good stories, satires, exaggerations, tall and bawdy tales (a strange mixture of good-humored kidding with aggressive sexist, racist and self-hating narratives). Side by side with anger and aggression is their modesty. They don't act spoiled, as if the world owes them something. They demonstrate an admirable seriousness, in meaning what they say and saying what they mean, and honoring commitments once they make them. Intellectually, they have barely been allowed to test their minds. Yet, they have more brain-power than they show in class or on the job. (86)

This is an amazingly schizophrenic quote which invokes images of the "peaceful savage" (i.e., the student) who indulges in the guilty and lowly pleasure of bawdy tales. Trapped in a life overwhelmed with "nitty-gritty" demands, these students still maintain their childlike innocence and naivety (they mean what they say and say what they mean and they honor all of their commitments). The problem here is that because Shor applies

Freire's theory in a lock-step manner, he is required to prove that students are in real danger of being ideologically overpowered, but at the same time he is also required to show that students are resourceful and capable of breaking out of such domination with the guidance of an educated teacher. Shor sets up this hierarchy between student and teacher repeatedly: "Faced with this threat, the designers of an empowering pedagogy have to study the shape of disempowering forces. As allies to the powerless, liberatory teachers need a working knowledge of the anti-critical field in which a critical pedagogy evolves . . . . The teacher's own critical learning prefigures the knowledge the class as a whole will gain" (47). Liberatory pedagogy places the teacher in the position of the all-knowing sage who can redeem students from their immersion in false-reality. While teachers know true reality, students are tricked by mass capitalistic culture into believing in false reality.

One of the more common and popular arguments that the teacher is in a position to show students the correct way to think can be found in liberatory pedagogy's concern over the degenerative influences of popular or mass culture. Within this scenario, grave concern over the dangers of mass culture are expressed, a concern which is consistently considered an unwholesome influence on impressionable young writing students, as is explored in more detail in Chapter 3 this dissertation. As quoted above, Shor explains that "The teacher's own critical learning prefigures the knowledge the class as a whole will gain" (47). Once the teacher's primary role in bringing students to critical consciousness has been established, popular culture and all its attendant ills can set up as the evil that students must come to recognize and conquer. Shor makes an outlandish claim for the value of critical pedagogy when he argues that "critical thought and the

practice of freedom are foundations for exorcising mass culture, purging sexism and racism, evoking class solidarity, and initiating social reconstruction" (269-270). But the connection between false consciousness and mass culture are made even more explicit, to the point that the former is a direct result of the later: "Beneath false consciousness, there are resources which survive the acidity of mass culture, waiting for a reconstructed life" (Shor 87). Herein lies an enduring concept still drawn upon in writing scholarship today, the concept that if students could only come to break out of the stupor in which they are immersed as a direct result of their complicity with popular culture, then they would achieve a vulgar type of Marxist true sight.

Shor's concepts and procedures for bringing about critical literacy, and by extension other forms of Freirian liberatory pedagogy, continue to be disseminated by compositionist and computer-compositionists alike: it is as if scholars do not recognize or think about what these terms or turns of phrases mean anymore, but the major terms and concepts nevertheless continue to be drawn upon (false consciousness, liberation, critical consciousness, the dangers of mass culture). Sharon Crowley similarly writes that later forms of critical pedagogy still condescendingly construct students as passive and oppressed: "Leftist composition teachers desire that their students be alerted to the oppressive and debilitating means by which their culture defines them and their relations; they desire as well that students be empowered by their awareness of oppression to change the means by which it is maintained (Berlin and Vivion; Bizzell 1992; Sullivan/Qually)" (*Composition in the University: Historical and Polemical Essays* 234-235). This desire on the part of composition instructors to "alert" students to their oppression and lead them to challenge the material culture and social relationships which

maintain this oppression carried over into social constructionist and social epistemic rhetorics as well.

Social Constructionist and Social Epistemic Rhetoric

James Berlin explains that different forms of social constructionist rhetoric have emerged out of different historical contexts—appearing in the early 20th century in conjunction with progressive politics, in the 1930s in reaction to the Depression and in an effort to train students in political discourse, and again in the 1960s and 1970s as a response to social unrest and race, gender, and class conflict. Each strain of social constructionist rhetoric recognizes "the influence of social forces in the formation of the individual" and the role the individual can and should play in participating in democracy for the good of the larger community ("Composition Studies and Cultural Studies" 398). Because this rhetoric places a premium on the individual as a freely acting entity, even while recognizing the social construction of knowledge, it has the tendency to represent the student as an individual who can come to really know his or her true self and make the right decisions outside of social or historical constraints. Berlin also recognizes that "[w]hile it emphasizes the communal and social constitution of subjectivity, it never abandons the notion of the individual as finally a sovereign free agent, capable of transcending mere material and social conditions" ("Composition Studies and Cultural Studies" 398). Herein lies the impetus for social contructionist and social epistemic rhetoric's turn toward disciplining students: while students are free to make their own choices as individuals, clearly the right choice is to resist social inequity in all of its forms and to defend democracy.

While Berlin does not address this critique of the social constructionist treatment of the student subject, he does acknowledge that it assumes the existence of rational discourse:

> [w]hile this rhetoric sees the manipulative power of discourse, it continues to believe that a universal, ahistorical, rational discourse is possible. As a result, it regards itself as a disinterested and objective arbiter of competing ideological claims, occupying a neutral space above the fray of conflict. In other words, it is incapable of examining its own ideological commitments, which it mistakes for accurate reflections of eternal truths. It accepts its signifying practices as indisputably representative of things as they really are. ("Composition Studies and Cultural Studies" 398)

Because of its belief in "a universal, ahistorical, rational discourse," social constructionist rhetoric assumes that it can convey the "truth" to students who, in their sovereign and free nature, will recognize it as the "truth." However, this type of circular logic leads to yet another type of standardization and discipline of the student. This rhetoric does not show students how to create and situate *texts* in social contexts, but rather shows students how to situate *themselves* as resisters of social conflict and defenders of democracy by deploying such universal and rational discourse. Dasenbrock makes a similar argument that:

> social constructionist pedagogy becomes little more than a more sophisticated version of subjectivism, with a slightly stronger emphasis on what is wrong with those people over there who are socially conditioned, and a slightly weaker emphasis on how we are not. This is precisely what social constuctionism has

become in composition, a tool for the critical analysis of the social complacency of our students. . . Seeing this leads us also to see that the struggle between individual and social models of the self has been a gigantic exercise in shadow-boxing. (6)

Berlin argues that much of the work being done in cultural studies composition pedagogy coincides with social epistemic rhetoric and therefore "considers signifying practices in relation to the ideological formation of the self within a context of economics, politics, and power" ("Composition Studies and Cultural Studies" 401). Social epistemic rhetoric, like social constructionist rhetoric, works from the premise that the subject is a discursive construct, or "a plethora of discourses—a rich variety of texts inscribed in the persona of the individual. The subject is thus a construction of the play of discourses that a culture provides. These discourses interpellate or address us, providing each of us with directions about our behavior, scripts that have to do with such categories as race, class, and gender" ("Composition Studies and Cultural Studies" 399). Yet this acknowledgement that the self is a made up of competing discourses also leads social epistemic rhetoric to focus on conflict, which means that it tends to regard the writing classroom as a site of intervention "in this process of construction, locating the conflicts in order to make them the center of writing" ("Composition Studies and Cultural Studies" 402). It is in this sense that social epistemic rhetoric controls and constrains students, because when students are encouraged to confront conflicts and produce resistant readings, such encouragement and such readings are always already ideologically loaded from the start ("Composition Studies and Cultural Studies" 401). Social epistemic rhetoric therefore betrays a tendency to discipline the student, as

opposed to student texts, as a result of this conflict approach.

The problem of representing students as in need of discipline and control once again becomes clear when we see that social epistemic rhetoric's focus on confronting conflicts requires that writing classes focus on student thoughts, beliefs, and morals, as opposed to student texts. This problem is apparent in *Composition and Resistance* when the authors claim that writing provides students with a way "'to make learning a personal act toward taking greater control' of their lives, and it must situate this process 'in and with social order" (Hurlbert and Bliz 4, quoted in "Composition Studies and Cultural Studies" 403). The reason for emphasizing conflict in the classroom is that it is the competing discourses which emerge out of this conflict that oppress students politically, economically, or socially. In other words, social epistemic rhetoric focuses on the student's sense of subjectivity within these conflicts, and not on the student's use of language or the student's understanding of how language functions in particular contexts to contribute to such conflicts. In the final analysis, social epistemic rhetoric returns to taking the student, and not language or rhetoric, as the subject of the writing course.

* * *

Since the first freshman writing course was designed and taught at Harvard in 1874, the idea that students' intellectual or moral improvement was an appropriate topic of the course has been disseminated and often unquestioned in the field of composition. Whether these earliest manifestations of the rhetoric of the student as subject were concerned with producing a passive managerial class or students who could prove their

worthiness to serve the dominant class by producing "correct" English, they nevertheless set a precedent for taking the student himself or herself as the "natural" subject of the writing course. While a variety of pedagogies and rhetorics were designed in the 1970s, '80s, and '90s in efforts to democratize and revolutionize writing instruction, they were unable to relinquish their investment in disciplining and standardizing students. This historical narrative suggests that computer-composition's contemporary penchant for disciplining the student as the subject of the writing course—to frame rhetorically and treat students as intellectually substandard and in need of moral regulation —is indebted to earlier forms of writing instruction. In the next chapter, I offer a first person narrative of my student and scholarly experiences as a way to explain how this traditional rhetoric of the student as subject functions as an undercurrent in computer-composition today.

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[1] In *Textual Carnivals* (1991), Susan Miller refers to the popular histories of composition as stories in order to indicate that they are open to interpretation and debate. She also argues that telling stories about composition is important because it gives the discipline a sense of its past, present, and future directions. Furthermore, telling stories about the field is a way to bring previously neglected topics—such as students, teachers, research and institutional frameworks—into the symbolic realm, "the space traditionally reserved for more 'important' topics" (3).

[2] While several other compositionists have contributed important histories of the discipline—including Robert J. Connors' *Composition-Rhetoric: Backgrounds, Theory, and Pedagogy* (1997) and Stephen North's *The Making of Knowledge in Composition* (1987)—Berlin's, Miller's, and Crowley's histories are often regarded as among the most influential.

[3] Similar critiques of expressivism can be found in Reed Dasenbrock's "The Myths of the Subjective and of the Subject in Composition Studies" (1993), John Clifford's "The Subject in Discourse" (1991), and Sharon Crowley's *Composition in the University* (1998).

[4] Crowley suggests that by giving Americans and English Departments the concept of

academic discourse to latch onto, their anxieties are appeased: "[i]t fosters and supports the persistent American belief that universal standards of literacy exist, and it legitimizes and covers over the social and institutional functions of Freshman English" (*Composition in the University* 233).

[5] Similar critiques of critical or liberatory pedagogy can be found peppered throughout a variety of other scholarship as well, including Susan Miller's *Textual Carnivals*, Charles Paine's *The Resistant Writer: Rhetoric as Immunity, 1850 to the Present* (1999), and Ellen Cushman's "Critical Literacy and Institutional Language" (1999).

[6] The language of liberatory pedagogy appears in other major scholarly works from this time period, such as Peter Elbow's *Writing with Power* (1981) and Paulo Freire and Donaldo Macedo's *Literacy: Reading the Word and the World* (1987).

Chapter 2
Purgatory: The Impossibility of Writing My Dissertation

> We were journeying on through the evening, straining our eyes forward, as far as we could, against the evening and shining rays;
> And lo, little by little, a smoke, dark as night, rolling towards us, nor any room was there to escape from it. This reft us of sight and the pure air.
>
> — Dante Alighieri *The Divine Comedy*, Purgatorio, Canto XV

> Before we enter into God's Kingdom, every trace of sin within us must be eliminated, every imperfection in our soul must be corrected. This is exactly what takes place in purgatory . . . [purgatory] does not indicate a place but a condition of life.
>
> — Pope John Paul II, August 4, 1999

Consenting to Purgatory

I offer my struggles with writing this dissertation as a practical example of how the dissemination of the rhetoric of the student as the subject of the course subtly pervades the realms of composition and computer-composition and ensnares those involved with it; it emerges in the research and scholarship and it populates the minds of instructors and students alike. In this chapter I therefore write as both a graduate student and a scholar who was on an unproductive quest to locate the elusive subject. My unproductive quest was prolonged not only because I actively consented to such traditional expectations and constraints, but also because the promises of computer-technology functioned to further strengthen my conviction that the elusive subject could indeed be identified and embodied.

As is common among graduate students, the rhetoric of the student as subject told me that if I read everything, ruminated hard enough on the issues at hand, thought clearly,

and followed the advice and direction of my committee members—in sum, if I could just become that perfect graduate student who did everything right and thought right—I would finally be able to synthesize every idea, bit of theory, and piece of scholarship I had ever read into one clear, absolute, without-a-doubt and beyond-reproach thesis statement, and then I could convey this absolutely correct answer in writing without interference or confusion to my readers. Yet in this chapter I also explain how this feeling was intensified by another important factor that contributed to the conundrum in which I found myself: there is a new type of desire that comes with working, reading, writing, and researching with computers; there is a stronger illusion, a more seductive siren-song that I can, or must, or am expected to arrive at the truth or keep working on each of the different versions of my chapters simultaneously *precisely* because the promises of computer technology permit me to do so. In other words, although computer-composition may promise otherwise, the deployment of the rhetoric of the student as subject also pervades this scholarship and affects the scholars and students working in the field. This chapter concludes with a review of how other computer-compositionists have attempted to negotiate, come to terms with, or resolve this problematic rhetoric of the student-as-subject.

I decided, or rather I was persuaded by my committee, that if I was ever going to complete my dissertation I had to jettison my own deployment of and investment in this rhetoric. I myself had to stop disseminating, through my own research, writing, and intellectual efforts, the rhetoric of individual originality, truth, and comprehensiveness. I realized that I had been working in a type of purgatory where my very topic of study wedged me into paralysis—psychological, philosophical, and theoretical paralysis. The

very act of conducting online or database research, analyzing resources, articulating positions, and theorizing my conclusions further entrenched me in the futility of writing this dissertation. I was trying to identify a single point of subjectivity from which to write about the futility of writing from a single point of subjectivity, and I was trying to develop an alternative rhetoric of the subject from which to write about the futility of endorsing any particular rhetoric of the subject. I was caught in a Derridian slippage in which the signifier could never map the sign. Or in other words I was hunting for the very thing that I was arguing was impossible to obtain. These realizations showed me that the central task of my dissertation was to identify and dissect the rhetoric of the student-as-subject as it is threaded unevenly and inconsistently throughout the scholarship, lore, and cultural artifacts of computer-composition.

Writing this dissertation often felt like I was living in purgatory, and I came to view my intellectual struggles, writing false starts, and theoretical frustrations as types of penance. I now realize, however, that this idea that I must pay penance is yet another manifestation of the deployment of this traditional rhetoric, and the process of writing this dissertation has shown me the extent to which it can fail students and hinder writing. The very idea that I can work into my dissertation a chapter entitled "Purgatory" contributes to my argument as well. I was so completely immersed in this rhetoric that I played into the idea that I was on an internal quest to improve myself spiritually, intellectually, and emotionally. If I could just become a better person, a more insightful reader of theory, a more serious and intellectually astute scholar, then I could once and for all figure out my exact argument and the exact outline of my chapters. I could theorize a concept of the subject that would escape the concept of the subject. It is

embarrassing to say and I realize my confessional tone here is problematic, but it is nonetheless true that my committee meetings often began with the confession "I'm a failure as a graduate student; I should know all this already," and concluded with the disclosure "If I was smarter this wouldn't be so difficult." And again, it may seem obvious now, but I assure you I was unaware of it at the time, that this attitude shows how well I accepted, bought into, and then disseminated the rhetoric of the subject. Once I had experienced enough internal psychological and intellectual hell, once I had experienced the external and physical struggles of getting up early and staying up late to write, then I would be a good student, good enough to think clearly, arrive at the correct answer, and write my dissertation.

A consideration of the distinctions between modernism and postmodernism can act as a heuristic device for thinking through this particular problem of subjectivity in composition. While computer-composition entices us with postmodern promises for computer technology in the writing classroom (meaning is never comprehensive or stable, originality is impossible), they get peppered with more traditional promises (meaning can be located and conveyed without interference, originality is possible) because we are still very much operating from a modern worldview. Yet of course, I do not mean to imply with this discussion that modernism and postmodernism are two different and distinct movements or that they are unrelated and independent of each other. The modern worldview, grounded in Industrialism and its accompanying print culture, values truth, knowing oneself, individualism, hierarchy, individual creation, and depth. In other words, the notion that ideas are created in individual minds and then are unproblematically expressed to the word—what could be referred to as a Platonic

rhetorical invention—prevails because of its long-held connection with industrial economy based on individuality (Tuman *Word Perfect: Literacy in the Computer Age* 92). In contrast, a postmodern worldview, grounded in a post-Industrial information age and its attendant online/computer culture, values the contingent nature of truth, vertical organization, collaboration, the impossibility of new or unique ideas, surface, and the connection of fragments (Tuman *Word Perfect: Literacy in the Computer Age* 48). Computer-composition finds itself in a strange mid-place between these modern and postmodern worldviews and values, where the field is excitedly discussing "new" theoretical ideas about how reading, writing, meaning-making, texts, and authors (writing subjects) are foregrounded and conceived of differently in technological environments. However, the field has not yet relinquished its strong and ingrained hold on a modern worldview and print as the primary way of organizing our lives. So we get a disjunction when computer-composition attempts to incorporate new technologies and ideas about online literacy with older models of thinking about students, what writing classes should accomplish, and best practices for teaching writing. While computer-composition's theoretical musings enter the realm of postmodernity, in the final analysis the reassertion of the traditional rhetoric of the student as subject indicates that this sub-discipline is still firmly entrenched in a modern worldview, trying to get students to buy into modern print culture and its accompanying modernist subjectivity, values of truth, knowing oneself, individualism, comprehensiveness, and unique creation. There is a general pattern that each of these different promises follow: writing in computer-mediated environments is supposed to free authors from the traditional expectations of comprehensiveness, originality, and authority, yet in the end, technology also paradoxically reinforces these

traditional expectations as well.

Although computer-composition scholarship promises to relax certain long held beliefs about textuality and authorship (Landow; Vitanza; Snyder; Faigley; Stone; Turkle)—which essentially amount to foregoing our investment in the modern rhetoric of the student-as-subject—we see that its promises still play into and reinforce this traditional rhetoric. For example, I was arguing that computer-mediated writing environments can help improve student writing when computer-mediated writing environments were greatly increasing the complexity of my own writing and proliferating my meaning-making. I had played into the latest version of the rhetoric of the traditional student, and it was tinged with the additional promises of technology: if I could just fulfill the promise of the cyborg and piece together an improved version of my scholar-self, then and only then would I finally be able to write my dissertation. I relished the notion that once I completed this project, I would be a better person, new and improved, cast in the mold of Haraway's cyborg, storming the reality studio and obliterating intellectual and disciplinary boundaries. In sum, what I experienced was a new type of desire that accompanies reading, writing, and researching in computer-mediated spaces. A longing that I must, since technology provides me with the opportunity, see everything, know everything, be everything, and therefore arrive at the truth which is there if only for my asking. The appearance of this new type of desire that arises when working with technology means that there are additional questions about teaching writing in computer-mediated environments that must be asked. And all these questions converge on the issue of what it takes to help improve student writing in online spaces. It is not a matter of achieving nirvana, the elusive promise of technology under which I had been laboring—

knower of all computer-composition research, reader of all theory, explorer of all databases and portal pages—but rather a matter of focusing writing courses on student rhetoric.

Traditional Authorial Expectations

A survey of computer-composition scholarship suggests that computer-mediated writing environments are suppose to free me from adherence to traditional authorial expectations such as authority and objectivity (Landow; Faigley; Stone; Turkle). Yet I have been forced to accept that writing in computer environments has, quite simply, failed to free me from these expectations, or perhaps more precisely, failed to free me from such self-imposed desires. On the contrary, I felt intensified pressure and responsibility to fulfill traditional authorial functions. Reading, conducting research, and writing in computer-mediated environments may be offered up as a liberating experience, but in practice it foregrounds the impossibility of writing a dissertation in synch with the traditional authorial requirements and expectations.

The traditional student-writing-dissertation subjectivity invokes a very traditional type of author-function. George Landow tells us that the author in hypertext, and by extension in computer-mediated environments, is "a decentered (or centerless) network of codes that, on another level, also serves as a node within another centerless network" (*Hypertext 2.0* 91-92). And Allucquere Rosanne Stone tells us that the notion of individuality and singular subjectivity is dispersed in cyberspace: "The cyborg, the multiple personality, the technosocial subject, Gibson's cyberspace cowboy all suggest a radical rewriting, in the technosocial space . . . of the bounded individual as the standard

social unit and validated social actant" (*The War of Desire and Technology at the Close of the Mechanical Age* 42). William Gibson's cyberspace cowboy provides us with a perfect example of the contradictions inherent in the promises of technology to alter subject formation or identity. *Neuromancer's* central hero, Case, is damaged physically and emotionally, and he hungers perpetually to jack into cyberspace so that he can throw off the limitations of the flesh. The reader is reminded constantly of Case's disdain for the flesh given that his name exemplifies how his physical matter is merely a container, or a *case*, for the meat of his body ("The body was meat. Case fell into the prison of his own flesh" 6). Yet far from being a technosocial space where "the bounded individual and the standard social unit" are rewritten, cyberspace paradoxically becomes the place where Case reifies the traditional qualities of individuality, experiences the nostalgic desire for modernity, and ultimately reaffirms the division between mind and body. In cyberspace he becomes hyper-rational and hyper-real, more real than if he were not logged into the sim-stim cyberspace deck. When the three-dimensional colored columns of information emerge out of the consensual hallucination grid and tower over him, Case, released from his damaged body and psyche, in the clarity of mind that can only be achieved in cyberspace, finally comprehends the complexity of data and patterns of cause and effect that have structured his life.

Case is finally sutured to the truth again in a nostalgic desire for the traditional, and, in a moment of clarity, he understands the web of interrelated and overdetermined structures of information and power that control the universe. It is a modernist dream of Enlightenment, a Transcendental dream of truth: by becoming whole in cyberspace, Case achieves a type of critical consciousness and understands that his subjectivity is a

modernist whole and that true reality is linear and completely comprehensible. While cyberspace promises to release Case from the limits of his physical body and the limits of modernist ways of knowing, it is in cyberspace that he paradoxically reaffirms the modernist division between mind and body (consciousnesses can be downloaded and exist entirely in cyberspace) and it is in cyberspace that he achieves a type of hyper-rationality. Case's situation serves as a popular culture example that, in the end, even in cyberspace, our intense desire to achieve a state of uniqueness, wholeness, and objectivity, our desire to seamlessly suture ourselves to the ruse of truth, situates us back firmly within a modern framework.

Like Case, I too feel the lure of the promises of technology to free me from traditional modernist authorial constraints. But also like Case, I too feel the contradictory nostalgic desire to be sutured back to the truth again, to a familiar space of modernist newness and wholeness, when I am working in online spaces. My desire in part is produced by my particular position as a graduate student writing a dissertation. From this position, I am still expected to write from a location of singularity and authority and, in the end, to produce something unique and new. In addition, I have not been forced, but rather have eagerly consented to the hegemonic, authoritative, singular, and dry writing style of academia, as it has served me well in earning high grades in my course work, being accepted to conferences, and in general creating a space for myself at my university and among my peers as a type of computer-composition expert.

In sum, I am trying to inhabit the type of subject position I am critiquing. I am trying to embody a particular notion of subjectivity at the same moment I am pointing out its contradictions. And the computer—instead of freeing me to work and write from

multiple perspectives—is only multiplying my problems and anxieties. I invoke the modernist author function to limit the never-ending proliferation of meanings I confront and create, and yet part of my dissertation criticizes this same act as well. My project critiques how the author function—the reassertion of the modernist Enlightenment subject—truncates, reduces, and limits meaning-making. Yet I still find it necessary to limit the meaning I create with my project; I am not free to allow my meaning-making to consider multiple paths are contradictory perspectives. While the popularly accepted story is that the author is the creator and proliferator of meaning, it actually functions in the reverse of this: we really use the "ideological product"—the idea of an author—to limit and exclude meaning. The author is therefore the "functional principle by which . . . one impedes the free circulation, the free manipulation, the free composition, decomposition, and recomposition of fiction" (Foucault "What is an Author?" 119). I was trying to *do* in my dissertation exactly what I *argue* is limiting; that is, I was using the author function as "the principle of thrift in the proliferation of meaning" (Foucault "What is an Author?" 118). I was eagerly consenting to the rhetoric of the student as subject and was accepting the call to interpellate myself into a modernist author, and as such was "mark(ing) the matter in which (I) fear the proliferation of meaning" (Foucault "What is an Author?" 119).

Uniqueness, Originality, and Truth

As a scholar, the traditional rhetoric of the student subject told me that there was one correct answer that I should be able to find, and launched me on endless attempts to reconcile conflicting terminology and definitions and contradictory theories and

scholarship. I was lulled into believing that writing my dissertation was a matter of truth, and not a matter of rhetoric. Computer-composition's offer of stripping meaning-making of the guise of independence might have freed me from this belief in originality and truth. As Landow suggests, "by making the borders of the text (now conceived as the individual lexia) permeable, it (cyberspace and hypertext) removes some of its independence and uniqueness" (*Hypertext 2.0* 84). However, this offer proved hollow to me, since my focus on truth was inextricably linked with my focus on the modernist concept of originality. In other words, while hypertext may on one level obliterate uniqueness, on another level the fact that borders continually merge and shift in cyberspace means that there is perpetual originality: no borders and no stability means that nothing stays the same, and so hypertext paradoxically re-ignites my desire to locate uniqueness.

An obsession with uniqueness can once again be attributed to an embrace of a modernist and humanist subjectivity. What I walked right into and could not get out of, even at a time when I was writing about this very enigma, was the rhetoric of the student as subject who could create something special and original. I was almost completely unable to resist the hegemony of the traditional stories I had read so much about and critiqued: that when we write, we should be able to produce something completely unique, and if we are reading and thinking and writing correctly, then we should be able to see some patterns of truth emerge and then convey that truth to our audience without interference or confusion. Landow suggests that writing in computer-mediated environments is supposed to free me from this need to create something unique: the fact that hypertext "enforces the presence of multiple versions potentially undercuts belief in the possibility of a unique, unitary text" (*Hypertext 2.0* 84). However, on the contrary,

the "presence of multiple versions" only complicated and mystified my modernist attempts to arrive at a definitive thesis. I wrote not as if the "belief in the possibility of a unique, unitary text" had been undercut, but rather as if I was that much more expected to arrive at a unique and unitary text precisely *because* I had the freedom, the option, of working with multiple versions. What I needed to do instead was dislodge my investment in the rhetoric of the student as subject. By foregoing the goal of locating uniqueness, originality, and truth, I could then focus my energies on writing and experimenting with which rhetorical devices and movements would best help make a strong argument.

Comprehensive Knowledge

Just as hypertext and cyberspace are supposed to free writers from the ruse of uniqueness, they are also suppose to free them from the ruse of comprehensiveness. The acts of researching and writing in computer-mediated environments are supposed to help me become a better researcher and writer, but instead I find that it proliferates my research options, thereby making my tasks more difficult. For example, the traditional rhetoric of the student as subject says that, in order to be a good student, I should be able to locate all research, read everything, and become an expert on all topics. While Landow argues that hypertextuality will obliterate our frustration with print's tendency to *limit* connections and *truncate* lines of investigations, I found that hypertextuality achieves the opposite: its forever-multiplying options greatly increases my frustration by dangling the possibility of comprehensive research in front of me (*Hypertext 2.0* 97).

One of the earliest promises of technology was to attain the organization and

connection of all meaning. For example, the Director of Scientific Research and Development in Franklin D. Roosevelt's administration, Vannevar Bush, proposed a machine that would organize large amounts of scientific information. His imagined memex mechanism "would transcend the storage and retrieval limitations of print technology by allowing users to gain access to and to search huge amounts of information in order to retrieve and annotate what they considered important" (Snyder *Hypertext: The Electronic Labyrinth* 22). Working from Bush's concept of a memex machine later in the 1970s, Ted Nelson developed a similar idea for connecting all human knowledge, which he referred to as the "docuverse." Ilana Snyder explains that Nelson conceived of his "Xanadu" project as "a system in which the whole of recorded discourse—all the world's 'literature,' defined as 'an ongoing system of interconnecting documents' (Nelson, 1992a:2/9)—would be woven into one enormous matrix" (Snyder *Hypertext: The Electronic Labyrinth* 24). The goal that Bush and Nelson had hoped to achieve with their projects— namely for technology to enable the cataloging and connection of all human information—helps us understand why the aggravation of being unable to connect everything in a complex web of meaning is usually attributed to the limitations of print textuality. Landow makes this argument explicit when he explains that "[s]uch frustrations (with print) derive from repeated recognitions that effective argument required closing off connections and abandoning lines of investigation that hypertextuality would have made available" (*Hypertext 2.0* 97). However, computer-composition's promise of comprehensive completeness, never-ending webs of connection, and multiple perspectives wedged me back into the overwhelming position that I could, and hence should, achieve comprehensiveness.

Online databases and Internet enhanced research capabilities lure me into believing that I can access every piece of digitized scholarship throughout the world. Far from being a reassuring situation, thought, it can instead be overwhelming. I detect similar anxieties in colleagues, like Matthew G. Kirshenbaum, who explains that "It's a full-time job (and more) not only to keep pace with the inevitable changes in hardware and software, but also to stay current with the exponentially increasing body of theoretical and critical literature on everything cyber, virtual, hyper, and digital, and most importantly of all, to find ways in which to implement the technology so as to make a real difference in my classroom and in my scholarship" (*Chronicle of Higher Education*, July 25, 1997: B11; quoted in Hawisher and Selfe's "The Passions that Mark Us" xiv). In contrast, Landow celebrates this aspect of digitized research and writing because it holds out the promise of increased efficiency:

> The speed with which one can move between passages and points in sets of texts changes both the way we read and the way we write, just as the high-speed number-crunching computing changed various scientific fields by making possible investigations that before had required too much time or risk. One change comes from this ability to move with equal facility to points within a text and to those outside it. (*Hypertext 2.0* 82)

The promise of databases, which now make possible "investigations that before had required too much time or risk," taunts me into imagining that I can locate every journal article, book, publication, or listserv discussion, and then read, understand, and incorporate it all into my project. The promise of interconnectivity and searchable databases entices me into a dream that I can find everything, read everything, understand

and incorporate everything; it is a dream that all modes of information and scholarship are "at my fingertips." However, consider that a search in the *MLA Bibliography* (1991-2002) for the keyword "subjectivity" turned up 2,099 hits and a similar search in the non-academic search engine *Google* turned up 171,000 hits. A general search in the academic-friendly *AltaVista* with the term "subjectivity" returned an astronomical 64,842 results, a search with the terms "composition" and "subjectivity" returned a more modest 5,272 results, and an advanced search with the terms "composition," "rhetoric," and "subjectivity" returned a comparatively reasonable 1,276 results. Hoping that a more discipline-specific database might return even more reasonable results, I turned next to ERIC, a database containing journal articles and reports on education. A search with the keyword "subjectivity" returned 533 results and a more specific search with the keywords "subjectivity" and "composition" returned a decidedly more manageable 64 results. In each of these cases, many of the returned results were unrelated to my intended topic of research, and so the time-intensive act of sorting through the results and culling out useful entries was still necessary. These examples illustrate the expanse of information that technology vows we have at our finger-tips, to use for our benefit and to break out of modernist ways of knowing and writing. Yet how could I possibly accept the postmodern promise of so much available information without then calling upon modernist ways of dealing with this astronomical amount of information?

Taking my specialized area of research of computer-composition as an example, there are several online clearinghouses of scholarship and pedagogy which claim to strive for comprehensiveness. Two recently introduced sites—*Rhetcomp.com* and *Kairosnews: A News Site and Online Community for Discussing Rhetoric, Technology and*

Pedagogy—promise to provide exhaustive and up-to-date coverage on all topics related to rhetoric and composition. *Rhetcomp.com* boasts that it is a portal to relevant sites and information in the field of rhetoric and composition, and it allows one to search based on a variety of categories, including calls for papers, fields of study, journals, listserves, MOOs/OWLs, organizations, people, portals, programs, and terms of research. *Kairosnews* describes itself using an analogy of the general store, where people used to gather daily to share both personal and worldwide news. Charles Lowe, the co-editor of the site, explains that "[i]n today's electronic frontier, a similar need exists, an Internet nexus for members of the teaching with technology community to share the news." News is collected based on the open journalism model used by Internet Technology sites like *Slashdot*, so that instead of sending calls for papers or book reviews to individual listservs, one can behave like a journalist and submit the information at *Kairosnews*. Far from simply being a list of news headlines, this site also provides forums and chatrooms for discussing this information, as well as portal pages to conferences, projects in progress, calls for paper, and major voices working in the field.

Landow makes a liberatory declaration about how the amount of material available through Internet technologies is altering the learning experience of students. Yet he does not acknowledge that this problematic situation may further mire students into modernist ways of thinking and coping with information:

> For students hypertext promises new, increasingly reader-centered encounters with text. In the first place, experiencing a text as part of a network of navigable relations provides a means of gaining quick and easy access to a far wider range of background and contextual materials than has ever been possible with

> conventional educational technology. Students in schools with adequate libraries have always had the materials available, but availability and accessibility are not the same thing. (*Hypertext 2.0* 225)

Interconnectivity and searchable technologies make available library databases across the world: online electronic journals which seem to be proliferating almost every day; archived listserv discussions from computer-composition practitioners and professionals; archived syllabi, writing resources and bibliographies; and lists of articles on teaching with multimedia. While the experience of being unable to read everything is certainly common among students, it seems that the amount of information, scholarship, and research made available through the promise of interconnectivity and searchable databases is almost incapacitating. Again it seems that students are enticed with a postmodern-type of promise that they now have "a far wider range of background and contextual materials [available to them] than has ever been possible with conventional educational technology," but they may very well have to rely on modernist ways of organizing this information in order to deal with its volume.

Endless Revision and Fragmentation

Intimately related to the matter of the proliferation of meaning and our hopes for technology to connect all knowledge is the idea that word processors permit us to edit and revise our writing endlessly, leaving us with absolutely no excuses for awkward phrasing, unclear paragraph organization, weak explanations, or my personal favorite, split infinitives. Jeannette A. Woodward implies that computer technology makes such textual flaws a thing of the past: "The introduction of the computer into the writing

process is an exciting development. It can free you from the more tedious aspects of a formal writing project and allow you to expend your efforts on developing insightful ideas and expressing them in the most precise and compelling language" (*Writing Research Papers: Investigating Resources in Cyberspace* xv). What all these supposed benefits of writing with word processors sometimes amounts to is the potential of spiraling writers into a never-ending purgatory of revision and rewriting in their search for "insightful ideas." However, taking my experiences writing this dissertation as an example, if I ever intend to complete it, I must resist the temptation to revise and rework endlessly in an inexhaustible search for new ideas. In order to complete my project, I must reject technology's postmodern lure of ongoing revision and embrace more of a modernist stance.

Another implication of the temptation of endless revision and endless development of insightful ideas is that I can juggle multiple versions of my dissertation chapters. And the different drafts have subtle differences in argument that seem to carry immense differences in meaning. For example, is my argument about how best to teach writing in computer-environments, or is it about how best to approach student subjectivity? One version focused on how computer composition carries echoes of traditional composition rhetorics and pedagogies which reinscribe modernist student subjects; a second version focuses on how computer composition continues a much older trend of disciplining docile student subjects; a third version is organized around rhetorical moves; and yet a fourth version is organized around different forms of computer-mediated communication and writing. Of course, graduate students have always worked with multiple versions and have always been required to select, at some point, what

appears to be the best option and follow it through to completion. The more important point that can be derived out of this scenario is that, once again, the popular narrative of computer technology tempts me with the postmodern idea that I do not have to select one strict perspective from which to view my topic and that I can work with multiple versions. A related manifestation of the promise of word processors is that I can efficiently and effectively put everything into categories (primary and secondary sources; books *I think with* versus books I *think about*; arguments; chapters; ideas). Yet this promise proved misleading, because the very act of categorizing my evidence into ever more finely-tuned categories only created meaningless fragments.

Enticed by the promise of hyper-organization and hyper-categorization, what I had meant to argue is that the rhetorics of fear and loathing and the rhetorics of promise and fertility are dispersed unevenly over a wide range of cultural manifestations. But in my zeal to take advantage of the promise of technology to categorize efficiently and effectively my ideas, I often undid my own arguments and sabotaged my own efforts by the extreme way I was fragmenting my information. I was also attracted to the possibility of saving, organizing, and accessing all of the fragments of writing I had ever produced in my graduate program: notes from seminar discussions, old course papers and their various versions, conference papers, notes taken on sessions attended at conferences, notes from comprehensive exams, peers' notes from comprehensive exam reading groups, comprehensive exams themselves, different drafts of my comprehensive exams, and even fleeting ideas jotted down on sticky notes. I was encouraged in this attraction by the cyborg promise of technology that fragments can be put together to create, in the end, a better whole. The promise that we can now write, or want to write, in fragments is

best described by Johndan Johnson-Eilola: "Composition theory and pedagogy must overcome a reliance on the idea of writing as production and look instead at ways for considering the values inherent in connection between texts and fragments. We can begin to see some of the cultural tendencies toward connection rather than production in information systems such as the World Wide Web" (22). This call to focus on the relationship between textual fragments seems to suggest the downfall of the traditional essay, thesis statement papers, and research papers, which ask students to brainstorm "original" ideas and then write their papers from scratch, essentially alone, even when so-called peer-response sessions are involved. But the contradiction this amounts to is that postmodern pieces and fragments can be and should be molded into a modern whole, and in the end the Western educational system still prizes more traditional ways of knowing, organizing information, and writing. What all these supposed benefits of writing with word processors sometimes amounts to is the potential of spiraling writers into a never-ending purgatory of revision, rewriting, and reworking of fragments. However, in the end, if I am going to complete my dissertation, I have to resist these temptations and instead select one perspective and one version with which to work: in other words, to complete my dissertation, I must reject the promises of computer technology and embrace a modernist stance.

While computer-composition scholarship may tempt us with postmodern promises that computer technology can alter the traditional rhetoric of the student as subject and dislocate traditional authorial and textual expectations, it often still gets tethered with more traditional promises because we are still very much entrenched in a modern worldview. For example, while writing in computer-mediated environments is

supposed to free authors from the traditional expectations of comprehensiveness, originality, or authority, in the end, technology also paradoxically reinforces these traditional expectations as well. These problematics— which are isolated in the above analysis and which amount to a return to the construction of the traditional student subject—also plague many of the contemporary theories of the subject in composition.

* * *

The rhetoric of the student subject emerging out of composition studies is a slippery issue that has been approached in a variety of ways. And any attempt to construct a cohesive review of past scholarly treatment of this issue is complicated by debates over individuality and community, philosophical meditations on the relationship between self and subject, as well as obligatory renunciations of the ever-entrenched Enlightenment division between body and mind. It striking that this scholarship does not use the exact same terms in the exact same ways, and hence never ends up making the exact same argument. For example, there are terminology complications, such as what constitutes the "mind" and the "body," whether "self" and "subject" refer to the same concept, and if so do the terms really refer to distinct and identifiable entities. There is debate over whether or not a "self" or a "subject" can really exert "agency," and then there is debate over the concept of "agency" itself. There are different perspectives on how different writing or discourse practices affect student subjectivity. And there are disagreements over how and in what ways the student subject should be "freed": the idea of "freeing" the subject is being used in many different ways and to mean several

different things. Should the subject be freed to be whatever it wants? To morph into different identities on the Internet? Or should it be freed from oppressive social and economic forces? Or perhaps freed from traditional composition pedagogy?

While practically all composition scholarship in some way or another grapples with the issue of the student-as-subject—to the extent that any piece of scholarship could be examined in order to determine how the student is conceived, represented, or treated—some compositionists have dealt with this issue as their primary concern. As the review of representative examples discussed below shows, what each of these scholars have in common is the struggle to reconcile a rhetoric of the subject as totally free and a rhetoric of the subject as totally socially and/or linguistically constructed. What is important to note is that each of these compositionists assumes that a rhetoric of the student as subject *must exist*; they each work from the assumption that while the current rhetoric may be insufficient or problematic, another rhetoric must be developed to take its place. The option that the rhetoric of the student as subject must be muted or removed from our scholarship and, by extension, our teaching practices is not even considered. Despite their occasional use of different terminology or their different conclusions in the agency debate, all of the scholars assume that the subject is being controlled in some way. And despite the fact that they arrive at different conclusions for how to "free" the student subject, they each nevertheless reveal their own obsession with the student subject by prescribing new types of discipline.

Marguerite H. Helmers's *Writing Students: Composition Testimonials and Representations of Students* (1994) criticizes written practitioner lore for relying on the genre of testimonials because they are replete with tropes highlighting "the stupid,

beastlike, and childish aspects of college writers" (1). Helmers maintains that these representations perpetuate unequal power dynamics between student and teacher, essentially casting students as deviant and lacking others. Such representations "remain stable enough to suggest that power relationships between students and teachers can be reversed neither by a change in epistemology (current traditional to expressivist) nor by an alteration of *ethos* (authoritarian to student-centered). In the final analysis, it would appear that composition must negotiate its own academic trouble before its discourse may reflect a change in attitude toward students" (149). In other words, composition has become associated with a feminine powerlessness: "Compositionists are the angels in the academic house, essential to the academic system, but not its most powerful resident. In the story of composition, we repeat our own tropes of lack, confessing that we are without the patriarchal authority or the cleanliness of intellectual respectability" (148). Helmers concludes that "practitioners and writers need to envision in new ways the relationships and underlying assumptions of the field to reverse hierarchies and replace familiar representations" (17). The primary limitation of Helmers's work is that it is still concerned primarily with developing alternative ways to represent the student subject and concludes that feminine representations of struggling students should be regarded as positive.

Other compositionists—such as David Bartholomae, Anthony Petrosky, Lester Faigley, John Clifford, Reed Way Dasenbrock, James Berlin, and, more recently, a group of scholars taking a cultural studies perspective—have attempted to complicate the notion of the subject in their work by appealing to social constructionist or poststructuralist ideas. Bartholomae and Petrosky's *Facts, Artifacts and Counterfacts: Theory and*

Method for a Reading and Writing Course (1986) presents a college course based on the premise that students must learn about how to produce academically specific textual performances in order to be successful in college. By arguing that students create specific textual performances when they read and write, they confront explicitly the problem of the authentic and free student subject in composition:

> The paradox of imitative originality or of captive self-possession can be resolved in the image of the reader or writer at work that is present in an artifact, a textual performance . . . . What we are offering them is not an affirmation of a person, free and self-created, but an image of a person who is made possible through her work, work that takes place both within and against the languages that surround and define her. Or, as Said argues . . . "To begin to write, therefore, is to work a set of instruments, to invent a field of play for them, to enable performance." (40)

Their idea of "an artifact, a textual performance" created "both within and against the languages that surround and define" a student implies that since multiple textual performances exist, so do multiple subject positions. Such a proposition can be viewed as a precursor to much contemporary computer-composition scholarship that hinges on notions of multiple and shifting subjectivity. While Bartholomae and Petrosky attempt to complicate the subject with the notion of textual performances, they ultimately reinforce a traditional singular subject throughout the design and implementation of their course, with its focus on academic discourse and its failure to consider wider ranges of rhetorical elements in a wider range of discourse events. Their insistence on dealing only with academic discourse indicates the extent to which their course aims to interpellate students into the narrow subjectivity of academia, and provides us with an example of how

composition tends to recreate students into the mirror image of their instructors as well.

In *Fragments of Rationality: Postmodernity and the Subject of Composition* (1992), Lester Faigley uses theories of postmodernity to examine the field of composition since the 1960s in general and the question of the subject in particular. Faigley confronts the problematics of the subject from a postmodernist stance, and his return to the subject as a site of morality and authenticity is representative of a great deal of later scholarship as well:

> Postmodern theory decisively rejects the primacy of consciousness and instead has consciousness originating in language, thus arguing that the subject is an effect rather than a cause of discourse. Because the subject is the locus of overlapping and competing discourses, it is a temporary stitching together of a series of often contradictory subject positions. In other words, what a person does, thinks, says, and writes cannot be interpreted unambiguously because any human action does not rise out of a unified consciousness but rather from a momentary identity that is always multiple and in some respects incoherent. If consciousness is not fully present to one's own self, then it cannot be made transparent to another. (9)

Faigley represses the sense of the subject as complete and autonomous in chapters 1-7, and with the aid of postmodern theory constructs the subject as a site of multiple and contradictory identities. He also usefully points out that discussions about student subjectivities are often confusing because two related but different notions of the "individual" are often conflated:

> the first notion of the individual is the subject of high modernism: a coherent

> consciousness capable of knowing oneself and the world. . . . the world is not less fragmented and transitory than in descriptions of the postmodern condition, but the individual is granted the possibility of being able to critique that social formation from a distanced viewpoint and to discover a potential course of human emancipation. The second notion of the individual is the postmodern "free" individual of consumer capitalism: one who can change identities at will because identities are acquired by what one consumes. (16-17)

While Faigley argues for a postmodern subject who can switch identities freely, he concludes with an awkward return to the complete and singular subject as the site of authenticity. In the final chapter, "The Ethical Subject" (the title of which is telling in and of itself), Faigley withdraws from his postmodern construction of the subject and returns to the autonomous subject as the site of authentic and good writing. He concludes that "the rejection of the individual-versus-community dichotomy for conceiving the subject and the recognition of heterogeneity and unassimilated otherness establish ethics as the central concern for postmodern subjectivity" (24). Although Faigley claims to reject the individual-versus-community dichotomy, his simultaneous entrenchment of ethics as the concern for subjectivity reinscribes the authentic subject/self as the site of value which will produce good writing if it turns inward. Faigley finally cannot resist the hegemonic lure to deploy a rhetoric of the subject, and he returns to the subject as the site of morality and authentic writing.

Both John Clifford and Reed Way Dasenbrock directly confront composition's constant battle between representing the subject as completely free or as completely socially/linguistically constructed, yet arrive at different, and at least from some

perspectives, inadequate, conclusions. Clifford's "The Subject in Discourse" (1991) criticizes current-traditional and expressivist rhetorical theories which construct singular, ethical subjects that are expected to turn inward to find "the truth," but ultimately ends up reinscribing just such a view himself. He explicitly questions the treatment of the subject in composition classrooms, stressing his concern that instruction often ignores social contexts and issues of race, class and gender:

> The subject position constructed for the student writer in this seemingly pluralist rhetoric leaves out resistance, excluding radical feminism, Marxism, and other committed political agendas. Masked as reasonable pragmatism, it seeks to ignore and therefore disparage dissent, discontinuity, and confrontational discourse. Our felt experiences, our various subjectivities, and our specific social situatedness as readers and writers is obviated under the guise of disinterestedness, as if race, class, and gender were messy accidents. (44)

While Clifford's discussion seems to be moving in the direction of arguing for situated authorship, his final concerns are only with acknowledging social and historical contexts and the overdetermined issues of race, class, and gender so that students can locate their "true" voices. His solution to the problem of the rhetoric of the student subject is to adjust composition pedagogy to fit students' "natural" urge to figure out "who they really are":

> Students want to become writers not because they have mastered syntax but because they are convinced they have something to say and, more important, somebody to say it to . . . they are propelled forward by the quest to clarify their identities, order their existence, and understand their values and the world's.

> Instructors can help students become inquisitive writers by avoiding rigid rules, constant evaluation, and an obsession with socializing students into the conventions of "normal" academic writing. (46)

Clifford also reinforces the view that the subject in writing is naturally on an internal search for the truth: "Those who know the pleasures and excitement of discovering and writing a truth not in concert with institutional norms are difficult to silence or mystify" (47). He ultimately turns to a liberal humanist view that the truth will be found when the subject follows its natural urge to turn inwards and express personal feelings.

Just as Clifford seeks a way to redefine the subject, Dasenbrock acknowledges composition's constant struggle to move beyond the Western dichotomies of inner/outer and subject/object and argues that turning to philosophy is one way out of this conundrum. He argues that while the field now seems aware of the complications, futility, and self-serving potential of concerning ourselves with students' senses of self, it still spends a great deal of effort worrying about "their identification with or alienation from society" (8). Dasenbrock further argues that the concept of an autonomous subject is oversimplified because "it ignores the networks of socialization in which our choices are made and by which they are conditioned" (5). While this work usefully identifies composition's self-serving potential of disciplining the subject, it is limited in its primarily theoretical recommendations and its failure to provide direction for future scholarship or practice.

While the work of compositionists taking a cultural studies perspective is informed by poststructuralist and postmodernist ideas about language and subjectivity, much of it fails to explicitly interrogate the implications of the various ideological and

hegemonic forces at play within the field. As a result, such scholarship still tends to talk in terms of empowering passive students through writing activities designed to "help" them find their "true culture" and hence their "true voices" (Harkin and Schilb 1991; France 1994; Faigley 1994; Fitts and France 1995). Further, such scholarship also tends to work from simplistic vulgar Marxist notions of ideology as a "false consciousness" which can be lifted from students with the help of a knowledgeable writing teacher. For example, two texts which converge composition and cultural studies—Karen Fitts and Alan France's *Left Margins: Cultural Studies and Composition Pedagogy* (1995) and France's *Composition as a Cultural Practice* (1994)—examine the intersection of these fields on a superficial level only. Each of the essays in *Left Margins* work from the assumption that teaching writing under the rubric of cultural studies necessarily involves teaching about culture, and teaching about culture necessarily means teaching about ideology. Another assumption all of these contributors seem to share is that all writing is a form of cultural production. In other words, to articulate culture through writing is to produce culture. Therefore, they all approach writing instruction from the perspective that the production of writing should not be separated from the contexts and ideologies that condition and shape it. The writing classroom is viewed as a site where students can be encouraged to become aware of the cultural conditions in which they are immersed. Once students become aware of these conditions, they can then develop a more sophisticated and critical understanding of culture and the role writing plays in reproducing and resisting cultural formations.

While it may seem like paying attention to the contexts and ideologies that shape writing and highlighting the effects of writing could be fruitful ways to question the

rhetoric of the student subject, most of the essays conclude with an awkward return to an at-risk subject in-need of redemption. Unfortunately, the essays most often conclude that understanding contexts and ideologies is important only because it will help students gain critical self-consciousness, which is required before they can engage in political demystification and social change. While these essays usefully gesture towards how linguistic struggles constitute the social realm, their major limitation is that they are based on a mechanistic reading of ideology which condescendingly conceives of students as in need of redemption from some type social oppression. While the term "hegemony" is mentioned at a few points, it is merely mentioned and these essays continue to work from a vulgar Marxist view of ideology as "mystification." For example, in "Contested Terms, Competing Practices: Language Education and Social Change," Mary Hines studies a literature class taught by Richard, "a Marxist instructor with strong feminist commitments" (231). Hines applauds Richard's pedagogical goal of leading students to reject "imaginary relations" of capitalism for "the real conditions of existence" (232). Likewise, Paul Gutjahr's "Constructing Art&Facts: The Art of Composition, the Facts of (Material) Culture" represents students as dupes of popular culture. He explains that "Like the police officers tracking Claude Rains in *The Invisible Man*, I strive to train my students in various techniques and strategies which will help them trace, identify, and ultimately capture the ideas which guide their lives" (70). Just as Hines supported Richard's efforts to lead students to the correct way of viewing the "real world," Gutjahr is certain his "training" will lead students to finally understand their lives.

The essay which perhaps comes closest to resisting assumptions of false consciousness on the part of students is Mas'ud Zavarzadeh's "The Pedagogy of Pleasure

2: The Me-in-Crisis." Zavarzadeh criticizes the "pedagogy of pleasure," which he argues attempts "to make the student a 'singular' well-rounded, free person" (224). He calls instead for a "pedagogy of critique," which would focus on collectivity, knowledge, critique, and social emancipation. But just as Zavarzadeh condemned the pedagogy of pleasure for concerning itself with the freedom of individuals, his pedagogy of critique concerns itself ultimately with the emancipation of individuals as well. While he rejects the concept of the free self and instead posits the self as "an imaginary identity produced by the dominant ideology," in the end he is preoccupied with freeing this imaginary identity. He explains that the pedagogy of critique will make students "aware" of ideology, it will lead them to recognize "the different ways social relations are organized in order to act on them," and its practice will lead students to experience "the pleasure of emancipation from established views and of participation in the construction of a new world free from class, gender, and race exploitation" (225). What is also striking about Hine's, Gutjahr's, and Zavarzadeh's essays are that they each repeatedly show dynamic teachers using a cultural studies/composition pedagogy to lead indifferent students to "empowerment" through a conversion to "correct vision." The teachers redeem students from their culturally conditioned passivity and show them how to be active interpreters and resisters of ideology. Again, this seems to be a result in part of the collection's uncritical and mechanistic view of ideology which is uninformed by complicated notions of hegemony and negotiation.

France's *Composition as a Cultural Practice* exhibits a similar tendency to oversimplify cultural criticism and the concept of ideology. France is concerned with how reading and writing instruction tends to immerse students in the language of

commodity production and consumption. Hence, students are unable to question the status quo, uneven distributions of power, and ideas of privatized conformity based on commodity satisfaction which are in line with the goals of the managerial class. France therefore argues that composition, as a cultural practice, can be taught in such a way as to question all of the previous mentioned social trends, thereby also encouraging students to question their identity formation in American cultural practices. He calls for instruction that challenges students with "the venerable practice of rhetoric as the basis for a liberating and humane education" (xx). In addition to the already popular self-expressivism and social constructionism, he wants to "clear the ground for a third rhetorical position from which writing might become an active means to transform the existing social inequities of commodity capitalism" (1-2). Here again we see the same limitations that pervaded the essays in *Left Margins*: students, who are automatically "duped" by the false ideology of capitalism, will be taught the "venerable practice of rhetoric" by all-knowing teachers and therefore will finally receive the "liberating and humane education" which will allow them to throw off their yoke of false consciousness. Rhetoric is offered up as a revered practice—indeed it is offered up as a type of savior-like transcendental signified—and the role of complex notions of ideology and hegemony in the deployment of signifying practices and subject formation is left unanalyzed. Instead, yet another version of the rhetoric of the student as subject who must in some way be redeemed from their intellectual stupor is deployed.

Some scholars have more recently recognized how the rhetoric of the student as subject has problematically pervaded the history of the discipline. In *The Resistant Writer* (1999), Charles Paine studies the nineteenth-century rhetoricians Edward T.

Channing and A. S. Hill and argues that their approach to writing instruction—which viewed composition as a countercultural force that could help students resist dangerous strains of rhetoric, very similar to the way people could resist dangerous viruses—fits a long standing pattern of rhetoricians attempting to save students from dangerous types of popular culture and communications. Like current-traditionalism which framed the subject as in need of bourgeois disciplining, Channing's and Hill's approach also framed the student subject as lacking something—the social rearing, the moral strength, or the intelligence—required in order to resist the dangerous rhetoric threatening to corrupt his or her "authentic" voice. Their idea of rhetorical of immunity "saw composition instruction as *countercultural*, as helping students 'resist' (again, as they might resist a cold or an infection) cultural domination" (xiv). Paine shows how Channing and Hill attempted to use rhetorical training to "*safeguard* students and citizens from a dangerous world of discourse, rather than trying to *activate* them as responsible, contributing citizens" (ix). Such training makes students themselves, and not their rhetorical acumen, the subject of the course. The student as subject is represented as passively in need of protection and safeguarding, rather than as actively participating in his or her own culture. They viewed composition as a countercultural force which could aid students in protecting their "authentic" voices from dominant discourses. Channing and Hill's move in the nineteenth century of representing students with "authentic" voices may have established a precedent for a trend in composition which can be seen in later expressivist theories of writing instruction. Significantly, this trend of viewing composition as inoculating students against dangerous rhetoric can still be detected in the field today and can help us understand similar contemporary metaphors about writing in computer-

mediated environments.

Initially Paine argues that we must question the idea that composition can, or should, instill a sense of "resistance" or a type of cultural "inoculation" in students. He claims that the metaphors of resistance and immunity are limiting because they position students as in danger of being subsumed by dominant culture, and he especially singles out contemporary cultural studies approaches to teaching composition as being particular guilty of this. In contrast, he praises composition studies for its unique "capacity for addressing students as individuals, and for helping them wrestle with the conflicts *they* bring with them to the classroom." Although Paine criticizes the health metaphors used by Channing and Hill, in the end he deploys them in his own argument as well: "Focusing on this sort of conflict may do little to 'inoculate' students against dangerous strains of discourse within their culture, but it can do much, I think, toward bringing them to a healthful understanding of the complexity and confusion of their culture as well as the complexity and confusion of their role in that culture" (xiv). While Paine initially resists arguing that composition studies can protect students from dangerous cultural discourses, he does claim that it can lead students to a "healthful understanding" of their individual culture. However, later in his argument Paine curiously falls into deploying the very same rhetoric of the student as subject:

> While we may think our students have merely conformed to the penetrations of commodity culture, we have to remember that those cultural beliefs, as far as our students are concerned, are *their* beliefs, and that our countercultural intrusions are the alien ones. To put this in terms of the inoculation/resistance metaphor, for our students, the beliefs of commodity culture are those of the healthy body, and

the teacher's countercultural beliefs are the immunogenic or pathogenic ones. And it seems likely that rather than really changing our students, we may merely be providing them with immunity to any countercultural arguments they will encounter after our class, leading, in other words, to the boomerang effect. (16)

By employing the same language and terms ("healthy body" and "immunogenic or pathogenic" beliefs) and ruminating over the same considerations as Channing and Hill in the late nineteenth century, Paine himself disseminates the rhetoric of the student as subject in a strikingly similar way. At the exact moment when Paine criticizes Channing's and Hill's rhetoric of immunity, he himself is swayed by the hegemony of writing about the history or contemporary manifestations of the discipline in the very same manner and by deploying the very same rhetoric.

* * *

This chapter began by offering my struggles with writing this dissertation as a practical example of how the dissemination of the rhetoric of the student as the subject of the course is infused throughout composition and computer-composition. Not only does it emerge in the research and scholarship, but it also inhabits the minds of instructors and students alike. Although some computer-composition scholarship may promise to alter certain long held beliefs about textuality and authorship (Landow; Vitanza; Snyder; Faigley; Stone; Turkle)—which essentially amounts to relinquishing our hold on the traditional and modern rhetoric of the student as subject—its promises ultimately play into and reinforce this traditional rhetoric. This contradiction emerges, in part, because

the various Internet technologies are employed in such a way so as to reinforce these traditional expectations as well. So, for example, online databases and Internet research engines make available unprecedented amounts of information, which allow Landow to celebrate that hypertext capabilities now make possible "investigations that before had required too much time or risk" (*Hypertext 2.0* 82). But the availability of such an astronomical amount of information only further mires students into modernist ways of thinking about and coping with information. The above scholarship review shows that composition as a field likewise grapples with similar contradictions. The next chapter of this dissertation will focus on a more specific manifestation of this contradiction and argue that the rhetorics of fear and loathing emerge in computer-composition to once again represent students as docile subjects in need of enlightenment in the modernist sense.

Chapter 3
The Rhetorics of Fear and Loathing

> Disenfranchised students, like expert learners, can use such (hypertext) tools to empower themselves in transforming knowledge to their own ends. (50)
>
> — Michael Joyce *Of Two Minds* (1995)

> Perhaps the primary reason to encourage such (hypertext) writing . . . lies in its potential for social change and personal empowerment. (70)
>
> — Donna LeCourt and Luann Barnes "Writing Multiplicity: Hypertext and Feminist Textual Politics" (1999)

> Hypertexts of the sort I am developing are excellent chances for textual producers to explore their internalized oppression. (37)
>
> — Laura L. Sullivan "Wired Women Writing: Towards a Feminist Theorization of Hypertext" (1991)

While the above statements could be mistaken as excerpts from a self-help book, they have, in fact, been culled from contemporary computer-composition scholarship. The primary concern of these writers seems to have curiously little or nothing to do with helping students become more effective writers; instead, these critics are more troubled with how students are becoming increasingly passive, vulnerable, and in danger of being consumed by evil forces in contemporary society. In these statements, scholars position themselves as the sages who will come to the aid of students, helping them use technology to break out of their intellectual or moral stupor so that they can acquire a more correct vision of themselves and their surroundings. Thus, students will be taught "to empower themselves," to facilitate "social change," or "to explore their internalized

oppression." These claims betray an urge to improve students morally or to manipulate them into advocates for social change, with scholars adopting the language of liberatory pedagogy to suggest that—by using newer computing technologies—students will arrive at some kind of proper social understanding and only then be capable of surviving in this more complicated world.

The above excerpts are representative examples of how computer-composition becomes overlaid with the rhetoric of fear that the world has entered a postmodern era and subsequently become a more dangerous place for students, and the rhetoric of loathing the failure of students to comprehend properly and negotiate this more complex society. For computer-composition, the move online often becomes the contradictory space of self, where wholeness is promised but priority is still placed on the incongruous values of fragmentation and mystification. This strange merging of hypertext theory and composition leads to peculiar conclusions, where inhabiting online spaces leads students to gain social understanding in cyberspace, wholeness in fragmentation, critical consciousness in unconsciousness. Students are promised that if they go online and create multiple identities or compose disjointed hypertexts, magical transformations will take place: they will finally become whole and empowered, understand and break out of their oppression, and establish contact with their inner essences and their true selves. The primary problem with this enigmatic promise is that it emphasizes the supposed limited social understanding of students and focuses on their sense of self; it is concerned with using newer Internet technologies in order to discipline student thoughts, morals, and beliefs, and not with how to integrate technologies into the writing classroom in ways that will enhance composition pedagogy and increase student opportunities to create

situationally appropriate and audience specific texts, thereby assisting students in becoming more effective writers. The primary problem, then, with computer-composition's tendency to draw upon narratives of postmodern crisis and student failure to negotiate the resulting dangers is that it diverts attention away from discussing how newer technologies might be deployed in the service of improving student writing and writing instruction. This is not to say that cultural critiques of contemporary society are not valuable; rather, what this study is concerned with is how computer-composition's engagement of these critiques often leads the scholarship to create problematic representations of students as well as sometimes peculiar perspectives about the benefits of integrating newer technologies in the writing classroom.

This chapter analyzes contemporary computer-composition's deployment of the rhetorics of fear and loathing and identifies common rhetorical maneuvers in the way scholars construct the problem of a more perilous postmodern society and the lacking student who is laboring under a false vision of the world and its corresponding ideological systems. If computer-composition is going to study how computers can best assist students with improving their writing, the discipline would be better served by focusing on the ways in which newer technologies can enhance writing instruction (i.e., enhance collaboration, facilitate peer-response, explore writing in online environments) and provide students with opportunities to produce context-specific and audience-appropriate texts, rather than focusing on declarations of student lack and paradoxical promise. The rhetorics of fear and loathing have become so commonplace throughout computer-composition scholarship that it is easy to outline the broader strategies often employed:

(1) Fear that we are entering a postmodern epoch and/or that the world has become more complex and conflict-ridden. There are several "evil others" which make this world more dangerous:

a. popular culture / postmodern crisis

b. a generic "oppressive ideology"

c. capitalism

d. computer technology and discourses of technology

(2) A declaration of loathing over inadequate or failing students. Student lack can be constructed in a variety of ways, such as:

a. through an inability to decode the signs of cyberculture or postmodernity

b. through a failure to contain threats of cyber-contamination

c. through images of students as developmental, childish, or unable to think for themselves

d. through the negative example that students have to become mirror images of their instructors in order to survive in a technologically-enhanced environment

e. through images of students as prey to larger cultural forces

While these categories have been developed for the sake of clarification, it is important to remember that these rhetorical acts overlap, merge, and even contradict one another in their actual deployment. My intention for providing this brief outline is to offer an overview of how the rhetorics of fear and loathing come together to create powerful stories in computer-composition.

One of the more common ways the rhetoric of fear gains momentum is by constructing popular culture as a type of evil other from which students must be saved.

By framing popular culture as degenerative, infective, or something from which students must be redeemed by the graces of technology, the rhetoric of fear manages to tap into long-standing disciplinary anxieties about how students may be tricked into submission. This rhetoric often follows in the footsteps of earlier manifestations of fear in composition that popular culture had become too confusing for students to comprehend. James Berlin exemplifies this earlier pattern in *Rhetoric, Poetics, and Cultures* (1996):

> The aim of the course remains the same in all situations: to enable students to become active, critical agents of their experience rather than passive victims of cultural codes. The "tactics," to use Friere's term, are always open to change. The final purpose of the course is to encourage citizens who are actively literate, that is, critical agents of change who are socially and politically engaged—in this way realizing some of the highest democratic ideals. (104)

Berlin is concerned that culture has become over bureaucratized and commodified, leading to alienated subjects who are "passive victims of cultural codes" and who will require some type of liberatory pedagogy to become "critical agents of change." In *The Mouse That Roared: Disney and the End of Innocence* (1999), Henry Giroux also describes a similar sense of crisis over popular culture's glorification of consumption and reification:

> As commercial culture replaces public culture and as the language of the market becomes a substitute for the language of democracy, consumerism appears to be the only kind of citizenship being offered to children. Consumerism, corporatism, and technological progress become the central principles for constructing who we are and how we act . . . . The commercial spheres promoting such changes include

> television, radio, cinema, and newspapers. They and other media are engaged in a cultural pedagogy marked by a struggle over meaning, identity, and desire. Increasingly large corporations work to connect matters of meaning and desire to a commercial logic that constricts democratic identity and affirms the growing political and pedagogical force of culture "as crucial site and weapon of power." (24)

For Giroux, the world has become more complex and alien as traditional communities lose their sense of identity and as boundaries dissolve and merge. Real interaction between humans is replaced with the degraded sense of relationships between objects. Even the individual has lost his/her sense of being whole, autonomous, and complete, and is replaced by the decentered feelings of multiplicity and contradiction.

This sense of fear over the nefarious state of popular culture conveyed by Berlin and Giroux has also become pervasive in discussions of composition and cultural studies and gets recycled yet again in computer-composition within the realm of cyberspace. And the dissemination of this rhetoric extends to more recent dissertations as well, suggesting that it has permeated the discipline successfully. For example, Patricia Webb's dissertation "Computing Cultures: Information Technologies and Narratives of Self" (1998) mobilizes in one paragraph a variety of maneuvers from the rhetorics of fear and loathing:

> These ideas about the poststructural nature of writing are widely accepted and embraced by compositionists. Therefore, I am not trying to persuade readers that I am offering a revolutionary reading of writing practices; instead what I am trying to do is to offer a model for how to teach *others* this view of writing—others who

> are constantly barraged with the cultural production of the modernist self ("Reeboks let UBU. You're an individual," screams advertising) . . . . I am also arguing that in the shifting terrain we call the virtual age that the debate over who gets to shape the possibilities for subjectivities is currently up in the air. And I argue that we need to push students to explore and engage in alternate conceptions to the traditional capitalist line of reasoning—the Net is for business. It is a tool for marketing. It should be controlled by "Us" and used by "them." (156)

Students are framed as "others," as the intellectually inferior counterparts to the intellectually superior teachers who really know the truth about the deceit being perpetrated on them by popular culture. The level of fear over student naiveté reaches a type of frenzy with the claim that students are "scream(ed)" at by advertising, they "are constantly barraged with the cultural production of the modernist self." This rhetorical scheme seems to assume that students really do have a self or an identity they can access, but are prevented from determining this truth on their own because capitalistic popular culture interpellates them into modernist individuals.

The problem of modernist subjectivity is complicated for Webb by popular culture's insistence on poaching "the shifting terrain" of the virtual age and transforming it to its own ends. Her concern over whether cyberspace serves the dark-forces of capitalism or more liberating possibilities is not unlike the tension found in the movie *The Matrix* (Warner Brothers 1999). Here the characters live in a world that is "largely a phantasmagoria of passing shows and vicarious stimulations" (Hoggart 45), a world of human making at the second hand, a false reality perpetuated by the false consciousness of humans. Humans created artificial intelligence, an invention that led to a battle

between machines and humans, destroying the environment and rendering the earth a dark, deserted wasteland. Created by machines, the Matrix is a giant dream machine, a neural interactive simulation, used to pacify humans who are kept alive to be used as batteries, the power source of the Matrix. In a similar way, Webb regards popular culture and its attendant "traditional capitalist line of reasoning" as fashioning cyberspace into a space to pacify humans and perpetuate false consciousness. Popular culture tells us "the Net is for business, It is a tool for marketing," it is controlled by corporations ("Us") and dupes the unknowing masses ("them," students) into capitalistic individualism. In other words, popular culture threatens to undermine cyberspace—what might otherwise be a safe haven for students—by transforming it into the new capitalist altar at which students must bow down.

Having set up students as dupes, popular culture as bad, and technology as potentially liberating and dangerous, Webb has paved the way to tell her own technological-empowerment story. While students have until now been victims of the Matrix and passive consumers of popular culture, using technology can make them "agents in the shaping of stories" of self:

> Collaboration using Web technologies highlights not only that audiences are listening and that writing does count and is situated, contextual and dialogic; it also highlights that the "them" who have the technological capabilities to become writers of the story, rather than merely readers of the "Us" story. Telling the story of what it means to be a self on-line and in a world which is increasingly shaped by on-line perceptions . . . is a powerful position to be in. And we need to teach students how to use writing to become agents in the shaping of stories, rather than

passive consumers of them. (156-157)

Webb's concern over the danger of popular culture to students—and the ability of technology to save them from being duped—leads her to declare that she is not concerned with whether such interaction with technology makes students better writers. Instead, she is concerned with whether her students learned to resist contamination by dangerous dirty techno-culture:

> Did this project make them better writers? Are there before and after writings that quantitatively illustrate that students wrote better because they were introduced to web technologies? I would argue that this is not the right question to be asking; rather, I would ask, did my students use writing to question their assumptions about writing and did they extend this discussion outward, outside of the classroom? Yes, they did. Did they become participants in the discussions about technoliteracies? Yes. (159)

This passage betrays anxiety over whether students learned to participate in discussions questioning the potentially problematic and dangerous role of technology in their lives. While such conversations are valuable, the way this analysis is arranged, the language it deploys, and the fact that it fails to consider whether or not student writing improved, shows that its primary concern is teaching students to *break out* of their previously imposed postmodern ideological daze and protect themselves from the onslaught of encroaching techno-culture, a techno-culture that dictates how they can act and the identities they can construct. Students previously failed to look beyond the carefully sutured false reality of the Matrix and question their unexamined and oppressive beliefs about writing, technology, and popular culture; and they previously failed to question

their assumptions about technoliteracies and how they are capable of controlling their lives and identities. Instead of exploring the ways computer technologies can be used to enhance writing instruction and assist student in becoming more effective writers, Webb's analysis is geared toward using Internet technologies to discipline the student subject into recognizing and correcting his or her failure to understand the "true nature" of reality.

Both Webb's argument and the film *The Matrix* exemplify how popular culture, capitalism, and technology have always maintained a strong and yet uncomfortable relationship with one another. And this awkward relationship becomes a point of contention and contradiction for computer-compositionists. These scholars are in the difficult situation of combining Berlin's and Giroux's mistrust of capitalism and postmodern sensibilities with technology's promise of individual freedom in cyberspace and the opportunity "to be whatever you want to be" by manipulating the codes and images of postmodernity. The way computer-compositionists often come to square these contradictory impulses is by locating a space where technology is not a force to be feared entirely (like capitalism) and by highlighting how it can be reigned in and subdued.

While popular culture and capitalism often serve as an evil other in computer-composition, sometimes the actual entity of fear is something much more ambiguous. In these cases, the specter of fear manifests itself as a generic type of "oppressive ideology"—which acts as a kind of negative transcendental signified—that students are in danger of being consumed by and from which they must be rescued. Accordingly, this ideological force has made the world a more dangerous and complicated place for students to live in and understand. Laura Sullivan's "Wired Women Writing: Towards a

Feminist Theorization of Hypertext" offers a careful feminist theorization of hypertext in general as well as insightful discussions about the value of feminist activist autobiographical hypertexts in particular. However, the rhetorics of fear and loathing are also dispersed subtly throughout her discussion, a gesture that operates as leverage for the rhetoric of promise later in her article. One of her main arguments is that students are terrorized by dominant and oppressive ideologies, and she offers up hypertext as a way to bring about social transformation: "It is my hope that ultimately the production and consumption of these feminist hypertexts produces deep transformations, both personal and social" (51). This argument—that hypertext technology can facilitate deep "personal and social" transformations and hence protect students—is reliant on the assumption that there is something *from which* students must be rescued. Sullivan's article creates just such a something by repeating the phrases "ideological oppression" and "internalized oppression" repeatedly (37, 39,40, 41, 43). The rhetoric of fear generated through the repetitive references to generic "oppressive ideologies" sets the foundation for the narrative of crisis that students require protection and salvation.

Sullivan's work also makes the peculiar move of arguing that "real" events or conditions of existence can be "described and critiqued" finally and accurately by appealing to mystical forces. She explains that

> In the hypertexts the students and I created, freed from the conventions of formal academic writing that specify that we must produce an argument that proceeds through a series of reasoned points to a logical conclusion, we included mythical, mystical, poetic, and unconscious perspectives, which allow a more reflexive commentary on the *real* events described

and critiqued. (44)

This argument activates a number of binary oppositions—linear/hypertext, conscious/ unconscious, and linear reality/mystical cyberspace—where the later terms in each set of binaries represent a paradoxical movement to validate a more amorphous and fragmented place as the location of the real and the whole. A perplexing conclusion is drawn: by inhabiting online spaces and by incorporating "mythical, mystical, poetic, and unconscious perspectives," students will gain clarity in mysticism and critical consciousness in unconsciousness.

The ultimate effect is akin to Jean Baudriallard's simulacra, where the hyperreal becomes the real, the whole, the location of desire. Sullivan continues:

> The experiences of my students and me in making these hypertexts involve dynamics which are often not entirely explainable. For the unconscious dimension of the hypertext is not only a counter to the patriarchal privileging of rationality, it is also an acknowledgment of the power of mystical forces. When the students and I beckon the unconscious, the dreams come. And, there is often an uncanny aspect to these dreams. During the making of my first hypertext, I began to have dreams in hypertext. In these dreams, I was disembodied, and I would click on the screen to get to the next part of the dream. (44)

The hyperreal of hypertext is "not entirely explainable," counters rationality, and acknowledges mystical forces. But within her rhetorical scheme, hypertext and cyberspace dreams are a source of wholeness and salvation, and work to contain threats of nightmares and ideological oppression.

Given the anxiety created by the interdependence between capitalism and

technology, it is not surprising that the discipline also disseminates the rhetoric of fear by tapping into contemporary angst about how students may be deceived into submission by capitalism as an evil other (from which students can be rescued by technology). Sullivan also deploys the rhetoric of fear as a type of shorthand to quickly yet decisively represent students as in danger of being overwhelmed by capitalistic ideologies: "In the postmodern social climate in which we live, late capitalism thrives on cynicism and leaves us in a quagmire of futility" (49). Dominant culture and mass media are also imbricated as dangerous forces within capitalism: "Multiple voices and perspectives in the hypertexts demonstrate powerfully the contradiction of living under the regime of contemporary capitalism. Deconstructions of subjects, ourselves and others, are situated within deconstructions of texts of the dominant culture, including those texts produced by the mass media" (51). In this image students are figured as mired down and crushed by the mighty regimes of capitalism that force them into linear thinking. Technology, accompanied by the aid of the instructor, can pull students from the melee. The images invoked are cliches in our popular culture landscape. They are like the moments in Pink Floyd's *The Wall* when students, bent on suicide, march in line off a plank into the homogenizing meat-grinder of capitalism, or in *The Dead Poet's Society*, when students are enticed to emerge from the shackles of rationality and recite poetry from atop their desks. The problem with Sullivan's argument is that it is in the mystical world where students really find themselves, where they retreat from the meat-grinder and sing from their desks, and everything else on the opposite side of the binary is considered perilous. What scares her is becoming mired in linearity and being denied access to free-floating

deconstruction.

Having framed students as dupes, capitalism and mass media as regime-like, and hypertext as liberating, Sullivan can now tell her own technologically-enhanced tale of redemption. While students have up until now been passive consumers of culture and mass media, creating hypertexts can help them break free from the temporal bonds of the Matrix-like regime of capitalism: "Hypertext allows us to transcend this futility, for it not only gives us the ability to arrange information in novel ways spatially, it also encourages the manipulation of temporality, especially through an interweaving of the past, present, and future" (49-50). Her rhetoric retreats into a type of cyber-romanticism, where oppression can be transcended and truth can be located if we could only manage to free ourselves from the bonds of temporality.

Because computer-compositionists sometimes find themselves in a struggle to control the terror of technology, another way the rhetoric of fear emerges is by constructing computer technology itself as an evil other which must be contained. Gail Hawisher and Cynthia Selfe are two prolific scholars at the forefront of computer-composition scholarship and research: for many years now they have spoken out about not only the potential pedagogical benefits of technology, but also the dangers of passively incorporating technology into our classrooms and simply reproducing existing social inequities. However, at times Hawisher and Selfe also reproduce the existing assumptions about student lack of vision and reenact the rhetorics of fear and loathing; and the fact that even these leading scholars at times appeal to these rhetorics highlights their pervasive and seductive nature. It is understandable that the title of their 1997

textbook—*Literacy, Technology, and Society: Confronting the Issues*—suggests that it will focus on how students must confront certain issues to be saved from ideological domination, since issue-dominated readers often dominate sales. Yet the title also insinuates that students are in danger of being crushed by their culture, and in this case it is technological culture that is threatening their existence. Aesthetically, even the book's cover subtly contributes to the idea that technology is an evil entity which is threatening to conquer the world and therefore must be harnessed back into control. The textbook's cover, which showcases a centered globe of the earth encased within a television set, with yellow, orange, and red energy rays emanating outwards, conveys a sense of fear that the earth will soon be subsumed by digital forces.

The title of Hawisher and Selfe's textbook also indicates that it will take a type of cultural studies approach to education and society. It implies that by "confronting" a wide array of contemporary issues surrounding education, technology, and society, students will learn how to resist ideological control. Accordingly, the textbook is divided into five different content areas that have been identified as important for students to confront, each providing a variety of reading selections. For the purposes of this study, what is striking about Hawisher and Selfe's introduction to each of these five sections is the language they deploy. At times, the language used in these introductions is almost deterministic about how student thoughts, their world, and really their very freedom is being infiltrated and threatened by various forms of technology. Such alarming language suggests that students had better come to see the truth and confront how computer technology is encroaching on their lives, legal system, popular culture, and

educational institutions so that they can resist or subvert it. For example, the introduction to the section on "Ethics, Law, and Technology" explains that "Indeed, the explosion of popular computer use in the last decade and the rapid expansion of the Internet have created a situation in which humans *must* re-think almost everything that they know about communicating with one another. It is an exciting and terrifying project to undertake" (259). Students are not merely encouraged, but rather are ordered that they "*must*" reanalyze almost everything they think they know about communications in the twenty-first century. Such an endeavor, they are warned, is "terrifying" but nonetheless necessary. This section seems to betray a type of fear over the chaos of cyberspace, to the extent that new laws are needed that will "govern information, authorship, and ownership in electronic environments" (269). This claim also seems to rely on the assumption that the concepts and practices of original authorship and capitalistic ownership will remain unaltered; what must be altered instead are the laws. This presumption perhaps also hints at an unconscious desire to maintain the status quo in the face of adversarial technological forces.

The rhetoric of computer technology itself as an evil other also makes brief appearances in computer-composition scholarship, emerging just long enough to escalate the level of fear and thereby making whatever solution the article is proposing that much more attractive. For example, Vicki Tolar Burton's and Scott Chadwick's "Investigating the Practices of Student Researchers: Patterns of Use and Criteria for Use of Internet and Library Sources" (2000) makes the reasonable argument that it is important for students to learn how to locate, evaluate, and cite electronic sources. It seems a bit odd, therefore,

when the rhetoric of fear is deployed several times at the very end of their article. Within the last two pages, Burton and Chadwick throw an array of alarming warnings at their reader. We are assured that this is the appropriate time to talk with students "about 'safe text'" (324). By repeating associations of the Internet and digital resources with promiscuity and sexually transmitted diseases—they state that "The parallel with safe sex not only works metaphorically, but might also help students remember important questions to ask of their sources" (325)—the rhetoric of fear about potentially dangerous technology is engaged. Much like Charles Paine's argument that rhetoricians Edward T. Channing and A. S. Hill viewed composition as a countercultural force that could help students resist dangerous types of popular culture and communications, Burton and Chadwick conclude that by critically evaluating Internet resources, students will avoid contamination and construct "healthy arguments, healthy writing, and healthy academic lives" (326). They betray an almost obsessive-like compulsion over containing the threat of technology, suggesting that student should ask of all Internet sources, "How will using this source affect the health of my argument?" (325). Furthermore, it is the responsibility of faculty to teach students how to conduct research in such a way so as to avoid "the one-night-stand research paper," (325) adding a sense of sexually charged desire to a relationship that already frames the teacher as in control of the student. While the authors acknowledge their use of these sexual disease metaphors, and while it is important to teach students to critically analyze sources, these metaphors nevertheless functions as yet another device within the rhetoric of fear. Computer technology is forever changing academic standards and procedures, it is bringing in new "partners," which may in turn

expose students to new and dangerous diseases and necessitates this new level of cautionary fear. In the end, Burton and Chadwick disseminate a rhetoric of fear very similar to that of Channing and Hill. While the former used rhetorical training and the later used the analysis of Internet sources, both attempt to "*safeguard* students and citizens from a dangerous world of discourse, rather than trying to *activate* them as responsible, contributing citizens" (Paine ix). Such training shortsightedly makes students themselves, and not their rhetorical acumen, the subject of the course.

The rhetoric of fear that students are in danger of being consumed or destroyed by various social and cultural forces contributes to the rhetoric of loathing over the student's incompetence to comprehend and resist these same dangerous forces. And in turn, each of the computer-composition works discussed above, by virtue of their disseminating some type of rhetoric of fear, construct student lack in a particular way. For example, fear over the dangerous influences of popular culture contructs student lack as an inability to decode the signs of cyberculture or postmodernity, and fear over the ways technology is changing how research is conducted contructs student lack as a failure to contain the threats of techno-contamination. Regardless of the specific threat or evil other which is terrorizing students, the resulting rhetorical act of constructing some type of student failure or deficient remains the same. And just as computer-composition carried echos of the fear expressed earlier by James Berlin and Henry Giroux, computer-composition also carries echos of the loathing expressed earlier by compositionists as well. As noted earlier, Marguerite H. Helmers's *Writing Students: Composition Testimonials and Representations of Students* (1994) recognizes this pattern of loathing student limitation

and critiques practitioner lore for relying on the genre of testimonials that represent students as unintelligent or childish. For example, Marilyn Cooper has recently argued that students "are confused and often frightened by the variety of cultural values they encounter; and they feel helpless to participate in any meaningful way in decisions being made about social and political issues that affect them" ("Marilyn Cooper's CCCC Statement"). And James Berlin fears that students will "become instruments of the language of others" *(Rhetorics, Poetics, and Cultures* 101). Berlin's word choice constantly reminds us of the perilous position of students. They are "reluctant," "passive receivers," "passive victims," who, following the standard postmodern cant, live in a "decentered world, a realm of fragmentation and incoherence, without nucleus or foundation for experiences . . . . The world of fast foods, fast cars, and fast fads" (46-47).

While Helmers concludes that representations of student lack are so well ingrained in the field that they cannot be disrupted by either a shift in epistemology or an alteration of ethos, it appears that a shift to computer-contexts alone is often inadequate to bring about such a disruption as well. Michael Joyce's *Of Two Minds: Hypertext Pedagogy and Poetics* (1995) follows the testimonial genre Helmers criticized for representing students as child-like, lacking, and in need of discipline. In the by now foundationally popular "Siren Shapes: Exploratory and Constructive Hypertexts," Joyce defines the qualities of these two different types of hypertexts and their respective pedagogical "perils" and "promises" (40). The majority of this chapter explores characteristics of exploratory and constructive hypertext, and when Joyce turns to discussing actual student experiences, he makes the interesting move of focusing

primarily on "developmental students." In contrast to "the technical or creative writing students" he had also worked with, these "developmental students make minimal use of the complex linking and on-screen hypertext capabilities of our program" (50). He states that his decision to focus on one member of this group in particular is in accordance with the genre of "that most unstable currency, the teaching anecdote" (50). His explanation for doing so is that, by focusing on a lacking student, he will more convincingly prove the revolutionary power of hypertext to free *all types* of students from their personal limitations:

> By doing so, I hope to suggest that the challenge of hypertext to traditional structures can take on commonplace dimensions and that disenfranchised students, like expert learners, can use such tools to empower themselves in transforming knowledge to their own ends. (50)

For the purposes of this study, what it telling about Joyce's teaching anecdote is that it uses, just as Helmers had warned us against, tropes that highlight "the stupid . . . and childish aspects of college writers" (1). He clearly explains earlier in the article that he had worked with more advanced technical or creative writing students, yet he makes the decision—perhaps because this approach more forcefully proves his point—to focus on developmental students. By focusing on the representation of a deficient student, Joyce invokes the rhetoric of loathing: there is a distinct sense of lamenting how "disenfranchised" students must be saved from their lack of insight, their inability to transform "knowledge to their own ends," or, in other words, their inability to even think for themselves. It is as if in an effort to more powerfully argue for the value and promise

of hypertext, the image of a failing student (delivered in the form of the teaching anecdote) is intentionally constructed.

This decision to focus on lacking students in order to prove more powerfully the value of hypertext can be found in other computer-composition scholarship as well. For example, in *Hypertext 2.0*, George Landow goes to great lengths to contrast novice students with experts. In the chapter "Reconfiguring Literary Education," Landow's overarching argument is that hypertext models scholarly and scientific reading and writing strategies (225-228). However, when explicitly discussing how hypertext affects students, he repeatedly constructs an image of a novice student struggling against academia. These novice students "continually encounter problems created by necessary academic specialization" (225) and desire to experience "the way an expert works" (226). Furthermore, "even novice students . . . have the opportunity of following individual topics in more depth" (227). Landow, like Joyce, constructs an image of a failing student (in this case a novice student) who can be redeemed from ignorance by technology, thus making the promise of hypertext that much more striking.

Another way student lack is often constructed in computer-composition scholarship is through the negative example that students will have to become mirror images of their teachers in order to survive in this more technologically-sophisticated environment. Barbara Blakely Duffelmeyer's "Critical Computer Literacy: Computers in First-Year Composition as Topic and Environment" (2000) is concerned with the extent to which students are capable of critiquing and resisting popular cultural narratives which portray technology as inherently beneficial or inherently evil. Duffelmeyer's work

usefully draws attention to the fact that U.S. society disseminates conflicting narratives about the value of technology in its culture, which in turn may affect how students view and use computer technology in their everyday lives and in their academic careers. However, the rhetoric of loathing seeps into Duffelmeyer's discussion, and in this particular instance acts as a way to signify a desire to recreate lacking students—who arrive in their freshman composition course completely void of critical computer literacy—into the much more attractive image of the informed and critically resistant teacher: "if students don't concomitantly acquire critical computer literacy, they will not be able to affect the conditions of their lives, for it is critical computer literacy that allows us to comprehend our relationship with computer technology and its uses, possibilities, and meanings" (290). This sentence subtly shifts activity away from "students" and onto "us," that is, onto teachers who are ideologically aware and already possess critical computer literacy. Unless students become like "us," like teachers, students "will not be able to affect the conditions of their lives." This is a sweeping claim: teachers have the knowledge to "comprehend" their relationship with technology and its uses, but students do not. Given that many students have grown up much more immersed in and aware of how to use technologies to their own ends than teachers, such a claim carries a ring of condescension. Duffelmeyer concludes this paragraph by again mixing references to students and teachers, while the context clearly marks the students as the ones who will pay most dearly for their lack of critical consciousness: "Without critical computer literacy, we may find it difficult to be productive, active subjects in this new environment where we function as teachers and students" (290). Since she has previously labeled

teachers as possessing this critical literacy, and since the entire article is about identifying student acquiescence to wrong ideas about computer technology, this concluding sentence serves as another expression of loathing over student failure. Duffelmeyer reinforces the concept of lack by highlighting how student failure to gain critical computer literacy will prevent them being "productive" and "active." In contrast to Burton and Chadwick, who talked in metaphors of sexual disease and framed student lack as an inability to have "safe text," Duffelmeyer frames student lack as a failure to be productive and active.

Computer-composition scholarship also tends to emphasize the vulnerability of students when they are framed as prey to larger cultural forces. As noted earlier in this chapter, such negative representations of students seem to follow the trend found in earlier composition scholarship that popular culture had become too complex for students to comprehend (Berlin; Giroux). Several pieces of scholarship also critiqued earlier in this chapter—such as Webb's "Computer Cultures," Sullivan's "Wired Women Writing," and Hawisher and Selfe's "Ethics, Law, and Technology,"—follow this trend as well. While Webb is concerned with advertising, Sullivan with generic types of dominant and oppressive ideologies, and Hawisher and Selfe with the changing nature of copyright in cyberspace, the arguments in each of these pieces of scholarship is grounded on negative representations of students as vulnerable to larger cultural forces.

Duffelmeyer also pursues this pattern when she reworks Christina Haas's claim to argue that students are in peril of accepting dangerous cultural assumptions about technology unless they are taught to both study and use digital technology: "Without such an endeavor, Haas (1996) asserted that literacy teachers (and I am adding their

students) are prey to disabling cultural assumptions (i.e., comfortable thoughts) about technology" (291). Not only do students lack essential intellectual tools to understand the world surrounding them, but they are "prey" as well, in danger of being destroyed by their sophomoric thoughts. Duffelmeyer continues to say that "first-year composition can and should be the site where students begin to develop the requisite cognitive skills to participate not only in the complexity of the academic community but also in a 'critique of ideology and culture, of the hidden forces of institutional and social structures that shape thought and give meaning to our lives' (Greene, 1990, p. 160)" (291). It is as if Duffelmeyer is suggesting that before entering college as freshmen, student lack is so extreme that they live in a cocoon of intellectual darkness, without the most rudimentary cognitive skills, preventing them from understanding even their own thought or lives; it is during first-year composition that student finally "begin" to develop such skills. While it is appropriate to assume that all students can continue to improve their writing, just as all graduate students and faculty can continue to improve their writing throughout their academic careers, what is problematic here is the extreme and negative representation of first-year composition students as completely void of basic cognitive and writing skills.

This disgust over student inadequacy reaches a fervent pitch after Duffelmeyer aligns herself with Peter McLaren's argument about the dangers of "dominant culture":

> Despite the desirability of encouraging critical literacy, our culture exerts an enormous and insidious influence against it. Peter McLaren (1989) pointed out that the dominant culture creates "dreams and desires . . . (i.e., stories, ideals) against which all individuals are expected to live their lives

> . . . a 'common' worldview, disguising relations of power and privilege . . ." (p. 174). Students beginning their college experiences generally have for so long been immersed in this hegemony that even to question, let along reject or change, these values of the dominant discourse specifically related to computer technology clearly feels to them "unnatural, a violation of common sense" (McLaren, p. 175). (292)

Here we have an example of how the rhetorics of fear and loathing seamlessly merge together to create powerful stories in computer-composition. This paragraph has everything: a bold assumption that "critical literacy" is lacking in students, fear that our culture enforces "enormous and insidious influence against" critical literacy, and fear over "'common' worldviews" which of course blind students as to the real "relations of power and privilege." Further, this passage offers insight into the extent to which desire and longing are caught up in professional representations of lacking students: instructors "desire" and "encourage" critical literacy, even though U.S. culture "insidiously" fights against it. After evoking these popular stories about dominant culture—which are so "common" in computer-composition that Duffelmeyer barely bothers to expand on them —the rhetoric of loathing student lack is easily inserted and, indeed, functions as a way to initiate a type of relief which will counteract the devastating rhetoric of cultural crisis. In other words, the rhetoric of cultural fear is so unpleasant and unavoidable, it is a relief to turn to the rhetoric of loathing student inadequacy. First, we can take a type of pleasure in the fact that students entering college have been continually "immersed in this hegemony." There is no reason to question this assumption or even to complicate it.

Next, we can reaffirm how necessary teachers are in the process of bringing students to "true sight," because students are so submerged in this hegemony that they are incapable of even questioning, "let alone reject or change," their beliefs. Teachers can rest assured in their loathing of student inadequacy, because students will not risk the "unnatural" feeling that they are violating "common sense" in order to question dominant beliefs.

* * *

Repeatedly, if unevenly, computer-composition scholarship deploys the rhetorics of fear and loathing to represent students as lacking subjects who are in danger of being consumed by evil forces in contemporary society. The rhetoric of fear often manifests itself through descriptions and lamentations about how the world has entered a postmodern era and subsequently has become a more dangerous and confusing place for students. The causes of our increasingly perilous world are many, and they range from the degenerative forces of popular culture, to homogenizing capitalism, to the infective qualities of computer technology and cyberculture. The rhetoric of loathing the failure of students to survive in this more complicated, postmodern world is bolstered by these descriptions, constructing student lack as an inability to decode the sign of cyberculture or postmodernity and through images of students as childish and unable to think for themselves.

By stitching together an image of the student as vulnerable and lacking, the rhetorics of fear and loathing play an important precursory role in setting the stage for the

rhetoric of promise. What we see in these critiques, then, is the retelling of a familiar story: after setting up students as dupes, some aspect of contemporary society or culture as bad, and technology as potentially liberating, scholars are free to pave the way to tell their own technological-empowerment story. The rhetorical development of these empowerment narratives is examined in the next chapter.

Chapter 4
The Rhetorics of Promise and Fertility

Narratives of technological empowerment and liberation pervade our everyday existence and popular culture through a variety of mediums: tales of how various technologies can improve our lives or lead us to life-altering epiphanies are found in jingles on commercial television, in annoying pop-up boxes on the Internet, in the ballads of mainstream music on the radio, in the words and images of print advertisements in more traditional paper magazines, and in tales of redemption in mainstream Hollywood films. Television commercials for Cingular Wireless tempt us into believing that, by merely buying a cellular phone, we will be transported to a place without stress or responsibility (rock concert) and have access to heretofore inaccessible freedom ("Everywhere the world over it's so easy to see, people everywhere just gotta be free!"). High-priced automobiles are pitched to audiences as vehicles that, with their technologically advanced Geo-Positioning Systems (GPS) and ability to navigate us out of the frenetic city and into the country, will allow us to provide our children with the education they really deserve, an education grounded in imperialist images of an empty and untainted frontier ripe for conquering. In television and print advertisements for Sports Utility Vehicles, students are first shown inefficiently sitting at desks in rows before they are transported in SUVs into the wide-open frontier with acres of green land and waterfalls. And in the past few years, Hollywood and commercial television have produced an array of films and programs that show a fascination with the power of newer technologies to both enslave and liberate humanity (*The Matrix*, *Johnny Mnuemonic*, *The*

X-Files: Fight the Future, Dark Angel, Andromeda).

Given how widespread and familiar technological liberation narratives have become in mainstream society, it is perhaps not so surprising or alarming that computer-compositionists, intent on figuring out how Internet and computer-networked technologies fit into our work, have also employed these narratives as well. While there are many different ways the rhetoric of technological promise is invoked in computer-composition, this chapter will focus on three of the more pervasive types: (1) the promise of social, political, or personal empowerment, which is often accompanied with appeals to liberatory or critical pedagogy, (2) the promise of achieving correct vision or correct sight, which is often accompanied with appeals to vulgar Marxism and claims that the teacher-as-hero can lift the veil of ignorance from students' eyes, and (3) the promise of liberatory technology to help students conquer the new empty cyberfrontier and its attendant challenges and pitfalls. To different extents, each of these three types of technological promise also contributes to the hope of remaking the student into the ideological or moral mirror image of the teacher. That is, the promise that technology can empower students to see or think in particular ways often results in remaking the student into the more ethical or socially adept image of the teacher. This hope often emerges in expressions of teacher desire for students to be like them and take on their own wishes, beliefs, and values. In addition, the promises that technology can free the student from ideological control often draw upon a rhetoric of fertility that multiple virtual selves can exist in cyberspace. However, appeals to multiplicity often function as a way to evade the new type of ideological discipline being forced onto the student as subject. While I have separated these kinds of promises into distinct categories for clarification, it is important

note that these rhetorical maneuvers overlap, merge, and sometimes even contradict each other.

The Promise of Social, Political, or Personal Empowerment

Perhaps the most common and pervasive way the rhetoric of promise is deployed in computer-composition scholarship is by incorporating the posturing and lingo of Freireian liberatory and critical pedagogy. By doing so, the rhetoric of promise attaches itself to the momentum of Freire's popularity and engages—to its own ends—commonly accepted and rarely questioned ideas about the democratic goals of composition instruction. Donna LeCourt's "Critical Pedagogy in the Computer Classroom: Politicizing the Writing Space," (1998) serves as a representative example of how Freireian liberatory pedagogy is reworked to serve the discourse of promise in computer-composition. It is important to recognize that I am not criticizing the whole of LeCourt's article. On the contrary, her work makes some valuable contributions to how technology may encourage students to examine the ideology of discursive contexts and explores how students may exert agency in such spaces (277). It is perhaps possible that the rhetoric of technological promise manages to evade detection and criticism precisely because it is dispersed throughout such a wide range of often very effective scholarship. Nevertheless, LeCourt's article sets up academic discourse (291, 292) as an "evil other" and disseminates the rhetoric of promise that technology can help students emerge from their intellectual stupor and lead them to "true sight" about their world. Further supporting this claim that LeCourt's work is most concerned with saving the writing subject from its own inadequacy is the fact that it does not discuss how to integrate newer computer

technologies in ways that will enhance writing instruction or student experiences producing situationally appropriate and context specific texts: instead, it explores different ways computer networked discussion technologies and hypertext can get students "to see" true reality.[1]

LeCourt engages the vulgar Marxism of Freireian pedagogy by framing students as blind to the true nature of reality and unaware of their location, or state of oppression, within that reality. Freire uses the word "conscientizacao" to refer to the state of self-consciousness one must achieve in order to understand truly the various social, political, and economic forces that converge to create true reality. Freire explains in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* that "the conviction of the oppressed that they must fight for their liberation is not a gift bestowed by the revolutionary leadership, but the result of their own *conscientizacao*" (49). And in her Forward to Freire and Donaldo Macedo's *Literacy: Reading the Word and the World* (1987), Ann E. Berthoff explains that "[t]eaching and learning are dialogic in character, and dialogic action depends on the awareness of oneself as knower, an attitude Freire calls conscientization (*conscientizacao*)" (xiii). In other words, Freire is concerned ultimately with an "attitude" he calls "conscientization," and teachers help and guide, but do not force, students to develop this attitude. While LeCourt does not explicitly use the term "conscientizacao," she makes a similar rhetorical gesture by constantly repeating the phrase that computer-composition instructors must help students achieve "true sight" or true understanding. She explains that by "writing hypertexts and interrogating how newsgroups allow for a multiplicity of meanings, students can come *to see* how

discursive contexts, although ideological, are open also to their manipulation" (286, italics added). She continues by arguing that "students also need *to see* how they already enact such multiplicity" (287, italics added), and "students can begin *to see* that their writing (and hopefully other forms of action) need not simply reproduce dominant ideology's attempts to reformulate their thinking and perspective on the world but might also serve as a material practice that can intervene into the ideologies of a text's context and the context's effect on self" (291, italics added). By repeating her commitment of helping students "to see," LeCourt is reenacting her own version of Freire's "conscientizacao." She concludes by explaining that "only by foregrounding such a personal imbrication in the ideological effects of language can we, as critical teachers interested in social transformation through writing, encourage students *to see* the material effects of ideology such that they might be interested in acting upon them" (292, italics added). She exerts a great deal of energy getting students to see various things—discursive contexts, their multiplicity, the material effects of ideology—but exerts little if any energy getting students to practice *producing* and *situating* texts in different social and historical contexts. Her word choice constantly reminds us of the perilous and passive position of students. They are overwhelmed by dominant ideology, in need of social transformation, and automatically assumed to participate in ideological reproduction.

LeCourt aligns her argument with both James Clifford's (1991) claim that the "good" writing subject has unknowingly internalized the ideology of academic success and so only imagines that he or she freely chooses between options, and with Patricia

Bizzell's (1986) claim that students are unaware that "discursive forms may inscribe certain ways of thinking" because they have gained institutional and social power from writing in academically sanctioned ways. She summarizes how students have unwittingly become pawns of ideology and highlights the teacher's role in freeing students from its grip:

> Their familiarity with the discourse combined with the ideologies of individualism and schooling inscribe a value system whereby writing subjects are predisposed not to examine the ideological positioning orchestrated by writing contexts, making a critique of the writing space extremely difficult. The task for the critical composition teacher, then, becomes making such ideological influences apparent to students through an examination of their own writing practice. (278)

Here we are explicitly told that it is the job of the composition instructor as authoritative sage of the real to make "ideological influences apparent to students." LeCourt even directly associates her work with Freire while seemingly unaware of the problematic narrative of promise she had endorsed: "Making the influence of discursive context on text production open to critical scrutiny is where writing technologies can best support critical literacy's goals. As in all critical literacy teaching, the goal of reflection is to make the invisible visible so that it can be acted on differently—to pose, in Freireian terms, the existential problem of how self is imbricated in ideology" (278). Using technology in the writing classroom to encourage students to analyze the discursive contexts of texts is an important goal when it is aimed at helping students become more rhetorically fluent, but the claim that the invisible must be made visible to unsuspecting

students veers this discussion into the realm of disciplinary technologies of the self (this act will ameliorate students' "existential problem of how self is imbricated in ideology").

It is important to recognize that the rhetoric of promise is disseminated in uneven ways even within a single study or piece of scholarship. For example, even though LeCourt at times explicitly associates her work with Freireian liberatory critical theory, at other times she carefully complicates such complicity. The section on "Constructing Agency: The Question of the Writing Subject, Ideology, and Text" shows how the rhetoric of promise may overlap, converge, collapse, and sometimes contradict itself. LeCourt contrasts Freire's concept of the subject as authentic and "grounded in an essential humanity" with the postmodern concept that the subject is completely interpellated by discourse and ideology (284). Yet she quickly distances herself from this hard-line postmodern stance by noting James Berlin's position that while writing can result in "a simple accommodation to hegemonic codes . . . it usually involves a negotiated transaction and even resistance . . . . (x)" (284-285). LeCourt finally aligns herself with Trimbur's claim about the "leaky" nature of culture: "The contexts available for writing subjects are probably best imagined as 'leaky sites of struggle and ongoing negotiation where no outcomes can be guaranteed in advance' (1993, p. 130)" (285). In other words, while LeCourt wants to lay claim to the promise that technology can save students from ideological domination, at the same time it is essential that she distance herself from the idea that students are completely duped by culture, lest she be accused of oversimplified technological determinism. So she negotiates a fine line between these two extremes by appealing to the notion of "leaky culture."

A similar contradiction emerges when LeCourt defends "critical pedagogy" from the accusation that it is outside ideology:

> Interrogating positions in these ways prevents a critical pedagogy from simply valorizing the difference of lived experience as authentic and somehow less ideological than academic discourse and, thus, not open to scrutiny. Instead, by pursuing what authorizes such potentially oppressive positions, students are asked to look at how they come to internalize the subject positions offered within the contexts of oppressive cultural discourses and begin to question them. (288-289)

By helping students see "what authorizes such potentially oppressive positions," they may then come to see the "oppressive positions" they occupy and question them. While LeCourt is sensitive to the concern that academic discourse and "lived experience" are both imbricated in ideology and therefore are both open to scrutiny, she still operates from the assumption that students are *already* and *unknowingly* entrenched within "potentially oppressive positions" and "oppressive cultural discourses." By helping students use computer networked discussion technologies, teachers will also be helping students interrogate these oppressive positions or discourses created by the degenerative nature of postmodern popular culture. The crux of LeCourt's argument about the value of networked discussions and hypertext in the composition classroom is, in the final analysis, reliant on the rhetoric of promise that ideologically duped students can be saved from false consciousness with computer technology.

As the above analysis of LeCourt's article suggests, the language of Freireian liberatory and critical pedagogy is often uncritically deployed in computer-composition

scholarship in the services of democratic education. As a result, sweeping and over-generalized claims are often made about the deficiencies of students, which means that their improvement is often taken as a given and appropriate goal of the writing course. In "Re: Ways We Contribute: Students, Instructors, and Pedagogies in the Computer-Mediated Writing Classroom" Sibylle Gruber acknowledges that computer-mediated communication does not automatically alter classroom practices and may even increase face-to-face and online conflict. Given these appropriate and reasonable admonitions, it is all the more interesting how Gruber still engages a superficial version of liberatory and critical pedagogy. We are told that computer-mediated classrooms can "empower students," "liberate students," and facilitate dialogical action and enhance "authentic thought" (76). Roxanne Kent-Drury endorses networked computer classrooms as a way to make students into "critical analysts rather than passive consumers of technology," and Comstock and Addison claim that "[s]howing our students how the Internet is used in the construction of identity and community may lead to more dialogic, liberatory, and democratic classrooms" (252). By first framing students as deficient subjects—they are passive consumers who lack empowerment, liberation, and authentic thought—the promises of technology, couched in the lingo of liberatory theory, are free to step in and save the student from his or her inadequacy.

The Promise of Achieving "Correct Vision" or "Correct Sight"

As discussed previously in Chapter 1 of this dissertation, composition scholarship that is informed by critical pedagogy often takes a vulgar Marxist approach to ideology as

a type of "false consciousness" which can be lifted from students with the help of a knowledgeable writing teacher. Even James Berlin's work, which contributes sophisticated theoretical work to the field with studies on the ideological grounding of writing instruction and educational institutions, carries strains of this "correct vision" and crude Marxist discourse. For example, Berlin aligns himself with Ira Shor's approach to liberatory pedagogy and represents students as in need of salvation and teachers as givers of true sight:

> Among the most important forces preventing work toward a social order supporting the student's "full humanity" are forms of false consciousness—reification, pre-scientific thought, acceleration, mystification—and the absence of democratic practices in all areas of experience. Although Shor discusses these forms of false consciousness in their relation to working class students, their application to all students is not hard to see . . . . ("Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Class" 490)

Berlin represents students as being deprived of their "full humanity" by an array of typical adversarial Marxist forces (reification, acceleration, mystification). He extends this analysis to apply to students in different economic positions as well, as we are told that even those lucky enough to avoid the label of working class are no longer exempt from the ignominy of "false consciousness." Berlin even echoes Freire's and Shor's language that students have become victims of popular culture when he explains that writing courses must "empower them [students] to become agents of social change rather than victims" ("Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Class" 491).

The use of simplistic Marxist terminology extends beyond composition and bubbles over into computer-composition as well. For example, by yoking the metaphor of empowerment to vulgar Marxism in his description of the value of technology in the writing classroom, Michael Joyce enacts yet another re-worked version of Freireian liberatory pedagogy:

> What I saw in my student Les was an ability to see himself as freed of these constraints (of paper-print technology), constraints that he and the other students had, admittedly, freed themselves of long before either by rejecting them outright or simply by failing to learn. What had changed in Les and the others, however, was their ability to perceive and express . . . the existence of information below the surface of a writing and to use that awareness of structure in commonplace fashion to empower themselves. (51)

Joyce's explanation invokes images of students having the veil of ignorance lifted from their eyes. First, students are represented as not only lacking the ability to perceive correctly the world around them, but then they are represented as lacking the ability even to express some rudimentary dissatisfaction or discomfort with it. By writing hypertexts, however, these same students gained the ability and perception to "empower themselves." Technology lifted the shroud of ignorance from Les's eyes and gave him the "ability to perceive and express" his ideological oppression, which took the form of the "existence of information below the surface of a writing" which he was previously unaware. Once Les gained true insight into this submerged structure of information, he became "empower[ed]" and achieved a truer vision of his reality." Far from being concerned

with how to use technology in the writing classroom in order to help students gain rhetorical experience by gauging the appropriate means of persuasion for a particular situation, Joyce is focused on how to use technology to extract students from the blight of false consciousness.

The forms of false consciousness that veil and hinder the sight of students are quite varied in computer-composition scholarship. Over and over again in the scholarship, students are represented as unknowingly laboring under false truths, inaccurate ideas, or immoral beliefs, all of which can be remedied with just the appropriate embrace of technology. In "Virtual Voices in 'Letters Across Cultures': Listening for Race, Class, and Gender" (1998), Elaine E. Whitaker and Elaine N. Hill argue that by participating in electronic e-mail discussions, students will develop personal voices, explore their own and others' cultures, and, most importantly, learn to identify race, class, and gender stereotyping and hence learn to respect and accept cultural difference (331, 335, 344). Similarly, Leslie D. Harris and Cynthia A. Wambeam suggest that computer-mediated communication can foster the humanistic goal of helping students become "not only more complex thinkers and writers, but also more tolerant, accepting people" ("The Internet-Based Composition Classroom: A Study in Pedagogy" (370).

Some scholarship moves away from the generic concept of tolerance to the more specific concept of tolerance in sexual orientation. Both Susan Claire Warshauer's "Rethinking Teacher Authority to Counteract Homophobic Prejudice in the Networked Classroom" and Michelle Comstock and Joanne Addison's "Virtual Complexities:

Exploring Literacy at the Intersections of Computer-Mediated Social Formations" conclude that electronic learning and writing can make students less homophobic. While both articles position the teacher as the savior who will lead students to this higher form of consciousness, the latter article is perhaps more problematic in the way it encourages students to study "coming out" confessionals in the name of tolerance (252-253). Comstock and Addison conclude that "[e]ven in the most potentially liberatory classrooms many of our students are afraid or unable to examine the social, political, and cultural implications of their personal experiences. This is especially true of politically and emotionally charged issues such as sexuality" (252). Their hope is that students will learn to engage "in online critical activities that directly and indirectly combat homophobia and ageism" (253). Some computer-composition scholarship even take students' sense of self as their explicit concern, arguing that the false consciousness students are blinded by is a wrong sense of self. Dean Barclay argues that student conversations in networked computer environments encourage mental activities that "help the writer make room for a self" (23). In "Narratives of Self in Networked Communications," Patricia R. Webb suggests that teachers explicitly ask students to reflect on their sense of self, lest "the narrative of the stable, coherent, rational self as embodied in the individual author" be told again and again by students in their electronic writing. What is important about all of the above examples is that these students are represented as unknowingly believing in false truths (there is no racism or class conflict, there is no stable coherent subject position) or laboring under an immoral belief (homophobia), and then some form of computer-mediated conversation or electronic

writing is offered up as a way to improve the student as the subject of the course by bringing them into correct vision.

Within computer-composition's discourse of promise, we often see the return of the teacher as the authoritative hero who has the power to extract students from their oppression through the use of some type of technology. It also seems that at precisely the moment when compositionists rely on liberatory rhetoric the most, an odd kind of reflective inversion often takes place and they end up remaking students into their own image. Susan Romano's "On Becoming A Woman: Pedagogies of the Self" examines electronic discussion transcripts for evidence of teachers discussing their own practices and for evidence of female students discussing narratives of the self (251). Romano assumes that while students inherently have certain selves, they are often unable to identify with them. Her answer to this dilemma is to invest teachers with the momentous power to "make offers to students of possible selves," which students may then decide to take up and occupy (265-266). Teachers are framed as the heroes who can save students from identity chaos, and therefore they also fail students when they do not offer them these "possible selves" or spaces outside of oppressive discourse (266).

Marilyn Cooper draws a similar conclusion about the special role teachers play in saving students through the promise of technology. In "Postmodern Possibilities in Electronic Conversations," Cooper does a superb job explaining how the shift from modern to postmodern ideas initiated a corresponding shift from the concept of knowledge as a universal truth represented by rational individuals with transparent language to the concept of knowledge as a partial truth created by contradictory

individuals and constructed by language (143). She goes on to argue that computer-mediated communications can teach students about "unassimilated otherness" and, through "paratactic juxtaposition of ideas and perspectives," teach students to understand better the "issues and problems that confront them" (157). Furthermore, teachers should follow Ira Shor's cue, Cooper continues, and act as an authoritative leader: "Foucault's description of his method suggests a role for teachers like that described in the Freireian model by Ira Shor, where the teacher is 'a problem-poser who leads a critical dialogue in class' (31)" (158). In the end, Cooper returns to the representation of the teacher as a powerful figure who will guide students to a vision of truth: "In order to have 'the legitimacy of a common enterprise,' the re-presentation of student problems must focus on helping students become aware of the complexities and contradictions within their own discourse on and within their own experiences with the problems, rather than on explicating an official or authoritative perspective on the problem" (158). The teacher-sage must select which problem to re-present to the student, and then the teacher will guide the student to become "more aware" of the "complexities and contradictions" the student experiences with that particular problem. The language moves seamlessly between the student's lack (his or her inability to understand their "experiences with problems") and the instructor's role in leading the student to critical consciousness and understanding.

The endgame of the rhetoric of promise is often a return of the repressed, a re-suturing of the position of truth, a recognition of the inherent value of liberatory pedagogy. It is similar to how Henry Giroux and others cultural critics, in their nostalgic

desire for the lost public sphere, rely on a Marxist vision that will unite cultural workers (i.e., writing instructors) and the oppressed (i.e., writing students) in a mystically underlying bond in an effort to fulfill the true needs of the people. Expressing the crisis in terms of the rhetoric of fear over student inability to understand this increasingly postmodern world neatly provides a shortcut for representing students en mass as oppressed. And the celebratory narratives of promise that writing in computer-mediated contexts can help students learn how to decode the signs that control their lives and hence be released finally from the technological embrace of corporations, media, or popular culture is also a convenient way to appease fears. At base of the rhetoric of promise is an imagined desire on the part of students to break free of these oppressions and align themselves with a radical pedagogy, thereby making passive and naïve students dependent upon ideologically aware teachers.

The Promise of Conquering the Cyberfrontier

In *Fragments of Rationality*, Lester Faigley argues that composition's old narrative of progress is being retold through the newer narrative of process. In a parallel move, I argue that computer-composition is now retelling the old narrative of progress through a repackaged narrative of technological promise. Indeed, this new myth of technological promise may not always be couched in terms so obviously problematic—for example, by using terms like "enlightening" or "empowering" students to see "the truth" they failed previously to see. Yet while computer-composition may not reductively claim that simply using newer technologies will free or enlighten students, it does show

an interest in controlling students through narratives of technological progress and proficiency. A new promise has emerged in recent computer-composition scholarship that is surprisingly traditional: students must learn these new forms of writing and communicating in technological environments in order to be free, there is a new empty frontier out there, and if students want to graduate, get a job, and live the capitalistic American dream, then they had better learn how to survive in this new electronic frontier.

Metaphors which frame cyberspace as a new empty frontier that students must be taught to conquer can be viewed as yet another repackaging of liberatory pedagogy. As Dasenbrock suggests, even though the discipline may realize the problematics of focusing on student subjectivity, it still seems to do precisely this: "While the field now seems aware of the complications, futility, and self-serving potential of concerning ourselves with students' senses of self, we still spend a great deal of effort worrying about their "identification with or alienation from society" (8). So while the new myths of cyberspace mirror composition's old worry over student "identification or alienation" from society, they manage to avoid using words like "empowerment" or "enlighten," which set off warning signals that students are being viewed as completely duped by ideology. They still draw upon the anxieties of composition professionals—such as the need to maintain control in the classroom and the need to be viewed as knowledgeable—and they still represent students as failures, but it is rephrased in such a way so as to avoid the conundrums of vulgar Marxism, Althusser's interpellation, and Foucault's double-bind.[2] The latest way of saying this, then, is that students must master a given technology and change with the times—or else they will continue to be mystified by technology and

labor under false consciousness.[3]

Narratives of cyberspace also tend to assume that composition instructors are free from ideology, so that they alone can teach their students to harness productively the power of technology outside of the influences of ideology. It is possible therefore to view these narratives of cyberspace as a displacement of the same concerns about student false consciousness and alienation from society; in other words, they reflect a new bread and circuses of the student as the subject of writing courses, only this time the carnival takes place in a technological environment. The colonial desire to identify student lack and to discipline the subject into enlightenment still appears to be played out in computer-composition even in newest space of the cyberfrontier. These concerns once again take on life in the field within newer concerns to teach students about newer technologies.

In his Preface to *Writing for the World Wide Web* (1998) Victor Vitanza explicitly invokes the frontier and accompanying pioneer metaphor: "Go Web, Young Men and Women; Go Web. The West is closed, and outer space is too far . . . . So venture into Cyberspace! And be one of its pioneers" (ix). This metaphor resurfaces throughout the textbook, like when he encourages students to "light out for the virtual territory ahead and check out those pages" (117). Vitanza's deployment of this metaphor suggests that he is seized by conflicting desires: he wants to embrace technologies that will help students write in the twenty-first century, but he also returns to an oddly traditional representation of naïve students as Mark Twain characters lighting out to unknown territories.

While Vitanza enthusiastically applies the frontier metaphor to the World Wide Web, Kristine Blair more tentatively conceptualizes electronic dialogue environments as

unexplored virtual communities that "enforce both empowering and disempowering ideologies" ("Literacy, Dialogue, and Difference in the 'Electronic Contact Zone'" 317). Importantly, she acknowledges that binary representations of electronic discussions spaces as completely empowering or completely oppressive are overly simplified: "[a]s we become more familiar with electronic networks . . . we are replacing our initial utopian labels with labels of conflict, particularly terms such as *electronic contact zones*" (318). Students will find that "the risks of cultural conflict are certainly worth taking," because it will lead to their personal growth as individuals and as citizens (326). A liberatory rhetoric of promise pervades her discussion as well, concluding with the claim that online dialogue and the cultural conflicts it gives students the opportunity to confront are valuable because they make students more aware and tolerant of difference. She represents electronic contact zones which are neither completely safe or dangerous, but she also represents them as spaces where students can earn liberation or empowerment as a result of successfully navigating these unknown territories and conquering the cultural conflicts presented therein: "For students to experience liberation, empowerment collaboration, and community building, it is vital that we examine the existing electronic spaces that do or do not allow for such goals to flourish, including the continuum between utopia and heterotopia" (326). Blair does not whole-heartedly frame cyberspace as a liberatory location, but she does frame it as a location students have the opportunity to occupy and conquer conflicts in the name of tolerance. Sometimes this preoccupation with cyberspace as a distinct location takes on an additional caveat, where fertile multiplicity in subject formation is imagined as a way to release the student subject from

ideological control.

The Rhetoric of Fertility

The promise that technology can free the student from various forms of ideological control often draws upon arguments that multiple virtual selves can exist or be created in cyberspace. Allucquere Rosanne Stone's *The War of Desire and Technology at the Close of the Mechanical Age* (1998) and Sherry Turkle's *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet* (1997) are frequently referred to as evidence that online interactions are free from ideology or that cyberspace does indeed undercut notions of the Enlightenment, autonomous, and self-consciously knowable self. Both Stone and Turkle argue that cyberspace is the perfect proving ground for claims that the self is multiple, fragmented, and constantly shifting. Because people can escape their bodies in cyberspace, a variety of boundary crossings—such as sexual, class, age, race, ethnicity, gender, etc.—are possible and indeed encouraged. And such boundary crossings permit people to explore better their true or real selves. Yet once again we see the problem that the rhetoric of the student as subject—this time the subject is formulated as multiple and free to explore alternative identities in cyberspace—enforces yet another type of ideological control onto students while downplaying how technological environments may assist them in gaining practice producing texts. When computer-compositionists pick up on the isolated idea that the subject is liberated in cyberspace, they often weave it into the rhetoric of the student as subject—but in this case the subject is multiplied, dispersed, and fragmented.

Turkle's claim that the computer screen is the newest space where we interact with the world and compose ourselves is understandably very appealing to computer-compositionists trying to make sense of the intersection of technology and writing: "Computer screens are the new location for our fantasies, both erotic and intellectual. We are using life on computer screens to become comfortable with new ways of thinking about evolution, relationships, sexuality, politics, and identity" (26). It is in this sense that some compositionists have used writing with computers as a way to think about students "having" multiple voices that may be stifled in more traditional writing courses. Turkle tells a personal story comparing how the student may be standardized in both a writing class and a programming class. In a French composition class in which she was required to write an essay in three parts over three-weeks, an outline was due the first week and the essay written over the remaining two weeks (50). Her approach was to read, take notes, write the paper, and then write the outline, all before the first week even ended. She explains that she came to think of her kind of writing as wrong. Turkle then describes a parallel story about the differences between the "modernist style" of programming taught at Harvard, which is "rule-driven and relies on top-down planning," and the "bricolage" approach with is "bottom-up" (51). Lisa, a Harvard student, resisted the modernist style and "came under increasing pressure from her instructors to think in ways that were not her own. Her alienation did not stem from an inability to cope with programming but rather from her preference to do it in a way that came into conflict with the structured and rule-driven style of the computer culture she had entered" (53). By now this has become a common claim in composition: that modernists rules prevent

students from thinking in ways that are not their own. However, all this assumes that there is a way to think that gets at the true essence, the true identity or self, of a person. It is in this context that Turkle offers up computer interaction as providing a method or a space where people are free to think more true to themselves in a bricolage fashion.

Turkle argues that it is beneficial for people to experience multiple selves by providing numerous examples of people's experiences in computer-mediated environments, such as in online discussions, MOOs and MUDs. Her argument about MUDs, that they "imply difference, multiplicity, heterogeneity, and fragmentation" (185), has become a foundation in MUD theory. While Turkle's scholarship does consider some negative results of computer-mediated communications, her work is most often referred to by computer-compositionists as evidence of the positive potential of technology to help people achieve a kind of liberation by locating their multiple virtual selves. A useful example of such evidence is found in the "Aspects of the Self" chapter where the anonymity of many MUDs is viewed as "provid(ing) ample room for individuals to express unexplored parts of themselves" (185). She quotes a 26 year old clerical worker as saying "I'm not one thing, I'm many things. Each part gets to be more fully expressed in MUDs than in the real world. So even thought I play more than one self on MUDs, I feel more like 'myself' when I'm MUDding" (185). Turkle believes that this confession shows that "In real life, this woman sees her world as too narrow to allow her to manifest certain aspects of the person she feels herself to be. Creating screen personae is thus an opportunity for self-expression, leading to her feeling more like her true self when decked out in an array of virtual masks" (185). And with this example it

becomes increasingly clear why Turkle's claim that a person can be more their "true self" in cyberspace is so appealing to computer-compositionists' desire to help students find their "true voices" or "true selves."

Stone make several of the same arguments as Turkle within the more general context of the conflicting desires people experience about the role of technology in their lives at the end of the mechanical age. But like Turkle, Stone also draws similar conclusions that emphasize the multiplicity of the subject in technologically mediated environments. She explains that she is interested in cyberspace because it is a social environment (36), and as such some of the interactions which take place in it are "stereotypical and Cartesian, reifying old power differentials," while others are "novel, strange, perhaps transformative, and certainly disruptive of many traditional attempts at categorization" (36). She also says she is interested in cyberspace because "the identities that emerge from these interactions—fragmented, complex, diffracted through the lenses of technology, culture, and new technocultural formations—seem to me to be, for better or worse, more visible as the critters we ourselves are in process of becoming, here at the close of the mechanical age" (36). Stone merges the disruptive nature of cyberspace with it opportunity of "becoming" and concludes that "[t]he cyborg, the multiple personality, the technosocial subject, Gibson's cyberspace cowboy all suggest a radical rewriting, in the technosocial space . . . of the bounded individual as the standard social unit and validated social actant" (42). While Stone argues, like Turkle, for multiplicity in subject formation, she adds the unique component of human *desire* for multiplicity. To Stone, the technosocial space of MOOs and MUDs are "a base camp for some kinds of cyborgs,

from which they might state a coup on the rest of 'reality'" (39). The claim that people gain a stronger or more accurate hold on "reality" in cyberspace offers some prescient insight into computer-composition's tendency to regard the use of technology in the writing classroom as a way to help students break out of enforced false-reality or false-thought.

Turkle's and Stone's claims about what happens to the subject in cyberspace and virtual reality systems were foreshadowed by earlier claims for the multiplicity of the subject in hypertext environments. These pedagogical claims for hypertext ranged from the reserved to the exuberant, and it is understandable that earlier scholarship tended to make more revolutionary claims. And it is also understandable that, like more traditional composition scholarship before it, hypertext scholarship uses the terms "voice," "self," and "author" interchangeably, which complicates and muddles its arguments. However, what consistently returns in the scholarship is the assertion that because the "voice" of a text is decentered in hypertext, the identity or author is likewise decentered and therefore freed and permitted to multiply. For example, George Landow tells us that an author in hypertext is "a decentered network of codes" in contrast to the author in print which is a modernist unified "I" (*Hypertext 2.0: The Convergence of Contemporary Critical Theory and Technology* 73-74). Jay David Bolter comes at the discussion from a slightly different perspective and argues that the experience of writing hypertext can make the author aware of his or her multiple consciousnesses (*Writing Space: The Computer, Hypertext, and the History of Writing* 233-234). And in the Preface to *Writing Space: The Computer, Hypertext, and the History of Writing* (1991), Bolter admits that he

"argue(s) rather cheerfully that the computer is a revolution in writing" (ix). His argument revolves around the assertion that since writing is manipulating signs, computers provide a new "field" to experiment with that manipulation (10). Hence, the computer "offers us a new writing space" which promises to revolutionize almost every aspect of written communication and especially the role of the author (10): "This tension leads to a new definition of unity in writing, one that may replace or supplement our traditional notions of the unity of voice and of analytic argument" (Bolter 9).

The rhetoric of multiplicity and fertility which often accompany the promises of computer technology seem to function as a way to evade the problem of composition's standardization of a current-traditionalist and humanistic subject. The rhetoric of fertility is used, for example, by scholars arguing for multiple subjectivities. As previous chapters explained, it is a commonly accepted story that traditional composition disciplines students into authentic, knowable, and singular modernist subjects. If computer-composition is going to avoid the same problem, it must offer an alternative to this well-worn story. Hence, the problem of the authentic singular subject is intimately tied to the rhetoric of promise and fertility in computer-composition, because it is precisely this problem which gives existence to the promise of technology as savior and fertile procreator. While computer-composition resources and lore cautiously warn us against technological determinism, we still see the emergence of the rhetoric of fertility which uses the language of reproduction, multiplicity, and re-creation as a type of shorthand to say that technology frees the repressed singular subject (which is blinded by culture's oppressive discourses and social structures) and instead lets the subject be free and

multiply.[4]

Some contemporary computer-composition scholarship approaches the treatment and representation of the subject in a more cautious way, avoiding the extremes of pure euphoria or absolute doom. For example, while several chapters in Todd Taylor's and Irene Ward's edited collection *Literacy Theory in the Age of the Internet* (1998) are more cautious about celebrating the liberatory value of Internet technologies, they still show an obsession with analyzing the student subject either from the perspective that a humanist Enlightenment subject is a sham or else that subject multiplicity is dangerous and hinders action. It is not surprising, then, that many of the chapters also show a deep ambiguity or uncertainty with regard to just what exactly they are arguing about the subject in computer-mediated environments. In "Our Bodies? Our Selves? Questions About Teaching in the MUD," Raul Sanchez seems conflicted about the value of using such technologies in teaching. He acknowledges that a common argument for the use of MUDs/MOOs is that "such technology allows students to explore multiple subjectivities" (102). Yet he quickly vacillates to give a cautionary caveat: "what usually passes for multiple subjectivity in a MUD is in fact the illusion of a unified Enlightenment subject trying on different roles but nonetheless maintaining the idea of a core being that exists apart from discursive exigencies" (103). He concludes with the slightly enigmatic comment that he dislikes the implications of this technology which teaches students to be "alone together," with their backs to each other, facing computer screens. Sanchez shows some desire for the postmodern subject to freely multiply in MUDs and MOOs, but he also shows fear over the complete abandonment and isolation that may also occur.

Beth E. Kolko's "We Are Not Just (Electronic) Words: Learning the Literacies of Culture, Body, and Politics" also displays ambivalence towards the supposed value of Internet technologies to let the subject multiply. She questions the merit of scholarship which says the body disappears completely in virtual interaction: "I would like to show some of the ways the decentered subject of the MOO is posited and then discuss some strategies for recuperating both political possibility and accountability from these arguments" (62). She concludes that teachers should not let ideas about fragmented subjects dilute the political power and accountability of students when writing in virtual spaces. Johndan Johnson-Eilola also shows some ambivalence in regard to the value of Internet technology for teaching in "Negative Spaces: From Production to Connection in Composition." He argues that while composition theorists and practitioners have for many years explored the idea of subjectivity as a multiple, dynamic and contradictory set of forces, they still maintain very traditional ideas about authorship, ownership, media, intertextuality, and process theory. He suggests that the common argument that newer computer technologies, unlike contact and border pedagogies which still reinforce modernist individualism, free subjects to multiply throughout time and space:

> On the one hand, contact and border pedagogies rely on an older model of text in which subjectivities work valiantly . . . through personal, internal battles negotiating two opposing worldviews; on the other hand, experts working in massive information contexts negotiate differences and connections on a much vaster scale including sometimes thousands of different factors and cultural forces . . . . We are closer here to Frederic Jameson's cognitive mapping . . . (which)

> describes the ways that subjects position themselves provisionally and multiply in relation to the world and history. (24)

In the beginning, Johnson-Eilola questioned whether it was useful to focus on notions of authorship or subjectivity. Yet by the end he positions his work within earlier debates about subjectivity, placing his ideas alongside those of Jameson's cognitive mapping, which regards subjectivity as constantly shifting and multiplying in different social and historical contexts. Sanchez, Kolko, and Johnson-Eilola each begin by doubting whether a focus on the writing subject is productive and by questioning the claim about subject multiplicity in cyberspace, which in a way is a kind of improvement over the scholarship which takes these concepts as a given. However, they each also end up, in the end, by reaffirming that it is proper and right for computer-composition to focus on students' sense of self, and they re-disseminate the rhetoric of fertility and multiplicity.

A stronger and more celebratory version of the rhetoric of fertility often emerges in feminist computer-composition scholarship. In this scenario, the rhetoric of promise is that computer technology can help students see how gender dynamics in society, the classroom, and/or academia silence and oppress them. The rhetoric of fertility is then often invoked as a way to enact the promise of computer-technology provided through computer-composition. For example, Donna LeCourt and Luann Barnes's "Writing Multiplicity: Hypertext and Feminist Textual Politics" (1999) argues that creating hypertexts within a feminist pedagogy carries the potential to find a place for marginalized voices and challenge the gendered power relations of academic discourse. It is important to note that I am not arguing that gender dynamics do not play a part in

society or education. Rather, what I am interested in analyzing is *how* the authors represent the writing student as lacking the ability, the awareness, and even the strength to make their true gendered selves be heard, *how* they carefully stitch together the rhetoric of promise and fertility to claim that technology can free naive students to see the "true" reality of their gender oppression, especially in academic contexts. In other words, the authors are already working from the assumption that students are silenced and oppressed because of their gender. It is the rhetorical moves the authors make with respect to constructing students as unaware of their gender oppression—and technology as the savior capable of making students aware of this oversight—that I am interested in analyzing.

LeCourt and Barnes explain that "writing multivocal hypertexts can help make students more aware of the multiplicity of their subject positions and the ways in which academic contexts try to silence those positions" (55). Here is one of the most common rhetorical moves: their study will make students "more aware," which quickly and yet decisively situates students as always and already passive, blind, and easily manipulated. And in this particular example, it is academia itself from which students must be liberated. Another fascinating aspect of this article which must be considered is that while the authors make claims about student experiences writing hypertexts, their research is based on the hypertext writing of Barnes, one of the authors. It is curious that a piece of scholarship that discusses the use of technology in a writing course studies an author-produced text instead of a student-produced text; LeCourt and Barnes use as evidence one of their own texts to support their argument about student texts. While this

decision could be taken as proof of subject multiplicity (Barnes is writing as a female, as an author, and as an instructor of the course), it could also indicate that the authors assume that students are incapable of creating complicated hypertexts which could produce the results their study required. In any case, LeCourt and Barnes acknowledge that "merely engaging in the seemingly disruptive practice of computer-mediated communication (CMC) does not lead to a new perception of self and writing; instead, it is more likely that students will reproduce humanist concepts of self and author" (69). It is important to note that LeCourt and Barnes argue that it was the fact that they emphasized gender issues in general, and gender issues in Barnes's own life in particular, that made the hypertext writing activity useful. In other words, without the teacher prodding Barnes's to consider explicitly her own gender oppression, the writing activity would have been less effective.

LeCourt and Barnes explain that "many ways in which she acceded to an academic context in the hypertext were made available only by our dialogic questioning of the text" (69). In other words, Barnes (as student) would have remained unaware of academic discourse's ideological pull if the teachers had not made her aware of it. The way that Barnes "acceded to an academic context," her ideological blinding, was explained to her by the teacher's "dialogic questioning." Here again we see some familiar rhetorical strategies: an initial denial of technological determinism, assumptions of student lack and inability, the rhetoric of promise that technology (in this case hypertext) can raise student awareness about their oppression (in this case gender oppression), and then the shorthand of fertile "multiplicity" as a way to evade the fact that the student has

yet again been disciplined into something more along the lines like the authors find acceptable (in this case, as more aware of the ways academia silences feminist voices). They conclude that "Perhaps the primary reason to encourage such writing, however, lies in its potential for social change and personal empowerment. Whether the texts produced for class actually enact a textual politic seems less important than what students may learn in the process—the need to interrogate the discursive grounds of achieving authority such that they can write differently in the other contexts which would silence both their alternative voices and the challenges those voice might make to the contexts' ideology" (69-70). Here they deploy the rhetoric of promise in such a way so that their study appears to avoid the criticism of ideological naivety itself.

LeCourt and Barnes conclude that the primary reason to use technology in the classroom is not to improve student writing, but rather for "its potential for social change and personal empowerment." Hence, the return to the affirmation of the rhetoric of promise that technology can lead students to correct personal insight that they previously lacked. And they conclude that the text that is actually produced is not, in the final analysis, at all important at all; rather, what is important is that students come to see that their failure to "interrogate the discursive grounds" of authority lead to the silencing of their "multiple voices." Student failure to perform such interrogations is what leads to their ideological domination. But LeCourt and Barnes seem unaware of the ideological force they themselves have just applied to students: they claim to have found a way to help students see their ideological oppression, but have in that very act forced their own student-in-need-of-coming to the sight of their own domination ideology on students.

* * *

Given how saturated our mainstream popular culture has become with tales of technological liberation, it is understandable that computer-compositionists, in their efforts to come to terms with Internet technologies, have also relied upon these tales as well. After the rhetorics of fear and loathing construct students as mired in oppression or ignorance, the stage is set for the rhetoric of technological promise to emerge and extract students from their limitations. The breadth of these promise—which range from the promise of social, political, or personal empowerment, to the promise of achieving correct vision or correct sight, to the promise of conquering new and potentially dangerous cyberfrontiers—reflects the breadth of concerns in computer-composition and also shows that this sub-discipline still strongly draws upon superficial concepts of critical pedagogy and vulgar Marxism. These different types of technological promise also unevenly reflect the desire of instructors to refashion students into their own moral or intellectual equivalent. Finally, the various promises that Internet technologies can release student from ideological manipulation often call upon a rhetoric of fertility that multiple selves can exist and flourish in cyberspace. Far from acting as a panacea, however, such appeals often function as a way to elude the new type of ideological control being forced onto the student as subject. While these rhetorics of promise and fertility problematically employ Internet technologies to discipline student conscience, the final chapter of this dissertation explores alternative ways of writing scholarship that

employs Internet technologies to assist students in learning to write more effectively.

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[1] As is often the case in computer-composition scholarship, one of the reasons LeCourt's article may unproblematically invoke the rhetoric of promise is because it relies on teacher testimonial (277).

[2] It is as if the field reached this impasse when Foucauldian theory did not get us out of this conundrum (we could not admit teachers were free from ideology and students were embroiled in it, because to follow Foucault means to accept that there are no individuals). However, we could not rely on Althusseur for similar reasons. What this amounted to was saying students, unlike teachers, were ideologically naïve and therefore we should focus on how to use computer-composition technology as a way to free students.

[3] Anecdotal evidence supporting this claim is found at publisher Prentice Hall's website, which lists the majority of its computer-composition resources under the category "Freshman Composition." By now it is an unfortunate cliché' that freshman composition is the site of the most unprepared and lacking students, and so by linking computer-composition with freshman composition, the website implies that these resources are geared at rectifying the deficiencies of freshman, the most needy of all students. It is of course unfair to use a publisher's online catalog as evidence that the discipline of computer-composition represents students as failures, but it does add some credence to my larger argument that computer-composition resources still apply the rhetoric of the student as the subject of the writing course.

[4] Laura L. Sullivan's "Wired Women Writing: Towards a Feminist Theorization of Hypertext" and Comstock and Addison's "Virtual Complexities: Exploring Literacy at the Intersections of Computer-Mediated Social Formations" also conclude with a turn to multiplicity of the subject in cyberspace as a way to avoid suggesting that their arguments force a narrow type of thinking onto students.

Conclusion
Reevaluating How We Create Perspectives in our Field: A Call for Vigilant Rhetorics

While the historical chapter of this dissertation suggests that computer-composition's disciplinary treatment of the student as the subject of the writing course is indebted to earlier models of composition pedagogy and theory, the analysis chapters show that this rhetoric of the student subject becomes particularly problematic in computer-composition. The rhetoric deployed in the field is often more overstated, making grandiose claims about the hyper-reality of cyberspace or extravagant promises that chatrooms, listservs, hypertext, or MOOs and MUDs can release students from ideological oppression, as computer-composition scholars strive to understand the role of newer technologies in the writing classroom. This dissertation's primary contribution to the field, then, is that it brings to the forefront the suggestion that it is essential that computer-composition scholars come to understand better how we create perspectives in our field, the problems that arise from these perspectives, and how we go about discussing the promises of newer technologies in our classrooms. By being vigilant about the rhetorics we employ and the representations of students that we construct in our scholarship, the field can avoid debilitating visions of the student subject and move toward focusing more on student writing as the subject of writing courses, on the ways in which newer technologies can enhance writing instruction (i.e., enhance collaboration, facilitate peer-response, explore writing in online environments), and provide students with increased opportunities to produce context-specific and audience-appropriate texts.

As chapters 2 and 3 of this dissertation argued, the field of computer-composition

often takes students themselves as the subject of the writing course and represents them as in need of enlightenment and salvation through the rhetorics of fear, loathing, and promise. This dissertation argues that the field needs to turn away from studying how to use Internet technologies to save inadequate students from their own failings or from a more dangerous postmodern world and instead turn toward using them to help students become more effective writers. This study also suggests that the field could benefit by developing alternative scholarly genres that take writing itself, and not students' moral redemption or social salvation, as the subject of research and debate. When computer-composition scholarship is grounded in images of student lack or need, its arguments are diverted subtly away from using newer technologies in the service of writing instruction and towards using newer technologies in the service of liberating students from their inadequacies. For instance, one of the more common genres found in computer-composition scholarship is the teacher testimonial, a form identified earlier as problematic because it often relies upon representations of lacking and failing students. Likewise, when computer-composition scholarship draws upon narratives of social turmoil, postmodern crisis, or technological disorder or infection in an effort to set the context that the scholarship at hand is important, its conclusions are diluted into something more along the lines of a moral salvation tract and contribute little to the field in the way of using Internet technologies to enhance writing instruction.

This conclusion recommends that the field consider alternative ways to write computer-composition scholarship, ways that will focus on the types of writing and pedagogical activities supported and enhanced by newer Internet technologies. Some of the ways that computer-composition scholarship can move away from taking students

themselves as the subject of the course, and move towards taking writing as the subject of the course, is by focusing research on how to deploy Internet technologies in ways that enhance student opportunities to practice older rhetorical arts, focus course content on antifoundational ideas of rhetoric, and produce audience- and situation-specific texts; allow for the integration of face-to-face and online interaction; encourage collaboration and peer-response; expand classroom boundaries, enhance classroom materials, and transform student publishing; make face-to-face classroom time more efficient; allow for student directed and point of need instruction; remind us that there are new rhetorical considerations to take into account with online texts; emphasize the value of visual literacy, information architecture, and web usability for producing user-centered texts; and highlight the importance of digital information management. It is essential to emphasize that any type of computer-assisted writing course in and of itself does not inherently use technologies in these more productive ways; rather, it is in the *design* of particular courses, the *uses* to which the technologies are put in particular courses, that amount to a turn in computer-composition away from the *student* as the subject of the course to *writing* as the subject of the course.

This study also makes the argument that computer-composition scholarship—if it is to focus on using newer technologies to help students become more effective writers—should be informed by a definition of antifoundational rhetoric. If computer-composition scholarship is to remain relevant, expand our understanding of the ways that newer technologies may enhance composition pedagogy, and expand our understanding of how writing may change in online environments, it is imperative that this scholarship relinquish its association of newer technologies with foundational ideas of rhetoric and

humanistic values of truth. Such associations lead to simplistic claims that the technologies themselves are inherently objective or liberating, which then opens the door to simplistic claims that the technologies themselves can lead students to some type of objective truth or salvation. Arguing that computer-composition scholarship should be informed by antifoundational concepts of rhetoric means that future scholarship should discuss, explore, and research the ways that Internet technologies can be used to help students understand better how language works in different situations and the ways that newer technologies can give students increased opportunities to produce (and not merely critique) persuasive arguments. Computer-composition scholarship that is grounded in antifoundational concepts of rhetoric assumes that, in order to become more effective writers, students need to be given opportunities to gain practice creating and situating *texts* (as opposed to locating their *true humanist selves*) within particular historical and social contexts; gain practice *producing* texts (as opposed to merely *analyzing* preexisting texts); and gain practice exploring the use of language and how language practices may change in online environments (as opposed to exploring metaphysical and humanistic ideas of truth). An antifoundational approach to rhetoric also assumes that language, as "constructed, contingent, and constitutive of social orders," can produce real material and social change in the world (Donals and Glejzer 3). Yet it is careful not to present "truth" as something students can achieve through the act of discovery and then convey without interference with transparent language. Instead, it emphasizes that truth is a discursive practice that is always contingent; at best only momentarily agreed upon through language, negotiation, and debate; and foregrounds how language functions in different mediums and in different contexts to achieve momentary consensus.

An important distinction may be made between the ethical shaping of the student subject and considering the ethical uses of rhetoric. While there may be ethical uses of effective rhetoric, this is a very different issue than endorsing the ethical transformation of the student subject. To this end, this dissertation has focused on critiquing computer-composition's tendency to use Internet technologies in order to bring about the moral or ethical salvation of students. However, when inviting students to think about using rhetoric for real reasons in real spaces, how might discussions about the ethical uses of rhetoric be approached, again without the concomitant shaping of the student as subject? One possible research area that could offer insight into this conundrum is the examination of the relationship between ethos—or "the character or reputation of a rhetor" (Crowley *Ancient Rhetorics* 337)—and the subject. Such an examination does not assume that the rhetorical concept of ethos is necessarily pinned to the subject. While the question of the ethical uses of rhetoric is not the same as the question of ethos, such an examination might provide ways to discuss the matter of ethical uses of rhetoric in a writing class without thrusting another type of disciplinary technique onto the student subject.

Given contemporary computer-composition's tendency to focus on the nature of student subjectivity and matters of student salvation, this study suggests that the field should carefully ground its research and scholarship on an antifoundational theory of rhetoric because it dispenses with the facade that there is any type of "true essence" to subjectivity and instead focuses on the production of situationally effective texts. Antifoundational rhetoric does not concern itself with the morality or social conscience of students and it avoids the other contemporary theoretical conundrum of reducing subjectivity to either a completely rhetorical construct or a preexisting entity completely

outside the effects of language. Instead of interpellating students into a liberal humanist or poststructuralist subjectivity—which, respectively, teaches students that they can turn inward and locate an authentic position from which to write or that they can turn outward and throw off the shackles of social conditioning—computer-composition scholarship should explore ways that newer Internet technologies can provide students with practice producing and discursively positioning their texts within various situations and circumstances.

Instead of focusing on the discipline or standardization of the student, computer-composition should turn towards studying how Internet technologies can enhance student writing experiences. This chapter concludes with some suggestions for possible future areas of research which focus on effective uses of Internet technologies in the writing classroom, and it makes an effort to do so without conjuring up images or representations of deficient students. In other words, both the content and the form of this final section make an argument: computer-composition research *and* scholarship should focus on studying the integration of newer Internet technologies in ways that will enhance writing pedagogy and student opportunities to become more effective writers.

* * *

> I hope to point out that the Internet is not a foreign land or a beautiful paradise but a writing tool that can help our students understand basic academic and rhetorical strategies. We must remember, for instance, that the Latin word for introduction, *exordium*, originally "meant 'beginning a web'—by mounting a woof or laying a warp," a wonderful metaphor that calls on writers to weave the multiple strands of their work into a pattern that will entice and entrap the reader (Corbett 1971, 303). That is to say, webs are familiar territories for rhetoricians. (195)

— Dean Rehberger "Living Texts on the Web: A Return to the Rhetorical Arts of Annotation and Commonplace" (2000)

> Computers provide peer interactivity and a reading-writing arena that support a new rhetorical base for instruction (or provide the old collaborative base with new, enabling functionality). (139)

— Fred Kemp "Computer-Mediated Communication: Making Nets Work for Writing Instruction" (1998)

> Though the ability to develop arguments, write descriptions, or adhere to other traditional rhetorical forms will remain a requirement for any writer, we cannot ignore the new writing spaces. E-mail, the World Wide Web, electronic meeting rooms, companywide "intranets," and various kinds of computer conferencing are becoming as important in some organizations as more traditional work forms. Also, the opportunities for exciting new prewriting exercises, new collaborative groupings, and new connections with text are there before us in the network-based classroom. We need to think not only about the new kinds of writing students will be doing, or are doing, but also about the new opportunities for teaching writing. (205)

— Trent Batson "Rhetorical Paths and Cyber-Fields" (1998)

This final section of this conclusion weaves together strands taken from the above three quotes in an effort to entice the reader into acknowledging the practical ways Internet technologies can be carefully integrated into writing classrooms in order to improve writing instruction and pedagogy and assist students in becoming more effective rhetoricians. From Dean Rehberger I borrow the ideas that "webs are familiar territories for rhetoricians" and that the Internet can be used as a powerful writing tool to help students gain a sophisticated understanding of academic and rhetorical strategies, mix in Fred Kemp's commitment to the value of networked peer-interaction, and then finish with Trent Batson's call to consider new types of online writing and online pedagogy.

Older Rhetorical Arts, Antifoundational Rhetoric, and Producing Audience- and Situation-Specific Texts

Newer Internet technologies can be integrated in the writing classroom in ways that give students practice with older rhetorical arts. As Dean Rehberger argues, "the texts on the Internet—homepages, Web resources, e-mail, listservs, MOOs, newsgroups, and chats—take us back to the time before the printed book, to a sense of writing as more fluid and malleable. The skills of the Internet hearken back to older rhetorical arts of linking, cataloguing, annotating, and collecting, rhetorical arts that remain the primary tropes of academic writing" (194). The production of Internet texts—such as creating online research Web resources or synchronous or asynchronous online discussions—asks students to collect and catalogue information online and then deploy that information in the form of paraphrases, quotations, and imitations. These activities remind us of the fluid nature of writing and the corresponding way that we often find so-called "originality" in synthesis. Producing such Internet texts therefore also encourages students to complicate traditional modernist humanist notions of what it means to be a rhetorician; in other words, modern concepts of individual authorship and modern concepts of unique and original meaning-making are disrupted with online textual productions. These conceptual disruptions correspond with Myron Tuman's argument that authorship in the future may rely less on the idea of individual creativity and more on thirteenth century ideas that a producer of text takes on many different roles:

> The future of authorship may have less to do with a single vision of writing defined in terms of invention, creativity, and copyright than with earlier, multiple visions. In the thirteenth century, for example, Saint Bonaventura spoke not of

> one type of producer of books but four: *scriptor*, one who "might write the works of others, adding and changing nothing"; *compilator*, one who "writes the work of others with additions which are not his own"; *commentator*, one who "writes both others' work and his own, but with others' work in principal place, adding his own for purposes of explanation"; and, finally, *auctor*, one who "writes both his own work and others' but with his own work in principal place adding others' for purpose of confirmation (Eisenstein, 1983, p. 84). (64)

Both Rehberger's and Tuman's comments emphasize that writing in electronic environments takes us back to a time before ideas about authors, texts, and writing had become rigid and standardized. While Rehberger focuses on how the skills of the Internet mimic older rhetorical arts, and Tuman focuses on how the concepts of authorship may change in the future, both ultimately make the argument that writing in online environments returns us to a focus on the fluid nature of language, meaning-making, and authorship.

Creating Internet texts not only permits students to practice the older rhetorical arts of cataloguing, annotating, collecting, and linking, but it also permits the integration of activities that reinforce the antifoundational nature of language as well. For example, synchronous and asynchronous communication tools facilitate collaboration, which highlight the importance of negotiation in all meaning-making; electronic types of document exchanges, such as electronic e-mail attachments or *Blackboard's* dropbox, facilitate peer-response, which highlight the importance of considering one's audience when developing persuasive arguments and engaging in debates; and the online publishing opportunities provided by the World Wide Web highlight the importance of

writing for particular audiences and producing and situating texts within specific social contexts (VanHoosier-Carey 404). For instance, students could collaboratively study and write a review of a media element for several different audiences (such as a review of a piece of music or a film written for high school students, parents, and a national newspaper) and then publish these reviews online. First, groups negotiate meaning-making, compose their texts collaboratively, and workshop their reviews inside and outside of class with any combination of chatrooms, forums, listservs, and electronic document exchanges. Second, the groups publish their reviews online, review their peers' work, and then write a collaborative reflection on how the reviews written for different audiences differed in terms of language use, style, tone, and evidence cited.

In addition to deploying several newer technologies in ways that enhance the writing process, collaboration, peer-response, and an awareness of the importance of producing texts that are audience and situation specific, this sample assignment asks students to think about antifoundational rhetoric on a metaconitive level (i.e., students composed collaboratively a textual production and then reflected explicitly on the different ways language was used for different audiences in order to create effective arguments and negotiate points of conflict). The way that Internet technologies can be used in the writing classroom to focus course content explicitly on the nature of language and language use itself is perhaps one of the most overlooked advantages of integrating newer technologies into the writing classroom. It is important to note that this assignment is only one example of how to employ Internet technologies in ways that will give students experience producing situationally appropriate and persuasive arguments for different types of readers, thereby facilitating student understanding of

antifoundational rhetoric, or how language functions in different situations and is audience specific. This is not to say, however, that such goals could not be achieved in a traditional face-to-face classroom; rather, the argument here is that newer Internet technologies can be deployed in ways that enhance the effectiveness of important composition pedagogical activities, such as collaboration and writing for real audiences. As such, promising areas for future research include studying which Internet texts help students gain practice with which rhetorical arts (i.e., which types of Internet texts provide students with practice collecting information, paraphrasing, and cataloguing) and developing best practices for teaching the production of Internet texts.

Integrating Face-to-Face and Online Interaction

Internet technologies allow the design of hybrid courses, which *integrate*, rather than merely *supplement*, face-to-face student/student and student/instructor interaction with virtual learning environments and activities. This type of interaction model is especially suitable for applying technologies in ways that help students become better rhetoricians because it takes the best of online language use (such as using forums, online databases, and the Internet as a tool for learning basic academic and rhetorical strategies) and combines it with the more practical uses of technology (such as electronic draft exchanges, online publishing, and expanding classrooms boundaries). In addition, the combination of face-to-face and online interaction takes advantage of several other important pedagogical benefits which have recently been the subject of a great deal of contemporary research. For example, the course design structure which combines and integrates online and face-to-face interaction is increasingly regarded as more effective

than either a completely online course or a completely face-to-face course because it mix of environments appeals to a wide range of student learning styles, accommodates a variety of student schedules, and incorporates diverse media. Amy Warner argues that a course model which combines face-to-face and online components is more pedagogically effective because its mix of multimedia, audio, and visuals appeals to students with different learning styles and preferences, and its flexibility appeals to students with hectic work schedules or family obligations ("An Urban University's Approach to Anywhere, Anytime Learning"). Two recently released articles make similar claims: in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Jeffrey Young argues that not all students excel in the lecture format and that face-to-face instruction is not always best, and in *Technological Horizons in Education*, Stells Perez and Rob Foshay present a study in which students excelled in a hybrid math course. Although these articles do not discuss writing instruction in particular, they do provide evidence that hybrid course models appeal to diverse student learning styles, facilitate collaboration, and provide a way to deal with lower-level classroom concerns, thereby protecting face-to-face classroom time for more sophisticated writing-related activities. On a general pedagogical level, then, courses which integrate face-to-face and online components are preferable to completely face-to-face or completely online courses for the following reasons: (1) they allow students to maintain more flexible schedules, (2) they maintain direct contact between instructor and students, (3) they allow instructors to focus classroom time on higher-order concerns while using technology to take care of more mundane and repetitive course tasks, (4) they have a lower dropout rate than distance education courses, (5) they allow institutions to use classroom space more efficiently, (6) they help class members establish a sense of

community for collaboration, and (7) they give students a stronger sense of course and institution identity (Bonk; Brown; Draves; Nahmoud).

Another reason a hybrid course, with its mix of face-to-face and online interaction, is an appealing instructional model is because it can be designed using a variety of technologies, which means that it could be implemented at educational institutions with diverse technological resources. For example, computer-mediated communications for the course could use commercial or institutional e-mail systems, listservs, forums, or chatrooms; draft exchanges and peer-response could use a variety of commercial collaboration programs (such as *Blackboard* or *WebCT*), university-based server access (for example, Michigan State University's AFS system), or networked computers. And course content could be delivered using any of the above options, through CD-ROMs, or through static or interactive web pages. Such a hybrid course model can therefore be adapted for use across a wide range of institutions with access to a wide range of technologies.

Collaboration and Peer-Response

Newer Internet technologies can also be integrated into writing classrooms in ways that assist students in becoming more effective writers by enhancing collaboration and peer-response with computer-networks and networked interactivity (Kemp; Palmquist and Zimmerman). Collaboration and peer-response in turn put into practice the antifoundational rhetorical principles that all meaning is contextually bound and that truth is not a matter of objectivity, but rather a matter of negotiation and debate. Collaboration in the writing classroom highlights the social and mediated nature of

meaning-making, the dialogic nature of language, and the importance of considering one's audience when writing (Faigley). While not all university or college writing programs have access to their own home-grown web-based writing and editing software applications, Fred Kemp's discussion of Texas Technological University's TOPIC (Texas Tech Online-Print Integrated Curriculum) can be applied to commercial programs as well. He argues that the most important part of learning to write is receiving real feedback from real peer-audiences and then revising based on this feedback, and the networked interactive capabilities of TOPIC accomplish precisely this. Kemp's analysis is an excellent example of starting with a theoretical premise and then designing computer-assisted writing instruction accordingly (i.e., students learn to write more effectively by writing for real audiences and engaging in constant peer-response and revision).

As mentioned above, newer Internet technologies permit the design of hybrid courses, which integrate both face-to-face and online interaction and writing environments. Starting with the theoretical premise that collaboration and peer-response assist students in gaining rhetorical expertise because these activities emphasize the antifoundational quality of language and the negotiated nature of all meaning-making, a hybrid course model integrates technologies in ways that highlight these textual characteristics. This type of course model allows collaboration to first take place in a face-to-face environment and then move into synchronous or asynchronous online spaces such as chatrooms, forums, listservs, or even MOOs or MUDs. A hybrid course model facilitates collaboration because peer-response can first be introduced, modeled, and practiced in the real-life classroom, where students can observe their peers participate in

this activity and ask questions about the process. After gaining structured and supervised first-hand experience with peer-response in the face-to-face classroom, this activity can be moved efficiently into online environments, where electronic drafts are exchanged by sending them as e-mail attachments, posting them at a course website, or submitting them to a document drop-off box at a course website managed through commercial software. Sharing drafts outside of class means that students begin the peer-response process outside of the physical and temporal boundaries of the classroom. Because students will have already read and responded to their peers' writing outside of the classroom, when the class does gather for face-to-face interaction, this time can be used for higher-level activities such as rewriting or revision. By bringing the online peer-response back into the classroom, a type of doubling reinforcement takes place and both the face-to-face and online collaborative activities are enhanced. The practice of integrating face-to-face and online collaboration and peer-response is an area that deserves further research in computer-composition scholarship. Additional research directions could include gauging the effectiveness of integrating peer-response in both face-to-face and online contexts, comparing the types of peer-response occurring in different kinds of hybrid courses with the types occurring in entirely face-to-face or entirely online classrooms, and developing guidelines or sets of best practices for how to implement effectively such integration.

Expanding Classroom Boundaries, Enhancing Classroom Materials, and Transforming Student Publication

Internet technologies can be used to make the writing classroom more efficient by expanding classroom boundaries, enhancing classroom materials, and transforming

student publishing. The idea that teaching with technology can expand the borders of the classroom is not a new idea. However, it seems that sometimes this simple practice is overlooked or disregarded precisely because of its simplicity and ease of implementation. Nevertheless, it remains that posting course syllabi, class procedures, assignments, announcements, and other course materials online has the benefits of making these materials available to students at any time and permitting instructors to revise them accordingly. Enhancing classroom materials through Internet technologies can contribute to enhancing student writing because course materials can be revised in light of class discussions and student questions or to adjust for strengths and weaknesses in student writing. For instance, if an instructor posts a writing assignment on a webpage or at a class *Blackboard* site but then decides that students are ready to move on to a more sophisticated or complicated writing activity, the assignment can be easily revised online and adjusted to student needs (i.e., an assignment that focuses on quoting resources and signal phrases could be adjusted to focus on paraphrasing instead). Classroom materials can also be enhanced by adding relevant hyperlinks; for examples, an assignment can be improved by adding links to frequently asked student questions, revision checklists, annotated descriptions, or external sites dealing with specific rhetorical forms or genres. While there are already large amounts of classroom materials already posted on the Internet, another area that requires further study is the extent to which these materials are revised in light of the trajectory courses take during the term. In particular, the field could gain from a systematic study of when, why, how, or how often course materials are revised online and the extent to which this practice contributes to more effective writing instruction or to an increased focus on student writing.

As scholars are increasingly pointing out (Eyman; Egbert and Jessup; Smith), enhancing student publication with online alternatives is another way to make writing and rhetoric central in the wring classroom. Web-based publication differs from more traditional paper publication in that it is more efficient, collaborative, and encouraging of ongoing revision and editing (*Educonsult: [Re]Envisioning the Classroom in the Digital Age*). Because online publication is less expensive than traditional paper publication, it is more likely that it can become an ongoing activity in the writing classroom, increasing the extent to which students write for real audiences and for public consumption. Online publication is also more collaborative in the sense that students can more easily work on a single electronic document in online environments and review and respond to peers' work after it is published on the World Wide Web. And by foregrounding the importance of publishing student texts, writing and revising for real audiences and writing as a way to get things done in the world is also emphasized. For example, a group research project could involve developing a website and corresponding printable documents for a local non-profit or student organization; in both cases, students are asked to gauge the prospective audience and to produce appropriate written texts and documents accordingly, thereby heightening student awareness of producing audience-specific text. The variety of newer Internet technologies also means that online publication can be put into practice at institutions with a wide range of resources; for instance, courses could use Microsoft's *FrontPage*, Netscape's *Composer*, server space and webpage templates available at the commercial site *Yahoo!*, or commercial course management programs that incorporate their own online publication tools. While a great deal of research has been done on publishing student texts in the more traditional sense, the practice of

publishing student texts on the World Wide Web deserves additional study. In particular, computer-composition scholarship could benefit from research that studies best practices for teaching online publication in the writing classroom and in what ways, if any, texts changed when composed for and published in online spaces for public consumption (i.e., the extent to which text conformed to web-based conventions of writing, such as chunking, relevancy, and titling, and the use of visuals to enhance or elaborate on content).

Making Face-to-Face Classroom Time More Efficient

Newer Internet technologies can be integrated into the writing classroom in ways that facilitate using online spaces to deal with lower-level activities so that more in-class time is available for higher level face-to-face activities, which in turn means that more class time is available to focus on student writing. For example, by posting instructor comments with interactive links, developing modules that explain technical procedures (such as creating webpages in *Dreamweaver*, creating and manipulating images in *Photoshop* or *Fireworks*, using file transfer protocol software, or accessing and saving work to school or university provided server space), or beginning peer-evaluation workshops outside of class with electronic documents, classroom time is reserved for focused discussion of student writing-related questions, responses they have already begun to formulate, or higher-level writing activities. Computer-mediated communications—such e-mail, listservs, forums, chatrooms, or other communication tools found in commercial class management programs—can be used to begin or extend class discussions about readings, activities, or assignments (Faigley; Tornow). Not only

can these online communications facilitate student preparation for in-class work, but because instructors can review student comments and gauge student understanding in these spaces, they also assist instructors in developing in-class discussions, activities, and assignments that are directed at student questions or concerns. Likewise, students can also review their peers' comments in these spaces for suggestions on how others approached a particular writing situation, activity, or course reading.

Student Directed and Point of Need Instruction

Internet technologies can also be deployed to provide student directed and point of need instruction by developing online rhetorical exercises or a database of rhetorical activities. Such Internet-enhanced activities could give students more opportunities to practice different composing conventions or strategies outside of the classroom, such as practicing a certain type of bibliographic format or experimenting with strategies for making prose more active. A range of classical exercises or activities—from practicing analytic or etymological definitions, to imitating and paraphrasing, to producing figures of thought or tropes—could be adapted to an online and interactive database as well. In particular, developing a database based on the elementary rhetorical exercises progymnasmata could be an especially effective way to provide meaningful student centered and student directed instruction. As Crowley explains in *Ancient Rhetorics for Contemporary Students*, "The progymnasmata remained popular for so long because they are carefully sequenced: they begin with simple paraphrases and end with sophisticated exercises in deliberative and forensic rhetoric. Each successive exercise uses a skill practiced in the preceding one, but each add some new and more difficult composing

task" (282). While there are currently several academic websites that provide static definitions of rhetorical terms and exercises, the design of an interactive database that asks students to actually practice these exercises in a sequenced manner while increasingly the level of difficulty or adjusting to student strengths and weaknesses could enhance writing instruction.

An online database resource could also facilitate student directed and point of need instruction by permitting students to work at their own pace and make deliberate decisions about what areas they struggle with and would like to practice. Such a database also serves as an example of a way in which Internet technologies can be integrated in the writing classroom so that the face-to-face classroom time is more productive and focuses more on student writing because it frees up class time for students to ask directed questions or receive feedback from their instructor and peers. But the integration of online rhetorical exercises can also be implemented in such a way so as to emphasize collaboration in the writing classroom as well. For example, while students may complete some progymnasmata exercises individually, one group each week may review and respond to the exercises of their peers, a collaborative and reflective activity that will be facilitated by database technologies. The design of an online interactive database of rhetorical exercises or activities that adjusts itself to students' writing strengths and weakness is a prime area for further computer-composition research and development.

New Rhetorical Considerations to Take Into Account with Online Texts

Not only can Internet technologies help students gain practice with more traditional types of writing, but they can also highlight new ways to write, or new

rhetorical considerations to take into account, when producing online texts. This use of Internet technologies is sensitive to Trent Batson's call to consider "the new kinds of writing students will be doing" in online spaces, as well as the new pedagogical opportunities these spaces will facilitate. As Fred Kemps argues

> Unless we plan on transporting our students back to the nineteenth century on graduation, we must prepare them to use words in a rapidly expanding electronic environment. The Internet, especially, and the easily navigable World Wide Web, are rapidly becoming pervasive, exerting an influence on society at a speed never before seen by even the most transformative technologies. ("Computer-Mediated Communication" 144)

In this rapidly changing electronic environment, writing for print and writing for the web involve deploying different rhetorical strategies. While writing for print prizes linearity, clarity, and the development of arguments, writing for online spaces prizes the chunking, labeling, and relevancy of information, consistency in navigation, the relationship between words and visuals, and the logic of linking (Lyons *Essential Design for Web Professionals* 34). These newer rhetorical values are in part affected by people's online reading practices, considerations that writers also need to take into account when producing online texts (Nielsen "How Users Read on the Web"). For example, people prefer to scan online text and to read without having to scroll down the page, they find information that is "chunked" together most easy to scan and comprehend, and they are willing to invest only about 3-4 seconds at a site in order to find what they are looking for before moving on to another site (Lyons *Essential Design for Web Professionals* 35; Helinski "Web-Site Usability Engineering"). Because researching and reading online

texts can become central in courses which integrate newer Internet technologies, students can reflect on their own online reading practices and take them into account when producing their own online texts as well.

When students use Internet technologies for producing both online and offline texts, it highlights that differences exist between online/offline reading, online/offline writing, and designing documents for online/offline environments. The act of vacillating between more traditional types of writing and online/web writing is in and of itself useful because it encourages students to compare and contrast the different ways language is used in these different situations, thereby becoming more effective rhetoricians in both contexts. For instance, a writing class could present the development of the navigation scheme for a website as akin to the development of a thesis statement for a traditional argumentative paper. Students can therefore apply experiences and observations gleaned from designing the content/buttons for a navigation bar to writing a thesis, and vice versa: both act as a type of blueprint for the reader, the construction of both carries important implications for what a text will achieve or argue, and both can be revised continually throughout the writing and development process. In turn, students are encouraged to take rhetorical experiences learned in online environments—such as the importance of keeping relevant information grouped together and carefully gauging your audience expectations—and apply them in traditional composing environments as well.

Visual Literacy, Information Architecture, and Web Usability

When a writing course asks students to practice composing webpages and other types of electronic documents (such as pdf documents, online magazines, or newsletters),

it moves beyond teaching purely textual rhetoric to teaching visual rhetoric as well. Although the field of computer-composition does not seem to agree on a precise definition of or approaches to teaching visual rhetoric, these points of dispute are not necessarily a hindrance because visual literacy can be taught as a set of rhetorical choices the writer must make within a specific situation and not as absolute rules. Even though there is debate among compositionists about how best to teach visual rhetoric, in general there seems to be a growing consensus that classes that teach writing for the World Wide Web must expand to include this type of literacy as well. Sean D. Williams argues that writing instruction based on only words is antagonistic to the very idea of literacy, because our society is highly visual and multimodal. He calls for a composition pedagogy that incorporates verbal and visual instruction ("Part 2: Toward an Integrated Composition Pedagogy in Hypertext").

Computers and Composition recently dedicated an entire issue to the topic of visual literacy. Patricia Sullivan's "Practicing Safe Visual Rhetoric on the World Wide Web" argues that because safe approaches to visual rhetoric are based on print values, they are insufficient models for teaching visual rhetoric for the Internet. But she does insist that because the Internet is multimedia-based, it is absolutely essential to teach visual rhetoric along with writing for the Web: "In general, if we teach writing for the Web without an awareness of the visual dimensions of the meaning we risk a great deal. Visual meaning is even more important in Web space than it is in print because animation and video are added more easily to a Web site than to other writing. Thus, ignoring the visual dimensions of rhetoric is avoiding an understanding of a major component of the power of writing on the Web" (118). In their articles in the same volume, Sean D.

Williams and Anne Frances Wysocki also agree that it is essential for visual rhetoric to be taught in composition classes. While Williams presents a design model based on process-pedagogy as a productive way to teach visual rhetoric, Wysocki makes the argument that the discipline needs to refine the categories it uses to teach visual rhetoric now that visuals are no longer limited to supporting text, but rather *make arguments* and *assertions* on the Internet.

The hybrid course model discussed previously is an especially appropriate medium for teaching visual rhetoric because its combination of traditional and online writing highlights the ways that visuals may function *differently* in online environments as opposed to print environments, thereby stressing how visuals may function differently *within* various online and print environments as well. In other words, because a hybrid model integrates both traditional and online writing environments, a structure which emphasizes how all meaning-making is contextually bound and continually negotiated (i.e., different considerations must be taken into account when writing for print or online audiences, such as page layout, the size and types of visuals used, and the length of sentences and paragraphs), it is an ideal medium for treating visuals as part of a larger set of discursive practices. Writing for real audiences in online environments also highlights how visuals work alongside with text to negotiate meaning with the audience and how different types of visuals perform different functions or carry different meanings in diverse social or cultural contexts. As Louis Rosenfeld argues, visual literacy "[i]s much more than creating pretty pictures. It is geared more toward creating relationships between visual elements and determining their effective integration as a whole. On a page, printed or HTML, these elements include white space and typography as well as

images" (16-17). Producing online texts also introduces students to the concept of visual architecture, which is "the use of a particular method of building visual information and balancing communication between images and words" (Guevin "Visual Architecture: The Rule of Three"). Visual architecture also emphasizes that the visual and textual must be brought together in a design that "makes sense" to the audience (VanHoosier-Carey "Rhetoric by Design: Using Web Development Projects in the Technical Communication Classroom"). Integrating newer Internet technologies into the writing classroom, then, enhances student exposure to the concept of visual architecture as a way to build different relationships between words and visual objects, such as pictures, graphs, illustrations, area boxing, layout and titling. In addition, the practice of creating digital documents that balance meaning between images and words in a design that "makes sense" to the audience highlights the importance of creating documents that are user- and reader-centered.

As the above discussion on reader-centered visual design suggests, integrating newer Internet technologies into the writing classroom also enhances the ways in which students can apply the concepts of visual rhetoric, web usability, and information architecture to their own written discourse in order to produce user-centered texts. Information architecture is a web design concept that asks students to think rhetorically about the different ways information can be organized and structured in order to meet the varying needs of users and contexts, a task that often require meta-discursive negotiations. While the categories and organizational structure of information must often be highly complex in order to meet the needs of audiences, they must also be designed in ways that disguise this complexity while enhancing usability (Rosenfeld and Morville

Information Architecture for the World Wide Web). It is from this perspective that the concept of information architecture can be used in the writing classroom not only as a way to develop rhetorically effective web sites, but also as a way to enhance student thinking about the rhetorical complexity and usability of any written text.

The kinds of online and digital writing projects supported by Internet technologies—such as developing visual or information architecture schemas and electronic documents for a website for a non-profit organization, academic department, or student organization—ask students to look at visual rhetoric, information organization, and usability concerns in terms of what makes an effective argument. By reflecting on matters of visual and information architecture and usability and as a way to meet the needs of audiences and create effective context-specific texts, students are encouraged to apply these same criteria to their own traditional and digital textual productions as well. For example, current web usability studies suggest making "the site's purpose clear: explain who you are and what you do," emphasizing the site's high-priority content in order to help readers/users find what they need or are looking for, using specifics as opposed to abstractions, and using meaningful graphics as powerful content communicators (Nielsen "Top Ten Guidelines for Homepage Usability"; Helinski "Web-Site Usability Engineering: Designing and Building a Quality Web Site"). Theories of web usability can also be particularly effective for encouraging students to think about reader-centered writing and user-centered revision because they call attention to audience considerations and the contexts of reading.

Integrating web usability criteria into writing courses, then, aids students in developing audience awareness in both traditional and digital environments.

Furthermore, web usability can be approached in the writing classroom as a type of meta-discourse; by researching, writing about, reflecting on, and actually creating web designs, students gain a meta-cognitive language of critique to apply to their own writing. Integrating Internet technologies into the writing classroom therefore encourages students to work with web usability criteria as a way to think about their own texts as pieces of visual rhetoric. As this discussion suggests, a promising area for future computer-composition research includes studying further the correlation between designing for the web and writing for more traditional paper environments.

Digital Information Management

Given the exponential increase of information available on the Internet every year, strategies for managing information and print and digital documents are essential requirements for effective writing in the digital age. It has been estimated that the

> [w]orld's total production of information amounts to about 250 megabytes for each man, woman, and child on earth. It is clear that we are all drowning in a sea of information. The challenge is to learn to swim in that sea, rather than drown in it. Better understanding and better tools are desperately needed if we are to take full advantage of the ever-increasing supply of information. (Lyman, Varian, Dunn, Strygin, and Swearingen "How Much Information?")

Newer Internet technologies can be integrated into the writing classroom in ways that gives students practice with the tools and strategies required "to take full advantage of the ever-increasing supply of information." As the rate of information production increases, the importance of gaining experience with information management increases as well.

Not only can newer technologies be used in the writing classroom to give students hands-on experience with data management tools, but they can also be integrated in ways that enhance student experience with digital information management practices such as file organization strategies and how to navigate and search increasingly complex databases.

Studying the ways that different websites, databases, or search engines manage information provides students with strategies for dealing with the proliferation of meaning and information in their own textual productions. In turn, writing courses should provide students with experience researching and organizing this information so that they can access and incorporate it into their own writing. There are a variety of newer information management skills and research strategies that are therefore important for being an effective rhetorician in the twenty-first century, including managing digital files, creating meaningful file structures, searching increasingly complex databases, and using bibliographic software. Integrating Internet technologies into the writing classroom means that students can be asked to work with digital documents, pdf documents, file attachments, file transfer protocols, and to negotiate the organization of these materials in their own textual productions as well as in their e-mail, *Blackboard* course sites, server spaces, and on their personal computers. By incorporating newer Internet technologies in the writing class, students are provided opportunities to practice newer types of information management, such as strategies for dealing with the proliferation of files and digital documents, organizing their hard drives for easy document retrieval, practicing meaningful file naming and effective saving strategies, as well as learning about appropriate computer maintenance, such as virus protection and backup practices. As

this list of newer computer-related strategies and skills suggest, digital information management is a key area of research for future computer-composition scholarship.

* * *

As computer-compositionists continue to research and theorize the practical uses to which Internet technologies can be applied in the writing classroom—uses that will take student writing as the subject of the course—it is important that they take care to avoid deploying the exaggerated rhetorics of fear, loathing, and promise. The analysis chapters of this dissertation argue that the field of computer-composition too often focuses on the student as subject, which makes it more likely that scholars will lapse back to fictive stories of student redemption or technological determinism. The danger of making students themselves the subject of any writing course is that it focuses on helping them attain personal, political, social, or cultural empowerment, when a writing course should focus on helping students learn to write more effectively for a variety of audiences in a variety of situations. Contemporary computer-composition scholarship that deploys this rhetoric of the subject can be debilitating and may not be the most effective way to help students improve their writing. This dissertation's principal contribution to the field is that it highlights the importance for computer-composition scholars to understand better how we create representations of students and perspectives in our field, the problems that arise from these representations and perspectives, and how we go about discussing the promises of integrating newer technologies into our classrooms. This dissertation further suggests that the field could benefit by developing alternative

scholarly genres that take the different ways that newer Internet technologies can support student writing and enhance writing instruction—and not students' moral redemption or social salvation—as the subject of research and debate. The field would do well to remember Dasenbrock's cautionary statement that "[i]t is deeply ironic that composition theorists . . . are now themselves displacing writing from the center of attention of the writing course" (8).

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