Inkshed

Newsletter of the Canadian Association for the Study of Language and Learning

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CONTENTS

by Graham Smart (pp. 10-14)

Virtual Presence, Virtual Absence: The Cheshire Cat Phenomenon on the Web
by John B. Killoran (pp 14-16)

Inkshed 18 Call for Papers

This issue was edited by Jo-Anne Andre, University of Calgary

Questioning Technology

Dale Jacobs

University of Windsor

Inkshed

Newsletter of the Canadian Association for the Study of Language and Learning

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This issue of *Inkshed* focuses our attention on the complex intersections between writing, teaching, and technology. The newsletter opens with Dale Jacobs' call for a critical praxis in the use of technology in our classrooms; he urges us to continually question why we are using technology and what happens when we do. This call to questioning is taken up in articles by Doug Brent, who critically examines the implications of using WebCT as a platform for delivering on-line course content, and by Graham Smart, who discusses the motivations for and effects of responding on-line to students' writing. In the closing article, John Killoran explores self-presentation in web pages and laments the ways in which issues of personal security and personal legitimacy have contributed to stifling "the full democratic flowering of discourse that compositionists might have hoped for" on the web. Finally, from the last CASLL conference comes a contribution from Laura Atkinson, Pat Sadowy, Karen Smith, and Stan Straw--a look at reasons teachers give for resisting technology in their classrooms.

Over the coming months, it's your turn to write. We've set a January 31 deadline for proposals for the May 2001 Inkshed conference (see the call for papers on the last page), and we're inviting articles for the next issue of the newsletter, which will focus on writing across the curriculum. Send your newsletter contributions to Barbara Schneider, who will take on the lead editorial role (baschnei@ucalgary.ca). ?

Happy holidays to Inkshedders one and all,

Jo-Anne Andre

From the Editor's Notepad

About Inkshed . . .

This newsletter of the *Canadian Association for the Study of Language and Learning (CASLL)* provides a forum for teachers, students, and scholars to explore relationships among research, theory, and practice in language acquisition and language use, particularly in the Canadian context. CASLL membership runs from January 1 to December 31 and includes a subscription to *Inkshed*. To subscribe, send a cheque, made out to "Inkshed at NSCAD", for $20 ($10 for students and the un[der]employed) to the following address: Kenna Manos, Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 5163 Duke Street, Halifax, NS, B3J 3J6, Canada.

Subscribers are invited to submit items of interest related to the theory and practice of reading and writing. CASLL also has a website (www.StThomasU.ca/~hunt/casll.htm) maintained by Russ Hunt. This newsletter was produced by Jo-Anne P. Kabeary, University of Calgary, Effective Writing Program.

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Inside This Issue

Technology surrounds us, even in university English departments, organizations not always known for innovation. More and more English departments are going on-line, constructing World Wide Web pages, serving as host sites for listserv discussion groups, and equipping and staffing electronic or networked classrooms. It only takes a quick look at the advertisements for composition positions in the *MLA Joblist* or the *Chronicle of Higher Education* to confirm this inexorable movement towards electronic learning and teaching in our field. Many job advertisements for composition list a requirement for such areas of expertise as computer-assisted writing, classroom technology, CAI (Computer-

Aided Instruction), instructional technology, computer-mediated learning and other designations of technological proficiency. In order to compete on the job market, new graduates feel pressure to learn computer-assisted instructional methods and to be able to talk about them with regard to the teaching of writing. Such pressure is symptomatic of what we all feel as teachers of writing and administrators of writing programs. This essay is an attempt to survey these pressures to technologize and a call for some much needed critical thinking about what we are doing when we implement technological changes to our teaching and our writing programs.

As I survey the increasingly technological landscape in English and composition studies, I am both excited and nervous about the prospects. I am no Luddite and there is a side of me that is enamored of what technology can do. I understand the drive towards technology, with departments feeling behind the curve if they are not at least making initial forays into computerized teaching. After all, the reasoning goes, the technology exists so we are remiss if we are not using it. Therefore, as teachers and administrators, we often participate, whether consciously or unconsciously, in the forces that shape departments' and individuals' efforts to implement instructional technologies. We become convinced by what Gail Hawisher and Cynthia Selfe have called the rhetoric of technology that computers will be the technological savior of writing instruction, alleviating all the problems that now exist in the writing classroom.

Moreover, it seems that English departments, marginalized as they are within many institutions, attempt to gain legitimacy through the use of instructional technology by placing themselves at the center of (or at least not outside) the information/computer revolution. Pressure to technologize instruction may be both internal and external; departments perceive the respect afforded to other departments within their own university and to English departments elsewhere that are already online, while upper level university administrators expect to see full use of the latest technology. Either way, the pressure is put on the English department and, in turn, on its composition faculty to incorporate technological advances into the classroom.

Several years ago, as a graduate student in composition, I felt this pressure, both in terms of the coming networked classroom at my institution and in terms of the job market I was soon to face. Technology seemed to be a means for individuals to gain power, especially graduate students and instructors, who are even further marginalized within university culture. Knowledge of technology and its instructional uses thus becomes a kind of intellectual currency, even, or perhaps even especially, within the humanities; that currency translates into respect and, ultimately, jobs. Such thinking is understandable within a cultural climate in which technological advances are seemingly the central concern. Universities are increasingly geared towards the sciences, both because of the research dollars that they bring in and because of the media attention they are able to generate for their institutions. More insidious is J. Hillis Miller's suggestion in the 1996 issue of *Profession* that "the shift from state and federal funding to transnational corporate funding is altering the research university and governance more radically than people yet realize," leaving the humanities little choice but to comply with the new technological order (7). In order to regain or maintain legitimacy, respect, and power within institutional contexts, then, it is not surprising that English departments are focusing on instructional technologies in much the same way that composition has often focused on scientific research methodologies. Part of what is happening, then, might be called science envy-- English departments and their individual members see the relative positions of science departments within the university and attempt to co-opt technological instructional methods in order to effect an increase in status. Technology is thus seductive in what it promises, both to departments and to individuals.

In the rush to equip computer classrooms and implement the latest technological advances in instruction, there is sometimes little thought to the pedagogical theory that underpins these classrooms and teaching practices. Both departments and individual teachers are guilty of such lack of planning and theorizing. Sound pedagogy, after all, must involve theory and practice that work in dialectic, continually questioning and informing one another in a critical praxis. It is no less important that such a relationship between theory and practice inform teaching with technology. Carolyn Handa writes, in "Politics, Ideology, and the Strange, Slow Death of the Isolated Composer or Why We Need Community in the Writing Classroom,"

We must remember, then, that in the excitement of setting up computer labs and classrooms, we could become mesmerized by the technology to the point where we forget our pedagogical goals, forget that theory applies in our computer classrooms just as much if not more than in a standard classroom; and even more crucial, that we fail to consider the politics and social webs surrounding our situations as we use the technology and adapt software. (174)

Handa explicitly calls for theorizing a pedagogy of computers and composition within particular institutional contexts. The use of technology, however, does not produce any specific or attendant pedagogy. Rather, as Mary J. Flores notes in another article in the same 1990 collection, "It is possible to use computers to preserve and strengthen the institutional status quo, or to use the technology as a means of change -- in our approaches to teaching, learning, authority, power, and knowledge" (107).

The use of technology is thus a product of context and within specific contexts, its use is never neutral. As Freire writes, "science and technology cannot escape the political and ideological implications with which they are conceived and with which they are used" (113). There must therefore be a theory underpinning the connection between technology and pedagogy and that theory must take into account the circumstances of each institution, as well as the ongoing dynamics of each class as it evolves throughout the semester.

In quoting Flores, I do not want to appear to support the binaristic argument that computers will be used either as tools for domination or as tools for liberation. Such an argument is simply a version of the computers-as-savior versus computers-as-slaver debate in which computers are either a panacea for all of society's ills or a force that undermines social relationships. The effects occur as a result of their *use*, which may have positive, negative, or mixed results for those involved. In other words, within any given situation, the results of using computers in teaching will probably yield mixed outcomes, resulting in complex power relations, questions of authority, and knowledge acquisition which cannot be classified as simply good or bad, positive or negative. It is necessary to interrogate our use of computers by continually questioning what we are doing as we implement technological innovations into our pedagogy.

But let me step back a moment. My decision to incorporate technology into the classroom was not simply a result of pressures I felt within the academy. It was also a result of societal pressure because technology surrounds us, enveloping our everyday lives in an omnipresent sense of progress. Our lives, we are told, are better because of technology, especially because of computer technology; it's simple to assume, then, that my teaching life would also be easier because computers would allow me to more easily reach my pedagogical goals. But the rhetoric of technology can create expectations about outcomes that cannot possibly be fulfilled. Further, an atheoretical focus on the practical benefits of technology obscures our vision of the larger picture. As Cynthia Selfe argued in 1990,

[an] atheoretical perspective . . . not only constrains our current educational uses of computers, but also seriously limits our vision of what might be accomplished with computer technology in a broader social, cultural, or educational context. Until we examine the impact of computer technology on language and society from a theoretical perspective, we will continue, myopically and unsystematically, to define the isolated pieces of the puzzle in our separate classrooms and discrete research studies. Until we share some theoretical vision of this topic, we will never glimpse the larger social or educational picture that could give our everyday classroom efforts direction and meaning. (119)

Clearly, Selfe saw the consequences of ignoring a theoretical perspective in favor of a purely practical orientation, a concern that is just as relevant some ten years later. On the other hand, she is not arguing for theory divorced of context. Instead, Selfe argues that theory and practice must inform one another and that the use of existing theoretical frameworks will help compositionists to understand technology's potential in literacy education.

Selfe begins to articulate her own response to this important challenge by using the lens of feminist theory to examine computers and writing instruction. She chooses feminist theory because it "allows us to look critically at the context of what we now know, of how we currently use and see computers, in order to rethink the relationship between techno/power and literacy and then reconstruct the role computers could play in our literacy efforts" (121). She thus turns her attention from explicit attention to hardware, software, and descriptive analysis to a larger theoretical discussion which attempts to place computers within a larger social, educational, and cultural context, while at the same time acknowledging and examining local contexts.

Theorizing and problematizing technology at all stages of its implementation and use are necessary and essential activities to the continued vitality of computers and writing pedagogy. Questioning and theorizing in relation to practice guard against complacency and ensure opinions and interpretations, whether about pedagogy or about technology, do not become orthodoxy. Here I want to draw on Lisa Gerrard's words in "Computers and Composition: Rethinking Our Values." She writes,

Theory helps us understand what we're doing. It provides us with questions, goals, a vocabulary for talking about our work, strategies for revising it, and a common frame of reference for sharing it with one another. But theory has a reciprocal relationship with practice and should be valued alongside it, not above it. Theory grows out of what we do in the classroom and conditions what we bring back to the classroom. Without practice, it wouldn't exist. (31)

To put it simply, Gerrard was calling for praxis, for a dialogically informing relationship between theory and practice in which each is indispensable to the other.

As writing teachers, we have to pay critical and self-reflective attention to technology because it provides one of the de facto contexts of our professional lives. As Stanley Aronowitz writes, ". . . just as it is futile to mourn the passing of the horse and carriage, there are really no alternatives to computer and electronic mediations of everyday life. Technology has become the new form of life; the only issue is how to harness it . . ." (121). Though technology sets many of the boundaries for our pedagogical work within institutions of higher education, it is nonetheless both possible and necessary for us to theorize how best to operate within those boundaries. This knowledge, coupled with an awareness of technology's seductive power and tendency to obscure one's pedagogical vision, is essential as we think about the place of technology within the teaching of writing.

The explosion of technological innovations poses a number of questions involving the ways in which we, both as departments and as individual teachers, conceive our uses of the World Wide Web, Internet, Usenet, and electronic mail, as well as networked classrooms equipped with interactive software such as *Daedalus*. Such critical questioning is an attempt to locate our actions and relationship to technology within specific institutional contexts by projecting the possible future outcomes of our actions, examining what has structured our current situations, and re-examining what actually happened as a result of our technological actions. I have attempted to show some of the pressures and movements within English and Composition studies that have combined to locate the current and ongoing implementation of computer technology within the field of writing pedagogy. Of course these are not the only factors and each institution, each department, and each teacher will need to perform a more specific archaeology of location, taking into account both the national trends I have outlined and the specific contexts within which each resides. Having done so, we need to problematize our uses of technology, asking ourselves specific, contextual questions within a theorized pedagogical framework that informs and is informed by practice. Why do we want to implement this specific technology within our teaching? What outcomes do we expect? Who is being served by this technology? Who is authorized to speak? How is information exchanged? What are the power relations that are constituted by this technology? In what ways does this technology reproduce and/or resist existing conditions of oppression, hegemony, and silence? In what ways does it open up or close off the possibility for dialogue? Is there a space for critical thinking about the technology itself? Is there a space for students to position themselves in relation to this technology? In what ways does the technology help students to become reflective language practitioners? In what ways can we as teachers be self-reflective about uses of technology in the classroom? In essence, then, it is necessary to ask questions that are both critical and pragmatic.

By pragmatic, I refer not to the bottom line, but to "a triadic conception of the way beliefs and actions connect; action based on belief continuously tested by experience and in a spirit of readiness and perpetual inquiry" (Roskelly and Ronald 87). Being critical and pragmatic means becoming self-reflective about our histories, locations, and discourse practices, including the discourse of technology; it means critically questioning our circumstances and the ways in which we are situated in and by discourse. It means attending to specific contexts, whether in individual institutions or in individual classes, and being willing to engage in departmental or university-wide dialogue about the use of computers in the teaching of writing. It means continually questioning the reasons for our actions, the possible outcomes that might result from them, and the actual results as they happen. It means attending to both theory and practice, combining them into a mutually informing praxis that is always self-reflective and always questioning of itself.

The pressure to technologize has put English departments in general and compositionists in particular under a great deal of pressure to integrate these new instructional technologies into their writing curricula. Unfortunately, there is seldom the time or the expertise available to plan for the ways in which computer technology will fit into the pedagogical structure of the curriculum as a whole. Instead, what often happens is that computers are purchased and installed prior to any departmental conversation about how they will be used in the classroom and what pedagogical

goals and outcomes they will support. Or worse, there is no departmental dialogue of any kind about the new equipment and each individual teacher is left to grapple with the technology on his or her own. Given the sheer amount of technical information that needs to be learned about any new technology and the incredible rate of innovation in both hardware and software design, it is almost overwhelming just to keep abreast of its possible classroom uses, let alone to theorize those uses. It's easy, then, for the individual teacher to feel lost in a sea of technology--the head is just enough above water not to drown, but never enough to think about how to build a boat. Still, a pragmatic and critical approach to the questioning of technology is absolutely essential if one is not eventually to succumb to the waters, either letting one's teaching fall into the service of technology or abandoning technology completely. As individual teachers, it is necessary to cast a critical eye to what we are doing when we use computers and other technology in the writing classroom. Departments, however, can facilitate such individual theorizing by doing some initial planning before the implementation of technology, asking, at the curricular level, some of the same questions that individual teachers need to ask about the pedagogical reasons for the introduction of computer technology into the classroom.

There is no easy solution to uncovering and understanding the multilayered grammar of technology and schooling. It is therefore important that teachers and administrators theorize and question the pedagogical uses of technology at all stages of the process. As Chris Anson writes, "Our key roles--as those who create opportunities and contexts for students to write and who provide expert, principled responses to that writing must change in the present communications and information revolution. But we cannot let the revolution sweep over us. We need to guide it, resisting its economic allure in cases where is weakens the principles of our teaching" (275). Theorizing the use of instructional technology, therefore, is an instrumental and ongoing process in which the end of one class becomes the starting point for another round of questioning and thinking. Questioning technology involves not only the how, but, more importantly, the why.?

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I have been supplementing courses with web-based materials for many years. Last year I tried WebCT, one of the new breed of web courseware authoring packages available to make our jobs somewhat easier. I came away from the experience impressed by many of the technical advantages of WebCT, but troubled by some of the politics which, I wish to argue, are embedded in the structure of the courseware package itself. I use WebCT as the exemplar of this family of software, but I would further argue that the embedded politics of this family of software go far beyond the specific merits or demerits of any particular version.

First, what is a web courseware authoring package? Briefly, WebCT (Web Course Tools) and its cousins, Virtual U, Blackboard and the like, are packages of tools that simplify the technical side of creating (for the instructor) and using (for the student) the vast range of teaching opportunities that the Internet affords. You can use WebCT if your university has paid for a site license, in which case you will have access to the tools on a secure server. As an instructor, you are presented with blank web page and an array of utilities for uploading and linking files. The system also includes e-mail, asynchronous conferencing and synchronous chat. Your students do not need to figure out the complexities of signing onto newsgroups or finding their way about in a MOO. They use any web browser to point and click on the page you have set up. Seamlessly (more or less) they will be in whichever virtual space you have designed for the exercise at hand. (See below for more on WebCT.)

For the instructor, panoptic surveillance is also made easy. A keystroke can tell you how many logins each student has made (though you must still read the postings to see if he or she has said anything intelligent). In other ways, though, the universe of a WebCT course is a very private one. The page can only be accessed by password. Partly this smooths the way for the posting of copyrighted materials: publishers are much more comfortable granting copyright clearance if they know that not everyone in the world will be able to access their materials. More important, students who are not used to speaking frankly in the highly public sphere of the Internet may be able to engage in much freer discussion knowing that only their classmates will be able to read their postings.

This system has a number of obvious technical advantages. However, I have a number of problems with the philosophy behind the system. All technologies are products of a particular social environment. More disturbingly, once developed they tend to reproduce the social environment in which they were developed. To borrow terminology from Russ Hunt, Internet tools, like all tools, afford certain things and certain beliefs -- make them easy -- and constrain others -- make them hard. Unless we understand these affordances and constraints, we will tend to drift, consciously or unconsciously, in the direction that the tools' winds blow.

Here are three aspects of WebCT, ranged roughly in order of importance, which seem to me to offer certain affordances and constraints that I believe should make us wary:

1. It's too tidy.

This complaint, of course, is perverse because it is the very tidiness of the system that makes it attractive. But my problem is that it's tidy not just in the sense of offering a technically simple interface. It's also tidy in the sense of offering a simplified and closed universe.

One of my goals in teaching Web-supported courses goes beyond the teaching of the content and skills specific to the course at hand. My larger goal is to expose students systematically to the world of the Internet itself: the messy, baggy, porous world of intersecting conversations and overlapping communities. When they sign onto a newsgroup or walk into a MOO, they are entering a world where their words are public and where they can listen publicly to the words of others. They can end up signing onto a dozen newsgroups other than the ones set up for the class, start exchanging e-mail with people on the other side of the world, read an infinite number of documents which may or may not be directly related to the agenda of the course. Most won't, of course: I won't pretend that many students go very far from what's going to be on the exam. But at least they see the edges of the Internet's hugely expansive universe.

But not in WebCT. This universe is closed. They can only sign onto the forums that have been set up for the class, only send e-mail to each other. They are sitting in front of a web browser, so in theory they can read anything they want, but the built-in tendency of the system presses in the direction of reading the course materials. Since the outside

world cannot get past the password, they cannot even fantasize that some day someone unconnected with the course will read their words while searching for something else, and perhaps, just perhaps, find them interesting.

2. It won't let us look over each other's shoulders. . .

When I sat down to start designing a WebCT course, I realized that I had no models. I am used to spending odd moments poking around other people's course-related sites, borrowing a little bit of this idea and a little of that from people who may be close friends or perfect strangers. I try to ask permission and give credit where it's due if I reuse any chunks of text, but it's seldom chunks of text that I'm after. It's inspiration: I can see how dozens of other teachers have structured their courses and model mine after the ones I think are most successful.

WebCT won't let me do this unless someone chooses to invite me in and supplies me with a guest password. This is more than merely inconvenient. It subverts a culture of exchange that most of us who create web-supported environments depend on more than we perhaps know. We all know how much we have learned from observing each other's teaching. The Internet has afforded an environment in which the fantasy of being able to drop in on each other's classrooms has become a reality. But not in WebCT.

3. It privileges text over performance.

This last kvetch, related to the other two, is in my opinion the most troubling. The WebCT course can masquerade as just "courseware," as a packaged, protected commodity. The password stands as a symbol that what has been developed has taken considerable time and money -- often institutional money -- to develop, and that people should not expect to view it unless they have paid their money to take the course.

This offends my sense of Internet culture, a culture based on the vaguely socialistic theory that more information is better for everyone--else why put it on the web in the first place? But more important than this vague "gift culture" of the Internet is a culture of teaching as performance. According to this culture, stable texts from the textbook to class handouts make up no more than a substructure on which the real work of teaching is mounted. The real work of teaching occurs in the class, where texts, including the instructor's more or less detailed lecture notes (ideally) come alive in an unfolding day-by-day performance of knowledge, a dynamic interaction between student and teacher and student and student that is never the same twice.

This dynamic interaction can certainly be textualized. The essence of any on-line distance course is in the discussion groups in which the daily give-and-take of classroom interaction unfolds in textual form. This does not particularly bother me. What bothers me is the suspicion that the felt need for a password affords a quite different view of education, in which an unauthorized viewer of the texts is truly taking something of value. It says that the course is little more than the sum of its texts. It is a relatively short slide from this notion to the related one that the important person in the course is the course "author," who is paid for his or her expertise while the people who do the "real" work of the course, the people who manage the day to day interactions with students, can be "tutorial instructors" who are in one way or another out of the academic mainstream.

Of course it is not just web packages that cause this mindset. It has been part of education, especially in large-sectioned courses with tutorial sections, practically forever. It is accentuated in any distance-education model in which the context requires additional textualization of the daily performance of education. But the password-protected "courseware" that web packages afford carries with it the danger of sliding further and further into thinking that there is something precious about the texts around which a course is structured, as if these were really what education is.

It is this feeling that I am ultimately disturbed by. Partly I am worried about the effect of "courseware" thinking on university administrators in this era of revenue generation--always a concern, and I could tell you lots of stories about that if I had more time. But I am more worried about its effect on us as teachers, who may be quietly led by the tendencies of our medium to think that our job is to "write" a "course" which is then sold as a packaged commodity rather than as an unfolding experience.

Read me carefully here. I am by no means arguing against distance learning, in which the textualization of performance is to some extent natural and inevitable. Nor am I intending to fixate on this or that feature of a particular

package--features which may just as well be different in the next release. What I am disturbed by is a *package of thinking* that makes passwords seem natural, closed universes worth their cost, and product more valuable than performance.

Notwithstanding the above, I don't reject web courseware authoring tools. As I write, I am already supervising the development of a new all-distance course, and we will almost certainly use WebCT for the many conveniences it provides as opposed to gluing together the usual bricolage of internet tools. If I'm a Luddite at least I know when to quit. But I also keenly aware of the degree to which technologies have politics. My advice is to keep using these tools for the conveniences they can offer. But please, please keep being disturbed.?

WITHOUT TECHNOLOGY	TEACHER COMMENTS
Teachers retain ownership of their materials.	"I'm not giving away my information to online education. They won't need me anymore once they have my stuff."
Teachers maintain better class control.	"How can I be a media mentor when the students interact more with the machine than me?"
Teachers avoid legal action.	"Who know what students are looking at on the Web? Filters just don't work."
Students do not take on the bad habits of their teachers.	"I look like a fool." (Teachers have fears and problems with technology that could be transferred to students.)
Students do not waste time on things they already know.	"Students know how to use technology anyway. Why bother teaching it?"
Students appreciate literature through the intended genre	"Shakespeare didn't use a laptop."
Students "get to the meat" of learning	"Technology just gets in the way of my teaching."
Students perform well on their exams.	"I'm being evaluated on how well my students perform on English exams and the integration of technology is not part of that testing."
The workplace is less stressful.	"I was eager to use technology but the system just wasn't set up to handle it successfully. . . So I gave up trying."

Web Courseware Authoring Packages:

Some Troubled Thoughts

Doug Brent

University of Calgary

Since responding to student work on-line demands significantly more of an instructor's time than responding on paper does, the question arises of when and how the practice adds value to instruction. In what situations does responding on-line offer clear advantages over responding on paper? Does responding on-line lead to improved revisions and contribute to students' writing development over time, and if so, in what ways? And finally, what new opportunities might on-line responding offer the teacher-researcher for examining the multi-faceted processes of student writing? To begin to explore these questions, I carried out research with students in two writing classes. This narrative explains my

motivations for moving to on-line responding, describes my approach, and discusses some of the pedagogical outcomes.

Some background

My research involved 37 students in two classes in Purdue's undergraduate Professional Writing major: 19 students in English 306, *Introduction to Professional Writing*, and 18 in English 203, *Research Methods in Professional Writing*. Both classes met twice a week in a classroom equipped with Power Mac computers, a variety of software, and access to the Internet. The primary goal of the Professional Writing classes--to help students develop the abilities needed to work as technical writers, editors, and writing/publishing specialists in different organizations--included acquiring expertise in a range of writing-related technologies. Both classes were organized around a number of writing projects, with each project involving the production of a series of related documents. Some of the writing was done individually and some collaboratively.

My main purpose in introducing on-line responding in my classes was to see whether it might help students learn to use feedback more effectively and thus develop more rapidly as writers. As well, I wanted to expand the range of my own pedagogy as an instructor. My approach to responding on-line functioned as follows: students would send their written work to me electronically as an e-mail attachment; I would then annotate the electronic copies with comments, questions, and suggestions and return these copies to the students, again on-line. In the case of drafts, the students would (I hoped) use my feedback to produce an improved final version of the document. In addition to providing regularly scheduled feedback during the project cycle, I established the groundrule that students could submit any part of a draft of any document to me for feedback (without the work being graded) and I would provide quick a turn-around, giving them a chance to revise the text before the deadline.

I responded to texts on several different levels, with all the feedback being rhetorically framed, part of a larger on-going conversation with the students about producing reader-centered texts. My response might, for example, convey a concern about the writer's awareness of audience; indicate places in a text where I couldn't understand the meaning or line of argument; or comment on issues such as organization, coherence, sentence structure, word choice, format conventions, visual presentation, or mechanics (gram- mar, punctuation, and spelling). (Please see Appendix A for a sample annotated student text.)

The research

I was interested in accomplishing three things through the research: learning about the students' perceptions of when, and in what ways, on-line responding offers advantages over feedback on paper; identifying the types of revisions students would produce and the kinds of improvements they would make to papers; and seeing what larger gains in learning might be realized.

In researching these questions I relied on three sources of data: questionnaires filled out by students in the two classes, textual analysis of sequential drafts of student work, and my own observations over the course of the semester. (Please see Appendix B for the questionnaire .)

The findings (so far)

After initial analysis of the data, I can point to a number of recurring themes in the students' perceptions about on-line responding:

On-line feedback on drafts, with an opportunity to revise a paper prior to submitting a final version, was very helpful; however, on-line feedback on a final product was more or less irrelevant (presumably because the students didn't bother to look at it).

The convenience factor was important: students could e-mail me drafts whenever and from wherever (home or school) they wished, my feedback on the drafts was more timely, and the students could access that feedback more quickly. Further, because much of the research required for class projects could be done on the Internet, getting on-line feedback meant that students had access to everything they needed through the computer when sitting down to work on

a piece of writing.

Receiving on-line feedback helped to counter procrastination because the draft--feedback--revision cycle tended to encourage more continuity in students' work.

On-line feedback was easier to work with in making revisions than on-paper feedback, for a number of reasons: it was easier to read than my handwriting; the feedback seemed more immediate and "live" than comments on paper; the feedback was right there on the computer screen along with the draft, so the student didn't need to look back and forth from a paper copy to the screen; and comments inserted into the body of the text rather than in the margins were easier for students to understand.

Students were conscious of making the following kinds of revisions: adding new information, reorganizing content, adding or changing headings, and correcting grammar errors.

My feedback appeared to be of a higher quality (it was more "in-depth") when provided on-line in the form of annotations to a draft.

On-line feedback is best when it is in color and formatted differently from the student's text, so that it stands out more clearly.

Saving paper was viewed as important.

While it is fair to say that, on the whole, the students found on-line responding to have clear advantages over feedback on paper, there were some dissenting opinions. These included the views that on-line responding disadvantaged students without access to email from home and that it is easier to work with feedback on paper because opening and closing documents on the computer is cumbersome.

Over the semester, I myself observed a number of pedagogical advantages to on-line responding: The students did much more revising of documents than in previous paper-bound classes I had taught, and generally the revisions appeared to be more substantive and meaningful and to reflect a greater awareness of audience. I also observed that many students got used to taking the initiative in asking for feedback where this was a voluntary step for them, appearing to see themselves as being more in control of their own composing process. As well, some students seemed to develop a new understanding of how writing works: because they were able to revise different parts of a document at different times, students appeared to view writing as both process and artifact, to see a text as evolving organically over time; to see how the different parts of a document fit and function together as an integrated whole; and to see the instructor's feedback as instrumental and helpful rather than only evaluative.

Plans for further analysis and research

I intend to do more analysis of the data gathered in the two classes. For example, I will look more closely at the types of revisions the students made to their written work and consider the kinds of feedback that appeared to be most effective in prompting students to improve their texts. I will also look for patterns of growth in the students as writers over the course of the semester, to see what gains in learning might be attributed to the practice of on-line responding. In similar research with future writing classes, I plan to interview students in order to supplement and explore the information provided by the questionnaires. ?

Note: This paper was originally presented as part of *Writing at the Interface*, an on-line conference on writing and technology, hosted by Purdue University in December 1999.

Appendix A: Annotated Student Draft

Overall, you've made very good progress with this report over the last week. Below I've annotated the draft with a number of comments, questions, and suggestions for you to consider as you produce your final version. Let me know if you have any questions.

Memorandum

To: Professor Graham Smart, Instructor, English 306

From: Student, English 306

Date: April 25, 1999

Subject: Recommendation Report: Draft

[In the final version of the report, use a more specific subject line--something like "A Recommendation to Improve the Professional Writing Major."] As you have requested, I have taken a look at the feedback I've been given on the problem analysis, alternative solutions, and requirements/constraints sections of the Recommendation Report. I have thought about how these sections might be further developed. Additionally, I have drafted each of these three sections and now submit them to you for additional comments.

Problem Analysis: What's wrong with ENGL 305? ***[A good descriptive title--though, as you'll see below, I don't think it really reflects the nature of the problem you're trying to get at.]*** The problem with English 305: Introduction to Creative Writing (ENGL 305) has nothing to do with its curricular content. The problem with this course lies in its relation to the rest of the courses offered in the Professional Writing (PW) program at Purdue University. As the program is currently designed, there are two paths a student can follow. One option is to pursue Creative Writing ***[The option is actually referred to a "Writing for the Arts."]*** and take courses that emphasize topics in that area. The other option is to follow a sequence of courses that emphasize***[s]*** Technical Writing. Before choosing one of these paths and following it, all students in the PW program must take three courses. English 203, Introduction to Research in Professional Writing, English 306 Introduction to Professional Writing, and English 305, Introduction to Creative Writing.

ENGL 305 places an unequal emphasis on the Creative Writing portion of the Professional Writing curriculum ***[Does 305 do this, or is it the design of the PW major?]*** It is that inequality which causes the problem. All PW majors are required to take ENGL 305, but there is no required course that emphasizes the Technical Writing side of the PW curriculum. There is not an equal emphasis on both sides of the program in the required initial courses. This has several implications. Among these a curriculum that produces well-rounded writers, student choice, and preparation for upper-level PW courses are of the utmost concern. ***[I find this paragraph a little confusing. I'm not sure what you're getting at. Can you clarify your meaning?]***

The first and perhaps the most obvious problem with is that students who choose to study Technical Writing are forced to take a class in the Creative Writing area. Students who follow Creative Writing path are not required to take a course in the Technical Writing area. What is the reasoning behind cross-area requirements? If the idea is to make students well-rounded, by offering a course outside of one's concentration, why is there no introductory course in Technical Writing that is required for all students in the PW Program?

Second comes the responsibility of the program to provide the opportunity for students to become informed and make decisions based on information, rather than be told what classes to take, or forced into taking classes which do not meet their needs. ***[I find this somewhat confusing as well. Can you elaborate on your view here a little?]***

Finally, preparation for upper-level courses in the PW curriculum is compromised by the current arrangement of courses. This is done both by only offering ENGL 305 and not an Introductory Technical Writing Course, and by ENGL 305 being required by all students in the PW major. ***[You're circling around a problem in this section, but it's not at all clear what it is. I think that in part this is because you've announced that the problem is English 305, when actually you're pointing to what you see as a problem in the PW major as a whole. For your report to work, you*** **must** ***present a clear representation of the problem in this section.]***

Alternative Solutions: Possibilities in the PW curriculum

[You've made a good start on this section, but you need to develop it further. You want to convey the impression

that you've put considerable thought into identifying several feasible alternatives and analyzing the pros and cons of each.] The Professional Writing Program at Purdue is far from horrible, and certainly worth improving. There are several ways ***[How many are you going to present?]*** one could go about changing the way classes in the PW curriculum are presented in order to make it even better. It could be left as it is, without changes ***[see my comment below]***. ENGL 305 could change from a required course to a "recommended" course. A new course, which emphasizes Technical Writing, could be added. Any of these solutions has both advantages and disadvantages.

There is always the possibility of leaving the program the way it is. This has the advantages of being easy to implement and having known outcomes. However, nothing can improve by staying the same. Change is required for growth. Leaving the PW program structured exactly the same has the disadvantage of not exploiting the opportunity to become better. ***[Given that above you've discussed the problems with the status quo, I wouldn't include it as an "alternative solution."]***

[Use a formatting device such as subheadings or numbering to indicate where the discussion of each alternative solution begins.]

[I'd suggest starting with a topic sentence saying something like, "One alternative solution would be to ."] By changing the nature of ENGL 305 from a required course to a recommended course, the advantage is gained of easy implementation. ***[?]*** Students have a choice as to whether they take ENGL 305 and become introduced to Creative Writing, or they have the option of taking a ***[another?]*** course that will strengthen their plan of study if they are following the Technical Writing side of the curriculum. Unfortunately, this option does not provide a clear direction in which to travel. That is, students would have to choose a course to replace ENGL 305. This has the disadvantage of not giving students the direction they might need in choosing such a course ***[I'm not sure what you're getting at here.]***.

Yet another solution would be to create a new course. It could have a title like "Introduction to Technical Writing." This course, Introduction to Professional Writing, could be offered as an alternative to English 305: Introduction to Creative Writing. This solution has the advantage of keeping the things about ENGL 305 that are positive, like providing an opportunity for PW students to become more well-rounded. It also has the benefit of creating a course which can better prepare students for upper-level Technical Writing courses just as ENGL 305 does for upper level Creative Writing Courses ***[It's more a question of preparing students for the "writing in the Arts" strand of the major.]***

Requirements / Constraints: Restrictions on implementation

[This section should deal with the requirements or constraints that any acceptable solution would need to address. Look through it and pull out any ideas that follow this theme; as well, look carefully to see whether some of the material would fit into other parts of the report.] Each of the proposed solutions has some restrictions on its implementation. Regardless of which solution is chosen, there are some problems with curriculum change in general that are addressed below:

(Should I include my concerns about implementation with each solution?)

Assuming that a change would be made to the curriculum, how should the change be made? Should a course be removed, added, or modified? If a course is added, how will it fit into the current plan of study?. How will students who are currently in the PW program be affected by the change? These are all questions that have to be answered before a change to the curriculum can be made.

(Should I address each of the questions above in a separate paragraph?)

As a student in the Professional Writing program, I have asked myself, "If I am studying to be a Technical Writer, why do I have to take Introduction to Creative Writing? Why isn't there a course that serves as an introduction to Technical Writing"? This issue begs the question, how valid is student opinion? Should the English Department act on research done by a student who is currently in the program?

A change in the curricular requirements will affect students in the program. Some solutions will only affect students studying Technical Writing. Other solution will affect students in both Creative Writing and Technical Writing programs. Additionally, changes in the courses offered will change the way that faculty administers the courses. If courses are added, instructors must teach more classes or additional instructors must be hired ***[Some research here, such as an interview with a faculty member, would have told you that neither of these options are possible, given the demands on faculty to do research/publish and the constraints on hiring.]***

Technical Writing is a more recent development in curriculum than Creative Writing. Is there a possibility that Technical Writing just hasn't had time to develop coursework that might have a parallel structure to that of Creative Writing? How does the fact that PW courses are offered as a "service courses" for students who are not in the PW major to take as an option to fill their requirements affect the content of the courses. How would a change in the curriculum affect those students and their curriculums?

Some of the more far-reaching implications that might restrict how this problem is solved involve development trends in Technical Writing curriculum. Other Technical Writing programs have all the courses in the major whereas our program must augmented with minor or an additional concentration. Our program may in fact be of a better design. Changes that detract from the positive aspects of our curriculum are not necessarily for the best. ***[As I'm sure your aware, you need to add a final section laying out your recommendation and providing a rationale for it.]***

As I mentioned at the beginning of the draft, you've made really good progress on this project. I think you're in very good shape now to produce your final version of the report.

Appendix B: Questionnaire on On-Line

Responses

Over the course of the semester you have received feedback on your written work from me on-line. I would like to get a sense of how well this has worked for you. Getting your perspective will help me decide how to employ this practice in the future. I would appreciate your taking a few minutes to respond to the questions below.

1. At what points in the writing process do you find it helpful to receive feedback on-line. In other words, when do you see "added value" over getting feedback on a paper copy of your work?

2. Do you see any clear advantages to receiving on-line feedback (compared to on-paper feedback)?

3. Could you say something about the ways in which you've been able to use my on-line responses to revise and/or edit work-in-progress?

4. Do you see disadvantages to getting feedback on-line rather than on paper?

5. Do you have any other comments about receiving feedback on-line?

Responding On-Line to Students' Written Work:

When and How Does It Add Value?

Graham Smart

Purdue University

Virtual Presence, Virtual Absence:

The Cheshire Cat Phenomenon on the Web

John B. Killoran

Brock University

As someone who has been researching the Web since the mid-1990's, I confess that my own contribution to the new medium is rather inconspicuous: functional but formulaic Web sites for all my courses and my embarrassingly modest CV page. I am certainly not alone in my on-line coyness, even among other researchers of computer-mediated communication, some of whom themselves maintain little or no Web presence.

But as a professional writing professor with an intellectual home within the composition-rhetoric community, I remain dissatisfied that the new medium--promising, in principle, a new civic agora--has not produced the full democratic flowering of discourse that compositionists might have hoped for. A careful study by John Buten (1996) found that only 6% of those who had the technical access to post a homepage had bothered to do so (cf. Sugimoto & Levin, 2000, p.148). Of those who had bothered, Buten found that their motives were oriented not just to the new medium's rhetorical opportunities but frequently to the new medium's instrumental functions; for many, constructing a homepage was a means of learning HTML, and the resulting homepage was a convenient repository for favourite hyperlinks.

Exploring the nature of both our rhetorical presence on and absence from the Web is among the aims of my research. Based on my survey of 106 personal homepage publishers and my analysis of their personal homepages, I have observed a tentativeness in our Web presence, a condition I nickname the Cheshire Cat Phenomenon: even those who make some presence for themselves in the new wonderland stop well short of a full presence. I'd like to single out two related deterrents to a more substantial Web presence: a legitimate canniness about exposing ourselves in public, and the illegitimacy of taking our self-exposure too seriously.

Personal Security

First, the common preoccupation with the mechanical hurdle of constructing a personal homepage overshadows the more exhilarating but disconcerting social hurdle of exhibiting oneself, at least in one's imagination, in front of an international population of strangers, a hurdle not always easily overcome. Perhaps as a consequence, personal homepage publishers, despite the label "personal homepages," do not regularly display much of their personhood. Tim Berners-Lee, the inventor of the Web, has expressed disappointment in how personal homepages have diverged from his earlier, idealistic vision of the Web's potential for personal and family domains:

[T]he personal home page is not a private expression; it's a public billboard. . . . It's openness, and it's great in a way, it's people letting the community into their homes. But it's not really home. They may call it a home page, but it's more like the gnome in somebody's front yard than the home itself. ("The interview," 1996)

Understandably, displaying the gnome reduces the possibility of being unmasked in "real life" outside of the security of the Web. For instance, close to 45% of my sample of personal homepages did not make readily accessible even such basic personal information as their author's full name. Yet many of those authors nevertheless conspicuously displayed their first name or went through the trouble of inventing an alias, suggesting a paradoxical desire for both anonymity and personability.

On the Web, as in real life, privacy and security are especially concerns for women. One participant, a woman in her early twenties, explained how she took precautions on her site: "I tried not to reveal too much info about myself because I don't want an internet stalker." She is one of among 16 participants whose sites identified themselves primarily with an alias. Another female participant, whose resume page revealed not only her name but also other identifying information, related that she had received an "obscene e-mail" one night. She said, . . . I got nervous that it revealed a little too much information about me." She went on to explain that, as a precaution, she took her resume off-line.

Personal Legitimacy

Others, of course, much less circumspect, unabashedly publish what one of my survey respondents calls "vanity pages." But to the degree that such sites are literally personal homepages, consisting of what another respondent characterizes as "ego enhancing fluff," they also attract some derision for their egocentric preoccupations and thereby bear the stigma of illegitimacy.

Much of what I observed in my study seemed to be a reaction against discourses of media legitimacy, those voices -- of the ecom's, .org's, .gov's, and .edu's -- that are perceived to have both things to say and the warrant to say them. In response, participants' sites emulate organizational and media discourses, or mock such discourses, or go out of their way to flagrantly reject such discourses. Regardless, the subtext of Web legitimation remains: the prestige of those -- primarily organizations -- who have it versus the discursive awkwardness of those -- primarily individuals -- who don't.

Among the strongest independent claims of legitimacy come from authors who can justify their Web publishing as a contribution not to themselves but to the medium and its users. For instance, one participant's narrative of how she came to publish a site about hosting cocktail parties characterizes the aspirations of several participants for being helpful by occupying an unoccupied niche: "I turned to the Web to gather information on throwing a cocktail party but came up short. After having figured out how to throw one I put the information on the Web so like-minded people would have a page on which to find the necessary information." Would she have done so had there already been sites about cocktail parties? Individuals like her recognize the Web to be a marketplace of information and join it only after waiting for a niche they can exploit with marketable offerings. Personal information, however -- and her site carries little -- is not perceived to be as marketable.

Alice Online

Neither of these Web problems -- personal security and personal legitimacy -- are, strictly speaking, the traditional focus of composition teachers, but as both may stifle our students, a response to both may inevitably become a necessary part of composition pedagogy. Regularly since 1996, I have had students research and construct Web sites. The more plausible the assignment, the more estranged my students' work seems to become from their own lives. My little success in having students develop sites speaking meaningfully on their own behalf as citizens increasingly confirms my suspicions that Web writing may ultimately be limited largely to the professional writing canon, not something that we will do regularly as citizen-rhetors.

Nevertheless, with the Web, we have only just been newly admitted to the mass media and so are still only starting to figure out what we can do there. Like a herd of Cheshire Cats, we now pose inscrutably but offer little behind our beaming Web facades. Our coyness is not, I suspect, a personal but a social issue. Perhaps most needed for our future presence in the mass media is not technical help but role models, credible models of how to become purposeful virtual citizens, perhaps a bit more like Alice.?

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Teachers Resist Innovations: Innovations Teachers Resist

Laura Atkinson, Pat Sadowy, Karen Smith, Stan Straw

University of Manitoba

This chart was distributed at Inkshed 2000.

Newsletter of the Canadian Association for the Study of Language and Learning
Volume 21, Number 3, Autumn 2004

Contents

I am my words;
My words are me

You are your words;
Your words are you

I am your words;
Your words are me

You are my words;
My words are you.

From *Alphabet Blocks*
✍

This issue was edited by Heather Graves and Roger Graves, DePaul University (Chicago). It is accessible through the Inkshed Web site, at http://www.stu.ca/inkshed.

About Inkshed . . .

This newsletter of the Canadian Association for the Study of Language and Learning (CASLL) provides a forum for its subscribers to explore relationships among research, theory, and practice in language acquisition and language use, particularly in the Canadian context. CASLL membership runs from January 1 to December 31 and includes a subscription to Inkshed. To subscribe, send a cheque, made out to "Inkshed at NSCAD," for $20 [$10 for students and the un(der)employed] to the following address:

Kenna Manos, Nova Scotia College of Art and Design,
5163 Duke Street,
Halifax, Nova Scotia, B3J 3J6
Canada ✍

Subscribers are invited to submit items of interest related to the theory and practice of reading and writing. CASLL also has a website—www.stu.ca/~hunt/casll.htm—maintained by Russ Hunt.

Submissions

Please submit newsletter contributions (preferably via email in APA format) to the editors:

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Inkshed editors and editorial consultants, past and present, include the following:

From the Editors' Desktops ✍

Fresh off a lesson in how easy it is to take for granted the work of the past editors of the Inkshed Newsletter, we've become aware of a number of items that we'd previously been blissfully unaware of and think merit some discussion.

- Should we establish and publicize a formal review policy? This would give those of our community who desire and need it an option that they could request; a note explaining that the manuscript in question had been reviewed in this way would be attached to the published article.

- Should we re-establish a print edition? Have you read the Newsletter lately? Would you be more likely to read it more thoroughly or at all if it came to you rather than you going to view or print it? The editors are of two minds about this, and we'd be interested in hearing what others have to say about it.

- When authors quote student work, should the names of the students be changed to preserve anonymity?

- Is it e-mail or email? How about inkshedders or Inkshedders? /Potayeto/ or /potahto/ (we'll defer to the PEI members on this one)?

Email the CASLL list with your comments or, better still, take a position and write a short piece for the Newsletter.

This issue contains words worth your time. Jim Gough writes about reading, and specifically about how the writing and reading dynamic has evolved in his Women and Philosophy course. Wendy Kraglund-Gauthier leads us towards zen-like insights waiting for students at the Saint Francis Xavier writing center. Margaret Procter explains why Gerald Graff would call Chicago students (and others) clueless. Carl Leggo explores the alphabet as a scaffolding strategy in three poems. Russ Hunt takes another kick at the Microsoft can, with Amanda Goldrick-Jones contributing her own dent or two.

We hope you'll peruse two other items as well: Wendy Kraglund-Gauthier's invitation to participate in a research study, and the call for papers for Inkshed 22.

Roger Graves *Heather Graves*

The Writer Becomes Reader and the Reader Becomes Writer

Jim Gough ✍

There have been several occasions when I have found it not only useful but instructive to recount classroom experiences teaching one or more philosophy courses. None of these has had as personal an effect on me as a teacher and person more than the writing experiment I conducted in a philosophy and women course that I have taught for several years. The experience for me, and some of my students, was transformational.

This course was unique from its inception. First, women, primarily nursing students, asked me to offer a philosophy of women course. Several attempts by me to get the course started failed as administrators claimed there was no interest, based typically on no empirical research nor direct connection to students' voiced needs or preferences. So, frustratingly caught between what the students wanted and the administration claimed that students wanted, I sent the students as a group to demand the course be offered. The test was simple and effective. Only hours after the course appeared on the schedule it was filled to capacity. So, the course had and still generally has a motivated and interested audience of students.

Second, after an initial discussion with some feminist colleagues (or, at least those who claimed to be feminists), I succeeded in getting the course identified as philosophy "and" women, rather than the traditional or standard philosophy "of" women, since I claimed then and now that there is no such entity as identified in the latter reference. This is a contentious claim, of course. I'm not sure that I will continue to win this debate, but I am still convinced there is a distinction with a difference between "and" and "of". I have since discovered through several terms teaching this course that the former use of a conjunction produces a less divisive and less confrontational attitude than the latter, making it easier to comprehend and argue about controversial issues with both feminist sympathizers and non-feminists. At the same time, it can inflame and distance those who believe there is a separate world "of" women. So, there is controversy even in the naming of the course.

"So, there is controversy even in the naming of the course." ✍

Third, although I had some experience teaching courses that involved women writers, I had no background teaching an entire course about women writers confronting important philosophical issues. So, I knew, from the outset, that this course would be a learning experience for me. It would be a learning experience both in terms of the content and in terms of the approaches to teaching this content and testing student's comprehension and ability to display critical skills in dealing with controversial parts of this content. However, I didn't expect to learn what I did learn.

Finally, I suspected that the pedagogical strategies that I normally followed in my other philosophy courses might be subject to change in a course that would probably involve students deeply and personally in the debates, discussions, and controversies with both

philosophical and "personally experienced" significance. In other courses it is possible to separate and detach "philosophical" evaluation or criticism from "personal experience," and indeed this can be encouraged to get students out of a narrow perspective so that they can confront and understand "the big issues". However, from the beginning I was concerned about how to deal with "personal experience," and I was to discover that this concern was justified**.**

Transformational Relationships

As a result of my experience teaching this course for several years, I have discovered (or, perhaps re-discovered) a relationship that can constructively and perhaps almost exclusively occur in an open, non-intimidating classroom situation. There are two parts to this relationship. The first is about the structure of the content and the second is about the content itself. First, it is a multiple relationship between the writer as writer and this same writer as reader and a second reader of the work of this writer who becomes, as a result of this process of self-revealing, a writer also. The self-transformational and other-transformational relationships can be diagrammed roughly as follows: W1(writer)—becomes→R1 (reader)[as a result of the activity of W1], then R2 (the reader of the written words and experience of W1)—becomes→W2 (a writer inspired by the experiences documented in the writings of W1). The student is primarily situated in the transformational relationship W→R1, (transformation of the original experiential person) while the instructor (me) is transformed (transformation of the other) in the relationship R2→W2 in ways that probably could not have happened outside the classroom, where students might be unwilling to freely express their experiences.

"The instructor isn't required to make the issues "relevant" or "timely" but rather is in the position of discovering, with the students, the universal situation of women." ✍

Second, in this (and some other courses) I have discovered that the "big questions" normally raised in a philosophy course to identify and focus attention on the central or essential features of an issue do not always connect well with students. However, the same issues opened up by posing "big questions" about systemic discrimination, patriarchal sociological and political structures, and troubling pseudo-scientific "fit-by-nature" claims about gender differences, can be posed using what the students call "little questions". Such questions have their source in the particular experiences of individuals, yet they can focus the "big" issue clearly, distinctively and effectively in the mind and experience of the individual student or teacher. This move away from the macro to the micro concerns has the positive effect of engaging more students in discussions and classroom debates by contextualizing the issues in the course, within the student's personal experience or within the experiences of the student's peers in the classroom. The instructor isn't required to make the issues "relevant" or "timely" but rather is in the position of discovering, with the students, the universal situation of women. Doing this requires that the instructor be prepared for emotional reactions as students compare experiences and reactions to these experiences in a cathartic interaction that has to be brought back from the specifics of a particular context to a more universal perspective, opening up the audience to both women and men willing to learn from these experiences.

The Problem

I discovered early on that there was a dispositional disconnect between some students in the philosophy and women course, namely the younger students, and the critical issues that I felt needed to be raised and addressed. These students did not understand that they were being treated badly in their "everyday lives" or that they were the subject of systemic discrimination in a society ostensibly dedicated to implementing equal opportunities for all. After all, they were not in the situation of women two hundred years ago! They could do what they wanted freely, with no interference. Other women in the course, however, disagreed that the situation was significantly better than that of women two hundred years ago. There was no solidarity in a group that seemed to at least need to understand what solidarity meant! This situation brought some important relational issues to the forefront.

> *"After all, they were not in the situation of women two hundred years ago!"* ✍

Women from one generation could not seem to identify with the situation of women from another generation to the detrimental understanding of both generations. What seemed to present itself to me was a kind of gender-generational gap, a situation where those women with sufficient experience of life could identify clearly and unambiguously with the issues raised, while those with less experience felt that there were no issues that were either relevant or meaningful to them. This was an inter-generation relational situation in the classroom. This put me in the position, as the teacher, of having to solve a relational problem by trying to defend the claim that the issues I felt were important to be raised in the course were "real" and "significant" for women of all ages and all generations. I could tell by the reactions of some women in the course that my efforts were not generally successful to make the critical issues raised about their lives both relevant and meaningful to these students. The question "What did I (the male) know, after all, about their (women's) situation?" seemed both significant and damning of my efforts.

Frustration developed in this course, since I was the one who some students thought had the task of demonstrating to them that critical issues about their lives were ethically significant. The way they initially perceived the situation, we had an impossible impasse. I became the brunt (in some sense willingly to function as "devil's advocate") of the "us-them" dichotomy, as the daggers were thrown at "him" (me) because I was one of "them," males disenfranchised from the discussion. Compounding the "black and white" thinking problem evident in their response, was a "guilt by association" fallacious strategy, which made open critical evaluation of the central issues I needed to raise in the course very difficult and tainted by a pre-determined bias.

As well, my approach to the course is that we need to understand issues about women in both their historical and contemporary context, since the issues and their significance are often context invariant. My emphasis, throughout the course in all of the content and argumentative approaches followed, is on an audience of women and men who need to be convinced to accept one side or the other of some controversial claim, position, point of

view, or perspective. It is a bigger task to try to convince an audience of both the converted and non-converted but the significance of the accomplishment is worth the effort. So I set some tasks for myself and for my students which were to move well beyond what we currently might believe to consider the situation and beliefs of the "other" as important to the understanding and support for our own beliefs.

The Solution

In designing assignments for a philosophy course, the task for me has to be one which helps students not only gain a better understanding of philosophical issues but also more importantly an ability to employ argumentation strategies in their writing. In many philosophy courses, this can mean taking the voice of the detached observer or spectator, someone empathetic to the rational resolution of an issue but not directly or emotionally connected to it. Such a stance is often helpful in focussing the various competing claims and coming to an informed judgement based on balancing these competing considerations. Clearly, given the situation I described above, this would not be an effective approach in a philosophy and women course, with the goals that I set for the course. The writing of three to four short argumentative essays and a final research argumentative essay had to give way to an approach which enhanced the integration of personal experiences in the development of a critically defensible position, decision or judgement. At the same time, the personal experience of the student or her peers had to be connected to the experiences of women from other situations and generations, grounding the experience in the readings of an anthology, which spanned the generations.

"The personal experience of the student or her peers had to be connected to the experiences of women from other situations and generations." ✍

To accomplish this goal, I asked the students at the end of the first set of classes, in which we discussed topics that would appear as part of essay questions, to write for ten to fifteen minutes an account of their own experience(s) or experience that might relate to what we had been discussing. In one example of this approach the results were startling and illuminating. In the *Vindication of the Rights of Women*, Mary Wollestonecraft says "I view with ***indignation*** the mistaken notions that enslave my sex" and "barely am I able ***to govern my muscles***, when I see a man start with eager and serious solicitude to lift a handkerchief, or shut a door, when the lady could have done it herself, had she only moved a pace or two" (Emphasis added). Wollestonecraft clearly indicated her personal outrage at specific experiential situations that had occurred in her life. She also expressed the idea that, even in her time (as some of my students observed in the discussion), it was possible to be very emotionally involved, even outraged at what might appear (both the one offended and the offender) to be the least of minor offences. Of course, the minor offence is embedded in a wider context of meaning, which the students discovered.

In the written assignment that followed the students were asked at the end of the class to find some experience of their own or from one of their peers or someone from another generation that related to or approximated Wollestonecraft's description of her reaction.

The students more than met the challenge. One student wrote about the following important experience in her life (which I leave, as much as possible, in her words): "I could have qualified for the police training program, if I had not failed to vault the high fence they asked me to leap over. I excelled in the written and psychological tests, as well as spending considerable time as a volunteer for the force in the community. Why was passing this test necessary? Was the test constructed so that my lack of upper body strength would work against me and prevent me from getting a job that I had longed for all my life? I was ***very, very mad*** at this outcome."

Another student wrote, "I have lately struggled to come back to school raising my family as a single parent after the departure of their father when he broke into my apartment and stole my school textbooks and notes. If this wasn't bad enough, he proceeded to brag to his friends and his sons about what he had done. I was ***very angry*** at both him and his sons. I was so upset that they thought my struggles were a joke." We had writing from a 40 year old woman frustrated by her attempts to join the police force to a 28 year old woman frustrated by the actions of her husband and sons, but more was to come.

Although there were other significant examples, the final one helped all of us see how to bridge the gender inter-generational gap. A 75 year old grandmother of six, wrote in the kind of precise and perfect handwriting esteemed in her generation of an event, of seeming little importance, but ultimately of great significance, in her life. She wrote: "I went to a one room rural school, where the male teacher on the very first day of classes produced his seating plan for the next twelve years. All of the girls were to be seated at the back of the room, since it was not necessary that any of them successfully complete the diploma. After all, he said, they were all destined for domestic tasks anyway. I was ***seized with indignation and outrage*** for much of my elementary and secondary schooling, each time I recalled this seating plan and its intentions. I had to give way to the dumb ones in the front rows." This was such a powerful written indictment of the treatment of women, paralleling the outrage expressed by Mary Wollestonecraft. It also confirmed an inter-generational ***outrage, anger, indignation*** about something "seemingly" insignificant—insignificant until connected with a life, the lives of women, in a larger context.

"I had to give way to the dumb ones in the front rows." ✍

Transformations

Through writing about their experiences, students, as writers, began to understand the situation of other writers, some from an earlier generation and some from their own. It was difficult for all of them to recall and then write about their experiences, but the writing about them transformed these writers into much more informed readers (W1→R1) of the experiences of other women writers, as well as much more informed readers of their own experiences. Questions about the source and reasons for the anger, expressed by so many women from so many diverse contexts, began to surface and take on a new significance for many of the students in the class.

The personal writing projects at the end of each class had opened up a new space for the argumentative essay. It provided the basis for not just complaining about something but making the critical complaint clear and including it in an argumentative appeal to focus on an audience of believers and non-believers. The class had not lost its footing in distanced abstract issues nor had it mired itself into petty "gripe sessions" designed only for the amusement of participants. The writing of personal experiences, and the integration of these experiences as one of the pieces of support in an argumentative essay, had transformed the class and many of the students in it. Writing had a new focus for them and for me.

At the same time, there was a second transformation. This time it was the instructor who was to change. Moved by the students' written accounts of their experiences (which we shared in the class by my having their accounts re-typed and distributed for discussion, with no reference to the author of any of the experiences—a task that will not be repeated by me or any member of the secretarial staff ever again because it was too difficult and time-consuming) I began to survey my own experiences and write them for the student's critical examination to determine whether they corresponded or not.

Without my reading of the students' experiences, I wouldn't have transformed myself from reader (R2) of these experiences to (W2) writer. One such recurring experience that I wrote about in my personal account involved a car. My wife and I leave a theatre or restaurant and head towards the car in the parking lot. I couldn't recall from my own experience any time when a man and a woman, each with keys to the same vehicle, didn't seem to automatically move to different sides of the vehicle. I always moved towards the driver's seat and my wife, mother or daughter invariably moved to the passenger seat. I asked the class to question why this was the case? And, what about the bill presented at the end of meal? If a man and woman have enjoyed the meal, who is the waiter or waitress likely to give the bill to, between these two people? In my experience, it is almost always the man. Both cases initially seem insignificant, but what lies below the surface in these seemingly innocuous pieces of behaviour? Reading of my accounts, students started to get mad. These were experiences that they had been a part of but had not interpreted in any way at all. My writing about them had triggered a variety of critical interpretations. Some students, for example, remained optimistic that there was nothing to be concerned about in these experiences, while others began to become mad, angry and outraged by these accounts, as they connected them to other experiences in their own lives and in the writings of women writers.

"I always moved towards the driver's seat and my wife, mother or daughter invariably moved to the passenger seat. I asked the class to question why this was the case?" ✍

Finally, as the teacher of a course in philosophy and women, I have initiated a research program involving a critical analysis of some women writers, like Mary Wollestonecraft and May Sinclair. At the same time, I give presentations and I write pieces, like this one, to inform others of my continuing writing and transformation.

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Destination: The Journey

Wendy Kraglund-Gauthier ✍

"Accidental tourists" hate traveling, and only do so with their eyes shut tightly[1]. They fail to look behind to see the distance they have come and the scenery along the way. To me, successful journeys are made with eyes and minds open to new experiences and new ideas.

My own journey has taken its own turns. In 2002, I left a comfortable job teaching adult education in Prince Edward Island to return to my alma mater. I accepted a position at the Saint Francis Xavier University Writing Centre, and I work with a team of seven other individuals. We are in a unique situation, where, unlike many other Canadian writing centers staffed by peer tutors, we all have at least two degrees and are considered professional staff. We are "Academic Skills Instructors", responsible for delivering our centre's programming. Now I am also a graduate student, trying to assess the success of our own writing centre and compare it with other Canadian writing centres. My rather daunting task is to both qualitatively and quantitatively assess the programs and services we offer.

Among the programs and services we offer are *eXcel*, for students embarking on their university travels, and APEX, for students who have lost their way. The *eXcel* program is a transition program for first year students, launched in 2002. The initiative was ambitious. Six new staff members, armed with well-written but untried curriculum, delivered a year-long, optional non-credit course to 500 first-year students. Over the past three years, the curriculum has changed slightly, but the core ideas still remain. First year students need assistance making the leap from high school learning to university academics. Critical thinking, time management, research and referencing skills, and effectively preparing for examinations are necessary skills which students often lack. Adding to their academic challenges are issues of personal responsibility, motivation, and independence. The Writing Centre also delivers APEX, a mandatory program for students on academic probation. These students are seasoned travelers who had an itinerary, but somehow ended up lost. The baggage they carry often impedes their progress.

These baggage-toting accidental academic tourists face physical as well as intellectual challenges in their quests to develop as writers. Our Writing Centre is located on the periphery of campus, in two separate office blocks which are physically connected, yet unreachable from the inside. We are tucked out of the way, and for individuals who are uninitiated to the maze of corridors and dead-end hallways, very hard to find. Their journey to our offices parallels the journey they make as they struggle with the process of writing and becoming all that it is to be an academic writer.

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[1] Tyler, Anne. *The Accidental Tourist*: 1985

Review

Clueless in Academe: How Schooling Obscures the Life of the Mind. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003.

Margaret Procter ✍

The title of Gerald Graff's book put me off at first—I don't need to hear more complaints about students. Having read a review in *University Affairs* that focussed on what Graff had to say about writing, I picked it up anyway. I can report that it's not about how dumb students are these days, nor (in spite of its subtitle) is it a repeat of the Boyer report on how universities fail to educate them. It's not entirely about teaching writing either, though a chapter is titled "Unlearning to Write," and Graff speaks from his experience in English classrooms and university administration. Its topic is the apparent gap between academic culture and popular culture in the US, and the actual and potential connections. *Clueless in Academe* is always a lively and engaging piece of writing. Graff's personal voice and his running reviews of current publications on academic culture kept me interested if not always convinced.

In 1992 Graff published *Beyond the Culture Wars* to suggest a way of bypassing the debates about the canon that he felt handicapped English programs. He said there that students should be brought into the debate about whether English studies should stick with the canonical classics or bring in more popular current works. In the current book he says that the need is to get students involved with any kind of debate. It's the weak or ambiguous place of open argumentative discourse in American life that bothers Graff and that he tries to address in terms of what universities can teach.

Many of his 14 chapters have been published previously as articles in journals such as the MLA *Profession* or *College English*. Some were clearly once reviews of specific works, others editorials about classic issues like the use of jargon in academic publications, and others accounts of current issues such as training public intellectuals in a new Masters program in the humanities. For *Clueless in Academe* Graff groups the new and reworked pieces into four sections, starting with an overview of the relationship between popular and academic culture, moving into his analysis of specific components of public discourse and of academe (including writing instruction), and ending with an array of classroom stories that address some specific issues described previously. The chapters overlap considerably, making the same arguments from slightly different starting points. I found that a chapter or two at a time was enough, and that some repaid close reading more than others.

The first sections of the book depict student cluelessness as a product of the ambivalences and self-contradictions in both academic and popular culture. Graff's anecdotal examples are clearly based on wide observation; his analyses chime with other recent studies of academic culture, which he cites and summarizes extensively. They also ring true to my experience and observation, though I can't help noting their limitations. Graff depicts individual students unable to engage in oral or written discussion with energy or depth

because they don't see any point in comparing two poems or finding the deeper meaning in a novel. That's all too familiar. His snapshots of the covers for Cliff's Notes on *The Color Purple* and *The Joy Luck Club* memorably illustrate his point that students are still alienated from the new canon of popular literature. I can fill in too that some students fake assigned personal narratives, not to mention reading journals. Graff's chapter on students' admission statements for graduate school derives from his experience as director of a new Masters program at the University of Chicago, where he saw letters stating enthusiasm but neglecting to show any sense of academic issues. Some of my students must have applied there. Disappointingly, though, given his experience in Chicago, Graff's depiction of student culture is nearly monolithic. He mentions a successful academic who was exposed to theological argument in his Christian fundamentalist upbringing, but doesn't describe current students with strong religious commitments. He cites Labov on black language, but only one of his teaching situations concerns black students (seen as immersed in generic "youth culture"); none mention ESL learners or international students. He states that social class is a factor in student resistance and in understanding the need to be explicit, but neglects to say or show much about it. Graff refers to his own teenage engagement as a sports fan, and generalizes that teenage boys' discussions comparing sports stars exemplify argumentation that can develop into the academic form. Would that work also for consumer talk about cultural products?

"Disappointingly, though, given his experience in Chicago, Graff's depiction of student culture is nearly monolithic." ✍

Similarly, I am entertained and stimulated by Graff's discussion of academic writing, though my problems aren't all solved. The chapter on "Unlearning to Write" is about academics' use of obscurantist style more than about student problems. This is familiar territory, but Graff's view is fresh. He points out that much of the best academic writing is actually readable, and he quotes a few passages that exemplify the combination of colloquial energy with subtle analysis. Graff claims that interdisciplinary viewpoints have replaced specialist research paradigms, and he summarizes a study about the "journalization" of academic criticism, listing a half-page of academic books based on personal narrative. His many allusions have stocked my "to-read" list with several years' worth of books in the humanities and social sciences. Graff also asserts that media analysis and academic analysis of current events overlap, borrowing from each other's methods. He gives convincing evidence that the public intellectual is alive and well and on TV tonight as well as on library shelves. His best examples uncover ambivalent attitudes towards intellectualism. He outlines Deborah Tannen's explicit rejection of the "argument culture" in a book that exemplifies it, laments Jane Tompkin's turn to transcendental meditation in preference to showoff academic performances, comments on a song by Bob Dylan where the singer evaluates his girlfriend's lack of judgementalism, and quotes appreciatively from a Monty Python skit called "The Argument Clinic" (though without noting that it's British).

How are we to apply this perspective to teaching? The final chapters string together nuggets of teaching practice as encouragement that we can solve the dilemmas outlined in the rest of the book. I found these disappointingly narrow in scope, unequal to the range of analysis in the earlier chapters. Most are about composition teachers. For someone who can split hairs about the nuances of public discourse and become passionate about the aims of literary interpretation, Graff is oddly uncritical in his choice of examples. He does point out that one teacher who restates his students' ideas in highly abstract terms is just demonstrating his own superiority. But a story about getting a student interested only in motorcycles to research the sociology of biker culture is so familiar a success as to seem clichéd. Guiding students to choose composition topics from "what they know well" hardly seems original either, though it's encouraging to see that another teacher also values papers based on personal interviews rather than always requiring library research. A Texas high school teacher and his students drill each other in using words from student "Realspeak" and from the SAT/ACT word list: amusing contrasts, yes, but surely Graff could say something about the impact on schooling of standardized testing. His final chapter is an enthusiastic but balanced review of Deborah Meier's book about transforming a Harlem high school that goes some distance to restore the breadth of perspective. Graff also cites several books on teaching composition, including Andrea Lunsford's textbook *Everything's an Argument* and Joseph Harris's memoir *A Teaching Subject*. They go on my to-read list too. But why doesn't he mention more university examples, more examples from experiments in teaching writing across the disciplines, more examples from subjects other than English? They would be a huge support for his point that argumentative skill is the key to the "club" of academic success and public discourse.

"There are no right answers, only endless questions; but some answers are better than others and some don't even qualify to get on the map." ✍

I marked several passages defining argumentation and discussing ways to teach it, which I'll try out with students and teachers in various areas, including the sciences. Graff has lots to say about the ways we usually teach. His list on page 29 of the mixed messages that academics give students hits home: "Be yourself, but do it the way we academics do," and "There are no right answers, only endless questions; but some answers are better than others and some don't even qualify to get on the map." Chapter 2 usefully enumerates the oddities of academic discourse, reminding academics, for instance, that we always expect aggression and negativity as part of persuasion. He notes the dual meanings of our term "argue" (sometimes simply state a proposition, sometimes outline a contention) and our unexplained assumptions about the need to use elaborated code where things are stated and explained rather than the restricted code of face-to-face conversation where knowledge is assumed. I wish he had said more about when and how we make that choice, a particular challenge for science students and for international students.

Graff's own teaching skills are no doubt exemplary. One of his maxims is "Dare to be reductive." He follows it impressively himself in defining the skills students need to enter

academic culture and public discourse. A commitment to articulating ideas in public, he says, requires you to "listen closely to others, summarize them in a recognizable way, and make your own relevant argument." (Yes, he cites the passage from Kenneth Burke about entering a parlour where the conversation is in full swing, though for some reason he says it's a cocktail party.) Several times in the book Graff mentions that he and his wife Cathy Birkenstein-Graff are developing a handbook as companion to this book, to be called *A Short Guide to Argument.* I'll watch for it. Samples of their advice are included in *Clueless*, including what Graff calls "template sentences" to indicate the rhetorical moves involved in argument. Graff says that it's worth the risk of reductivism to ask students to include sentences like these in their writing: "To put the point another way…," "Here you will probably object that….," or "Of course I don't mean to suggest that…." It occurs to me we could ask students to find such sentences in what they read, then imitate or even parody them in their own work. The book ends with a two-page epilogue, "How to Write an Argument: What Students and Teachers Really Need to Know." It includes several of the template sentences—enough to require choice rather than seeming like a formula for organizing a paper—and standard advice like imagining a reader who keeps saying "so what?" and "who cares?" Graff tells students to be bilingual so that they can try out their ideas in both an academic voice and a nonacademic one to see if they still make sense. His own writing certainly passes that test, though his advice doesn't match the sweep of his analysis.

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Alphabet Blocks

Carl Leggo ✍

α
I write a lot of words,
    speak a lot of words,
        think a lot of words,
            live a lot of words,
and really there is no reason why
I should shape the words into poems.

Surely the poet's job is
to choose, assess, grade,
like a trustworthy butcher.

I must be ruthless with wordy proliferation.
I can write a lot of words in 3 minutes,
once timed myself, at least 223 words. So,
just imagine how many words I could write
in an hour, a day, a week, a month, a year.

I must be parsimonious! So, I just scratched out the words in my journal,
and there will be no poem made with those words, unless, of course, you count
this poem about scratching out words and not writing a poem, a dog chasing
its tail, the self-reflexive circularity that gets postmodernists in trouble,
especially with Terry Eagleton, circling overhead, counting every word.

β

Because words seek places beyond the alphabet,
I write in anticipation I will find the words
I need, or the words will find me.

χ

My first memory is dark:
early morning, Lucy
in a purple dress swung
me between her legs.
I remember a blank black
page I cannot write on
with India ink. I need
light like rescue ropes
in the maelstrom, vertiginous
with verbs, including *be*.

δ

I want to know the names of plants, trees, flowers, birds, clouds,
but of course I don't and I won't, no end to the knowledge I need
to write my poems, except if I waited till I had the knowledge,
I would never write a poem, too busy surfing the Internet without end.
So, I need to write about what I know and continue to learn more as I go.
Nobody knows everything. Agnosticism is part of the humility needed
for writing poetry. This summer I learned about rosehips. Why didn't I
learn about rosehips when I was growing up. Did the people around me
know about rosehips? Did I care to know? Probably not, especially when
I needed to learn the names of English kings and queens. Perhaps I live
in chaos beyond naming. Perhaps I place too much faith in naming. Is there
any need to describe the sky if I am not able to describe it in an unfamiliar
way that will help us see its familiarity? Is the sky waiting for me to name
it, like another Adam, compelled to acknowledge the ends of language?

ε

A poem is like a butterfly.
Often unwieldy, without
grace, it works hard
to navigate the sturdy wind,
appears suddenly, startles me.

ϕ
The difference between a poem and a painting
is that the painting hangs on a wall where it can
be seen and enjoyed every day, some days many
times. A poem gives pleasure in the making and
again in the reading, but how many people will
read a poem? A painting can give pleasure at least
365 times a year. A poem is glad to give pleasure
occasionally, like a cat penurious with affection.

γ
What good
is a poem
in an affluent age,
an effluent age,
like ours?

η
I have lost writing a number of times,
especially because of computer meltdown
and car theft. On one occasion, the loss
of the writing paralysed me for weeks,
but on another occasion, the loss opened up
a new path for writing. I don't think our
writing is ever really lost. There is a law
of thermodynamics which claims energy is never
lost, only transformed. While my high school
physics is decades old, I am thinking a lot
these days about energy and ecology
and interconnections in the heart's course.

ι
In my poetry I seek the way,
the wisdom for living well
in the longing of language
to name ourselves where
we know our long belonging,
and I just told Lana
I could spend a whole lifetime
working on a single poem
because the poem is never
finished, only suspended till
the return, when, where ever.

φ
In August, I helped George

build a work shed. Day after
day we sawed and hammered,
put the pieces together, with care,
like a big Ikea project. George
knew what he was doing.
I didn't. I followed him.
Like a poet, George was
conjuring out of imagination
and plans with frequent trips
to Stan Dawe's for more supplies.
And like building a poem,
the process could not
be hurried, needed time.

κ

The really sad part of infidelity is that
it has nothing to do with the quotidian,
with everyday living. Infidelity is born
out of a mesmerized, confused, hypnotic
state of lostness, of not-being-present.
Infidelity is conjured out of the imagination
that has lost its roots, its mooring in the earth.
It is easy to spell stories with no connection
to others, to the earth, to past and future.
    Poetry is the way of fidelity.

λ

Like the countless beachstones
I can't tell you the stories I have lived in this place,
even though I mostly only came here
in the summers and for many years did not come at all,
still clutching the wild chaotic world in my words.

μ

I no longer write, at least not much,
like I am scared of writing, frightened
of remembering, eager to live in the present moment,
perhaps unable to live well in forgiveness, accept
that the past is always present, always a part of living,
not only a part that holds *in the beginning*,
that comprises the first sequence of chapters.
Instead, the past is still present. It is still being lived,
is still alive, is still living, and I want to proclaim
the future does not count, has not yet been lived,
and therefore does not enter into my storied universe.

But I believe in the eschaton, the future, the hope.
The future is then like the past, also present.
Perhaps the future is telling the stories that are
possible when we attend to the art and heart
of story-telling. The future is the panoply
of versions of stories that can be told to reveal
the world, not in myths of linear progress, but
as growth to freedom by artful attending to
the momentous moment that is never monotonous.

ν

Love cannot be defined,
and so poets, craving a challenge,
compose love's meaning,
by seeking ways into the labyrinth
of nonsense where Cupid shoots
errant arrows, random like
randy rabbits, and laughs
at the limits of law, litters
with reckless abandon
more letters than we can
use in a lifetime.

ο

In language I calculate the world.
I build intricate equations
with unknowns of x and y,
but the answer is not in the back
of the book, so I never know
if I see anything right.

π

The ecology (and economy) of words:
where do the words go?
So many words spelled out without a spell.
When do words lose their spell?
Imagine yourself wild with words.

θ

Where poets are eager to understand
the ineffability of wonder, joy, love,
grace, spirit, and the whole host
of abstract nouns, I write about
the quotidian experiences of backyards,
always with a sense of the extraordinary
at work in the ordinary, and seek wonder

by attending to the inexorable,
inevitable experiences of every day,
always effing the ineffable.

ρ
I fear the truth
in some stories
like a blast furnace
that at first singes
the eyebrows
and then quickly
incinerates bone.

σ
Solutions for heart-burn include:
Pepto-Bismal and poetry.

In the tangled midst of memories,
the heart is resilient and calls out
for a poet's language with the breath
of dark moist rum-soaked fruit cake
like Lana just made for Christmas.

τ
Today while I revised this poem,
the oil furnace stopped blowing,
and Sam the Irving's repairman is
on his way, hopefully soon, since
on this winter's day in York Harbour,
I feel like Bob Cratchit scratching
figures in Ebenezer Scrooge's accounts,
and as I wait, I don't want to whine,
but this poem is failing to keep us warm.

υ
Textual affairs include: the desire to write,
and the desire to be written, in words composing,
always coming, always posing, promised pleasure
of textuality, unconsummated relations,
textual intercourse without climax or end.

ϖ
I grow angry with word waste, so much
breath for so little wisdom. What happens
to words that prattle and rattle with desiccated,
disheartened, disembodied whispers

like basement dust in a beam of light
or ubiquitous flotsam in the world's oceans
or discarded satellites in erratic orbit around the earth?

ω
I am my words;
my words are me.

You are your words;
your words are you.

I am your words;
your words are me.

You are my words;
my words are you.

ξ
The language of poetry pushes at edges,
sometimes even extending beyond the edges,
even to the places where language refuses
comprehensibility, clarity, coherence, composition
(I love lists, not for the way they organize but for their infinite, endless possibilities).
Some texts refuse consumption, easy access,
even a comfortable reading location.
The reader must struggle to locate
their positions for responding.
Some texts involve an intricate and complex
textualizing that refuses to be still.
Some texts invite me to let the words flow around me,
as well as in and through me.
I must relinquish the desire to hold the text in place,
for then I carry the memory of mystery,
even the mystery of my story, to other places, places
like e.e. cummings where "I have never travelled."

ψ
In this place the sun rises in the harbour,
and light and shadow are the alphabet
that calls and composes my senses,
and I make poems, and find sustaining
places of stillness and stability.

ζ
How many dreams do I need to record on paper?
I have many dreams that I do not wish to record.

It takes wise courage to know when to be silent.

In the end Marcel Marceau alone speaks a word.

In the Beginning

Carl Leggo ✍

As I shape language, alchemically language shapes me,
my poems writing themselves in autobiographical urgency.

Beginnings and endings and all the countless moments between
the beginnings and endings that are more beginnings and endings.

Compelling words cannot be commanded,
will find their way when they wish, organic chorus.

Do different alphabets divide the world differently,
full of desire for divining concealed secrets?

Emphatically, empathetically, energetically evoke
experience in language like echolocation.

Fat, flat, flatulent words fill the air in this board room
where I am bored with chewing words like myrrh from a fir tree.

Grammar slips through the stipulations of handbooks when
nouns and verbs scramble to find their rhythms in gramarye.

How does poetry know? What does poetry know?
How do I know poetry? What do I know?

Incarnate word, the Word in flesh, embodied presence,
poems born in the imagined present.

Journeys begin somewhere, but navigating the landscape
requires a map, compass, GPS, memory, heart.

Knowing even how my words often lie, slant lines with scant
truth, I still seek words like dew in the desert to quench thirst.

Language—so much always remains unsaid. The holes allow us
to recognize the world. Learn to lean on light in the darkness.

Moonshone stones like words rise up to the surface

in a farmer's field, tugged by lunatic gravity, responding to the call.

Narrating my experience taxes the limits of language,
leaves me in liminal spaces I will likely never traverse.

Order has an odour, even sometimes like ordure. The logic
line is only one way. Try the ludic. For fun.

Phonse pronounced phonetic phrases with a parrot's panache
and pissed poetic polyvalent possibilities outside the pot.

Question everything. What if? The world is transformed,
even in the asking. What questions need to be asked?

Rhythmically, poems breathe, long heart's breaths full
of the flowing, neverending geography, everywhere, always.

Sense runs both ways like the two strands of a reef knot,
like shadows complement light in a counterpoint.

Today I saw a bumper sticker: Ban Leg Hold Traps, and I read:
Ban Leggo Traps. My world sharply focused in my image alone.

Unlike undulating curves of oil in water, wind in snow banks,
waves on a sandy beach, my handwriting does not flow and swirl.

Vases on window sills hold the poems I gathered for you
in early autumn light.

Winnie the Pooh searches for the hole in order to find home.
I search for the whole, too. Longing for the hole and home.

Xerographically language reproduces living, like chiaroscuro,
in new conjunctions of light and dark.

Yarns yammer, yowl, yak, yelp, yawp, yell, full of yearning
for you.

Zigzagging with the mark of Zorro, the poet begins with the end
and ends in the beginning.

Zoo

Carl Leggo ✍

A
with a sticky tongue the aardvark burrows in the earth
for ants and termites like letters of the alphabet

B
a bat uses echolocation to navigate dark, dense texts,
interprets the lyricism of regnant resonant rippling lines

C
a coyote composes its own lines in the cacti and sage, knows
a language different from mine, insufficient for writing this poem

D
in long walks near the slough, I hear ducks laughing, but I do not
know their language, still content to ask, Why are the ducks laughing?

E
with a phobia of worms and snakes, I especially screech when I see
an eel draw its line in the brook, one more story I don't want

F
with a fierce, feral resolve, I hunt truth with ferrets, hope to
ferret truth out of its hiding places into the noon studded sun

G
according to Gary Larson the world offers daily both
good gnus and bad gnus; of course, the alphabet is flexible

H
the hen pecks at the hard scrabble backyard, finds pebbles and
seeds like dry words that can sustain at least a lean narrative

I
the still ibis is mostly a sculptor's image, but sometimes stumbles
across the river and soars over the lettered landscape

J
always a voyeur, the jealous jaguar watches from the parking lot
of Tim Horton's, eats another donut, waits, prays for one more revelation

K
a kangaroo jumps the endless expanse of the outback, and I too bounce
too boisterously to know the steady place at the beginning of the alphabet

L
just like no poet ever tames the wildness of language erupting with endless possibilities,
nobody really tames a lion, its heart always hidden

M
like most expository prose, the moose is big and slow, but occasionally startles
with an explosive burst out of the alders on the side of the highway as we pass

N
the new-born newt knew no new news, but near a new moon ate fig newtons
and dreamed a new-fangled newsreel about the New Age New Left in a New Deal

O
with an ocelet's stealth we can walk in the spaces
of the alphabet and leave no trace of our circuit on the catwalk

P
it isn't true that I fear words, but I have learned to sneak up on them
like porcupines before I steal their quills for more writing

Q
like Dolly Parton the quetzal doesn't seem real, looks like a graphic
designer's confection, challenges the alphabet to concoct new vocabulary

R
my muddled imagination runs hypertextually in all directions,
unlike the rhinoceros who always sees the sturdy singular point

S
like a poet, the sloth has the good sense to linger in the spaces
of the alphabet, refuses to hurry, knows the words will come

T
Howard the Turtle's jokes didn't dazzle Al Hamel (unlike thigh master
Suzanne Somers), groans only, but I always admired Howard's perseverance

U
the unicorn is a creature that lives only in the untamed alphabet
that can't stop with naming just the earth's millions of creatures

V
I circle high overhead searching for the carrion left by others,
a vicious avaricious vulture with claws too weak to chase vital verbs

W
like a whale in the ocean, scribing its shape in the ocean, while pressed
on all sides by the ocean, I shape language, I am shaped by language

X
the xerus stays close to the ground and plays its part in the *Scrabble*
dictionary, assisting the player with the rich but notoriously difficult letter X

Y
the yak stands in a circle in the Arctic long night, silent, sure, knows
enough letters huddled together will ward off the icicles of danger

Z
the zebra exhibits sartorial splendor, black and white,
like the alphabet, suitable for all occasions

A Plague on Both Your Houses

Russ Hunt ✍

I don't know how many Inkshedders there are out there who will have confronted this, either as writers or teachers, but it has become increasingly apparent to me that we're dealing with an industry that wants us to go back to about the fifties in terms of composition theory. Word processors and HTML text editors are increasingly, and inexorably, becoming text display manipulators rather than text processors. Editing something produced in any of the current version is more difficult by a factor of about five than it was five years ago.

I've got students creating assignments (lesson plans, essentially) for an eighteenth century literature course and posting them on a Web site so that the rest of the class can read them ahead of the meeting. One of them just posted a page which includes text that doesn't wrap. Text is displayed out two or three hundred characters to the right of the screen.

She achieved this, she says, by composing the page in M$Word, and then saving it "as a Web page"—M$Speak for HTML. This happened at the end of class Monday night, and I casually said, oh, don't bother; I'll copy the file and fix it for you.

I spent over an hour yesterday trying to fix it without copying the entire text to a new file and reformatting everything manually in some different editor—and failed. I can't find the code that means the text wraps in M$Word but not in a browser. I wound up

converting the text to plain ASCII and re-introducing the formatting with Netscape Composer.

> *"Oh, don't bother; I'll copy the file and fix it for you."* ✍

The problem is that the sheer amount of useless code that M$Word pours over the text makes it impossible to edit manually, and also—and this is my main concern—really makes it damn near impossible to edit within M$Word itself. Every change you make has amazing, unexpected consequences: there's a bulleted list in the file, for example, and any attempt to modify it simply screws up the formatting entirely.

I can't find an editor that doesn't make it damn near impossible for someone who doesn't already know what she's doing—and can avoid formatting tricks and all the other bells and whistles that the damn programs shove in her face—to go back and revisit a text in any way other than spell checking. Both Word and WordPerfect, which seem to be the two default word processors around these days, and all the HTML editors available as well (though to a lesser extent), have been migrated to, or have evolved to be, text *display* editors. It's *all* about how the text looks. And from my perspective as someone trying to help students learn to write, that makes them all next to useless.

What happens when a student wants to produce not a snappy graphic display but a text which can then be revised? I can't find an editor that doesn't make it damn near impossible for someone who doesn't already know what she's doing—and can avoid formatting tricks and all the other bells and whistles that the damn programs shove in her face—to go back and revisit a text in any way other than spell checking.

We spend half my career getting past surface error fixing as the default mode for editing . . . and Bill Gates & Co. wipe out all that progress in five years of "improving" their word processors.

So I guess I have three questions:

(1) has anybody else encountered this, or is this just a function of the fact that I'm a fossil and still want text markup to be comprehensible?
(2) does anyone know about publications or resources on the migration of word processors toward text display and away from, well, word processing?
(3) does anybody know about a program that'll strip out the useless code from a M$Word-created HTML file? (as a plain ascii file the text in question is about 17K; in its full flower, as published to HTML by Word, it's 48K). (By the way, I've tried M$Word's "filtered" HTML and Dreamweaver's HTML cleanup. Neither touch the mess.)

</rant>

St. Thomas University ✍
http://www.StThomasU.ca/~hunt/

Response

Amanda Goldrick-Jones

M$ (!) Word does NOT translate well into html, no matter what "they" tell you! At the very minimum, a user needs to turn off all "smart" features, such as the one that turns double quotes into curly quotes or two hyphens into an M-dash. Smart features become gibberish, and normal word wraparound bolluxes up when one tries to save Word as html—users might have to use hard returns to ensure that their text takes up no more than 90% of a 800 x 600 screen resolution or fifty (50) character spaces.

I'd tell students to avoid the save-Word-as-html option completely. Those who don't have access to a web page program like Dreamweaver, Adobe GoLive, or FrontPage can use one of the web-page templates in IE, Netscape, or Mozilla Firefox. They're not fancy, but they're cheap and they work. Online course software like WebCT also provides webpage templates.

Hope this helps at bit!

University of Winnipeg ✍

Call for Proposals: "Writing for Others: Others Writing"

Inkshed XXII

Conference of the Canadian Association for the Study of Language and Learning

White Point Beach Resort, Nova Scotia
May 12-15, 2005 ✍

This year's theme arose from discussion of the importance of writing for identity, 'authentic' projects, and the changing contexts in which we both teach and write. We invite you to consider the possibilities below and any other topics linked to the main theme**:**

- writing in the first person and the 'discursive I' in academic texts
- teaching writing for professional contexts
- collaborative writing for and/or with others: community projects, service learning
- cross-cultural and alternative literacies in research, teaching and professional contexts
- writing in/to/for/of the public
- authority, assessment, and audience in academic writing
- citation practices and the 'other'
- interdisciplinary writing
- writing centres, writing workshops and support groups

- discursive communities and the politics of 'otherness'
- writing ourselves for others: professional genres: reference letters, annual reports, research articles, grant applications, presentations . . .
- writing/creating others: professional uses of writing in medical, therapeutic, social services, media, literary . . . contexts to define/create others

The Inkshed Conference format—which includes inkshedding, discussion, and no concurrent sessions—encourages a continuing conversation among all participants. As anyone who has attended Inkshed before will know, the conversations begun here often continue on the list and in the newsletter. For more information on CASLL, Inkshed, and inkshedding, please visit our website http://www.stthomasu.ca/inkshed/.

As usual, we want to avoid the "talking heads-reading papers" model by encouraging participatory and unconventional approaches. We welcome poster boards and performances, case-studies, collaborative presentations, student involvement, workshops, or interactive demonstrations. We would also be willing to help with arranging a presentation format to create variety. There will also be a reading table, so all participants are encouraged to bring items which others can borrow during the weekend and which might add to the discussions.

This year we will be experimenting with two new formats—a research works-in-progress session and two roundtables. If interest in participating in these sessions exceeds available space we will make selections based on coherence between participants' topics.

Research Works-in-Progress Session

Participants will provide 2-3 page descriptions/summaries to be posted on web site in advance (must be received by April 10th). Each participant gives a very brief presentation followed by a general discussion/question period.

Round Table Sessions

10-minute individual presentations on the topic, followed by moderated discussion.

Themes:

Round table 1: Literacy and Power

Round Table 2: Us and the 'Others': The Discipline of Rhetoric and Composition on and off campus

All proposals should include the name, addresses, and phone numbers of the presenter(s) and a title, brief abstract (approx. 200 words), brief description of the mode of presentation, and an indication of format: regular session, research works-in-progress or one of the round tables. In order to help us plan time slots and coordinate sessions we would appreciate an indication of how you will use inkshedding.

Deadline for Proposals: January 30, 2005

Decisions will be made and presenters contacted by February 28th. ✍

Send Proposals to:
Pat Saunders and Jane Milton
5163 Duke Street
Halifax, Nova Scotia
B3J 3J6
Or by email to **pat.saunders@smu.ca and jmilton@nscad.ns.ca**

Other members of the conference team:
Jane Milton, NSCAD jmilton@nscad.ns.ca (902) 494-8151
Susan Drain, MSVU
Kenna Manos
Russ Hunt, St. Thomas University

Invitation to Participate

Canadian University Writing Centres: Benchmarking Success ✍

Dear Writing Centre Director:
You are invited to participate in a survey regarding the operations of the St. Francis Xavier Writing Centre. I am a graduate student in the St. Francis Xavier Masters of Adult Education program and for my thesis research I am evaluating the work of the St. Francis Xavier Writing Centre. I want to develop a tool to document writing centre goals and methods used by writing centre staff to assess attainment of those goals. I hope to compare the work the St. Francis Xavier Writing Centre is doing with the work being done by other Canadian undergraduate university writing centres and develop a standardized method to evaluate and implement "best practises" that can be applied to other writing centres.

You will need to spend approximately 60 minutes of your time to complete a survey and a future telephone interview. Your responses will be kept confidential and used only for comparative purposes. You have the right to refuse to participate in the proposed research. You may withdraw from the research at any time. However, your withdrawal from the research does not necessarily include the withdrawal of any data complied up to that point. Research results will be shared with Canadian university writing centres, regardless of participation.

You are encouraged to contact me by email, by telephone, or in person with any questions. My office hours are Monday – Friday, 8:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. You may also contact my advisor, Dr. Allan Quigley, at 867-3244 or aquigley@stfx.ca if you have any questions about the project.

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