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Humanism, Humanities and Hypertext: Learning, Authority and Ethics in the Electronic Classroom

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“. . . it is impossible to strip the human element out from even our most abstract theorizing.”—William James (450)

As Nicholas Negroponte, the founding director of M.I.T.'s Media Lab, sees it, information technology's great contribution to education will be in multimedia. Multimedia assisted pedagogy will, according to Negroponte, bring sound and images into the classroom; it will allow for independent learning and, ultimately, it will bridge the gap, imposed by the traditional academic disciplines, between "technology and the humanities, science and art, between right brain and left" (81). Many of us teaching in the humanities might wonder about the role of written language in Negroponte's vision and rightfully so. Neither he nor Bill Gates (or, for that matter, the popular press) are overly concerned with the fate of writing and the problems of teaching written texts. However, since the late eighties a great many academics have been teaching successfully with important text-based writing technologies, technologies that have dramatically effected, far more than multimedia CD-ROMs ever will, the web of human relationships that engage in them: reshaping the nature of the classroom, the role of the instructor and the activities of the students. In this essay I will introduce those technologies, discuss the pedagogical debates surrounding them and finally argue for a critical approach to their implementation. As you will hopefully agree, the lessons from nearly ten years of computer-assisted pedagogy are dangerous to ignore — particularly for those of us concerned with the 'humanism' of the humanities.

An Anecdote

Once upon a time at the University of Texas at Austin, I taught an introductory writing course for non-native speakers of English. It was a difficult course to teach. My students came from all parts of the globe, from Sri-Lanka to Quebec, Singapore to Argentina, and they came with a shockingly wide range of English competency. Some could hardly string together a single complex sentence and, when I asked them to speak in class, acted as if I were inflicting upon them a unique form of pedagogical torture. Others, like my elite Indian, Pakistani and Sri-Lankan students, came with fluencies and accents which would have shamed Prince Charles into silence. At times the result for the students was a general linguistic anxiety, but when conversation did not collapse under its weight, their various cultural backgrounds always made class discussion fascinating. It seemed so to me, anyway.

There were, however, other stresses on conversation. American rhetoric and composition courses tend to center around contemporary issues. However, many of the standard "rhet./comp." issues failed miserably as argumentative topoi. Iraqi and Pakistani Moslems do not consider abortion or homosexual rights sites of legitimate debate; my Taiwanese and Chinese students could not safely discuss issues of self-determination, and there were a whole slew of topics which my Indian, Pakistani and Sri-Lankan students could, at times, almost come to blows over. Yet, both semesters I taught the course, I found that my Taiwanese and Chinese students sat together and that my Pakistani and Indian students sat together. I also found that these groups

almost always regulated conversation away from those hot-points. They changed the subject or found ways to transfer blame to safer, more distant locations (“previous generations,” “the government,” etc.). I quickly learned to do the same.

To some degree it appeared the students had found that in the United States their differences seemed less important than their similarities, and that preserving cooperation in class was more important than bringing their individual cultural or political conflicts into it. They were almost all — male and female alike — sociopolitically conservative, and it was perhaps their shared desire for social order that helped preserve this cooperation. It was perhaps that shared desire, as well as a generally shared faith in authority, which also led in each semester to a student initiated, classroom discussion of the role of the Professor as moral guide. Almost all of my students argued for it. I argued against. “What part of their training,” I would retort, “qualifies your Engineering Professors or your English Professors for moral instruction?”

At the time, of course, I was in an awkward position. The ethical assumptions of my students were often different from mine, and in a class of largely third world students, asserting my values was occasionally received as a form of cultural colonialization. Recent dismissals of the Euro-American discourse of human rights by the Chinese and Singaporean governments demonstrate my problem. It seemed to me that my students were asking me to take on a role which they would not have accepted me in. They wanted me, I felt, to present a stable, uniform code of ethics at the same time that they were largely resisting many of my liberal, American ethics as culturally contained or just plain wrong.

In any event, my retorts usually ended the debate, but Asian students rarely challenge an instructor. There was one student, a deeply nationalistic Singaporean engineer, however, who never gave up. He wrote about the issue, as well as the social failure of American ethics, all semester, with no sense of self contradiction. He was particularly adamant in his final paper, a research paper on the increasing impact of computers on education. As he put it:

Computers are making it so teachers do not have to spend all their time grading and testing. They are also making it so students don't have to sit through long lectures in big lecture halls to get the information they need. They can just get it from their teachers by e-mail instead. This will decrease the need for teachers, and those teachers that remain will have time to do more important things-like moral instruction. If they are not grading, testing or lecturing, what other purpose will they serve?

I responded in the margins of his paper with something about there being more to teaching, particularly the teaching of writing, than he was admitting to here, even when we disregard the difficulties of grading content and rhetorical effectiveness by computer. There is the fostering of open communication or debate among students, the giving of direction, through discussion and example, to richer or more critical connections, the pressing for grounds, etc. I told him to go down to the English Department's networked computer classrooms to see an example of what my vision of computer-based teaching could be like. The kind of computer-based education which networked computers favor, I wrote, still presents instructors with significant discursive roles.

I don't know if he ever visited the classrooms, but if he **had** I still believe that he would have found a world of computer-based education which encouraged the kind of teaching I claimed it did, one that was educationally, personally and ethically significant without being transformed into the scene of Sunday school didacticism. At the time, I felt that the networked classroom created this environment on its own, and that it engendered a self evident, managerial role for the instructor. At that time, I felt — although I might not have said so openly — that this role stood somehow beyond the positional complexities of ethics. The computers would take care of such things for me. This was, after all, what much of the critical literature argued. I have since decided that I can no longer afford to be so naïve.

Humanities, Hypertext and Networked Classrooms

The computer-assisted classrooms I am discussing provided two kinds of technologies. The first was hypertext software, and the second was a synchronous conferencing application for the Local Area Network (LAN), technologies that, as I will discuss, share a great many theoretical principles and an increasing amount of practices thanks to the explosive growth of the World Wide Web. Both have seen a great deal of laudatory critical commentary by American academics in the humanities, particularly those involved in the teaching of literature and writing. Before I discuss that commentary, however, I will introduce the fundamental principles and practices of both for those who have not had extensive experience with them.

Few of us today can say that we have not come in contact with hypertext. The World Wide Web — with its clickable links from one document to another — is a form of it. However, it is only a fairly recent form.¹ As both a word and concept, hypertext has had a surprisingly long history. The idea for a technology that would provide, “associative indexing, the basic idea of which is a provision whereby any item may be caused at will to select immediately and automatically another” hails from an article written in 1945 by the Science Advisor to President Roosevelt, Vannevar Bush (7). Ted Nelson coined the term in 1965 — the same year that Doug Engelbart invented the mouse — and, by 1967, the first hypertext computer applications were completed at Brown University: Andy Van Dam's HES (Hypertext Editing System) and FRESS (File Retrieval and Editing System). Apple introduced the first hypertext software for the personal computer in 1987, HyperCard, and a few years later there appeared a similar program for IBM compatibles, called ToolBook.²

HyperCard “stacks” and ToolBook “books” are fundamentally indistinguishable in terms of function and use. Like web pages, each card of a stack — or each page of a book, as I will henceforth refer to it — is made up of text, text links, buttons, images or other media and fields for entering data (see diagram 1).³ Click on a button or text link on one page and you are instantly transferred to another, with its own set of buttons and links. Thus while you might be able to read a

¹ The World Wide Web was named and saw its first developments in 1990. The first Graphical User Interface for the WWW, Mosaic, appeared in 1993.

² Macintosh users had and still have access to another hypertext program called StorySpace, designed in part by David Jay Bolter. However, while it functions along the same principles as HyperCard and ToolBook, its unique interface has proved to be far less influential.

³ Diagram 1 is a screen shot from a hypertext project on the novel *Frankenstein* produced by students in 1993 for my second term “rhetoric and literature” course in the Computer Writing Research Lab at the University of Texas, Austin.

hypertext book linearly, digitally turning from one page to the next, you can also read it from one link to the next, from one related section of text to the another, with no interest in the linear ‘meaning’ of the work. The benefit for the reader is that she has access to a much more open and flexible construction of the book. She can, to a far greater extent than she could with standard print technology, follow her nose. The writer, on the other hand, is faced with an imposing task, that of providing the meaningful connections between spatially distant segments of text. To a teacher of writing and literature, however, that challenge looks like a tremendous pedagogical gain. Finding and articulating relationships is what critical thinking is all about, and the Humanities quickly began exploiting hypertexts’ pedagogical potential. The English literature department at Brown university ran a poetry course on the FRESS system in 1978 and was involving its students in the constructions of elaborate hypertexts by the mid 1980s with its Intermedia system (e.g., George Landow’s “The Victorian Web”).⁴

Since the World Wide Web’s rise in popularity, educators have generally turned away from dedicated hypertext software and turned toward HTML (Hypertext Markup Language), the coding language of web pages. Even before the arrival of WYSIWYG (“what you see is what you get”) HTML editors, it was clear that humanities students had an easier time making a home page than making a HyperCard stack or ToolBook book. Moreover, while one lost much of the automative potential of such programs, it was a potential that most students simply weren’t using and which most instructors didn’t find educationally important. At the same time, moreover, HTML provided two pedagogical gains. The earlier platforms were not designed for networks, but rather for a single user sitting at a single machine. As a consequence, while group work was possible and an entire class could theoretically read the same book at one time, it was not possible for all those users to be creating new pages or new links concurrently. With HTML that problem evaporated. On the Web, groups of any size can browse a site, and – as long as he or she has the right passwords — any member can add links or pages to the site at will. This makes hypertext development a far more social process, and enables a web site to become the location of simultaneous classroom activity, with or without an actual classroom.

Instructors have generally utilized two sorts of hypertext assignment. George Landow, who helped develop Brown’s Intermedia system, describes the first sort in his book, *Hypertext*. For this type of assignment, students are provided with a book or site full of digitized primary and secondary texts. Students are asked to read the texts on-line, to find meaningful connections, and then demonstrate them with hypertext links. Often these links are explained and interpreted on intermediary pages of the students’ own creation. These links and commentaries thus become integral parts of the book or site; the original texts are permanently altered by them. A second type of assignment asks groups of students to create books or sites of their own — usually textual analyses or research projects — that link and comment upon themselves as well as link outward to the world of primary or secondary texts. They are the term papers for cyberspace, as it were. Either assignment formalizes and focuses on the process of analysis and continual reflection by making student writing an integral part of a course’s reading material. At the same time, one quickly recognizes that these

⁴ For useful references on the HES and FRESS systems see the “Hypertext at Brown (University)” Web site as well as Yankelovitch, et al. On the Intermedia system, see Landow.

two types of assignment demand two different levels of analytical commitment, and consequently it is not uncommon for instructors to use both during a term.

The second kind of technology I want to discuss is synchronous conferencing. Synchronous conferencing provides a means for groups of users to take part in a single on-line conversation simultaneously, one that takes place entirely in writing. The most common form is known as Internet Relay Chat (IRC). Internet chats were first developed in 1988, but by then a non-Internet form had already been at work in the classroom for over a year.⁵ In 1987, a group of graduate students in the English department at the University of Texas at Austin developed an application with which students could engage in LAN seminars, to “chat” in response to questions or even lectures provided on-line by a teacher. The principle behind the program, now part of the Daedalus Integrated Writing Environment (DIWE), is that students spend a set period of time during class sitting at their computers, engaging in written conversation, called the “Interchange.” Essentially, Interchange looks and works the same as all other chat programs. It’s key is a simple, scrolling bulletin board, to which all the messages sent to the chat are posted. Its user-interface consists of two parts: an upper frame which displays the bulletin board and a lower frame in which students can write new messages that they can then post (see Diagram 2).⁶ Everyone logged into the discussion sees the same bulletin board, with the same scrolling list of messages, and they follow the conversation by reading them as they appear there. They can also scroll through the list at their own rate — backwards or forwards — or use a *find* function, to search out particular messages or key words, responding to any message or any group of messages at any time. Once completed, chat conversations can be printed for study and/or archived for future reference.

In my opinion, synchronous conferencing can productively involve up to around twenty-four student-users, although instructors often ask their students to work in smaller, more manageable groups. A standard chat class might begin with a short, on-line lecture and then a set of discussion prompts, both of which the instructor posts beforehand. The students are expected to respond to the prompts and then to each other’s responses, working together to come to some well reasoned, well supported conclusions. The instructor’s job is to help them do this, and next to formulate subsequent tasks that ask them to use, analyze or critique those conclusions. In this way, the body of knowledge that the class thus constructs becomes a formal part of a course’s reading material and group analysis the focal activity of the course, much as it does with hypertext assignments. It is a pedagogy that emphasizes the learning — through practice — of analytical methodologies rather than the learning of information.

The fundamental benefits of synchronous conferencing are two-fold: everything is in writing and the instructor is less of a presence. The practical results are threefold. Students can “call up,” at any time, those parts of the interchange they want to respond to. They can take the time to compose more complete responses or

⁵ The original program was developed by Finnish programmer Jarkko Oikarinen. See “What is IRC?” online at http://www2.undernet.org:8080/~cs93jtl/irc_faq.txt. It should be noted that, like most early internet applications, IRC was free and its code was considered public property. As a consequence, an untold number of programmers throughout the world have improved upon, modified and adapted IRC and will continue to do so.

⁶ The text in Diagram 1 is an excerpt from a DIWE interchange generated in 1993 during my second term “rhetoric and literature” course in the Computer Writing Research Lab at the University of Texas, Austin.

arguments, thus raising the intellectual level of classroom discourse and making the gap between conversation and essay writing a much smaller one, and they feel free to try out ideas or voice opinions that they might not in the physical presence of the instructor. The fundamental downsides to synchronous conferencing are also two fold: everything has to be in writing, and the instructor is less of a presence. At first slow typists can feel left out of the excitement, and, in the worse cases, withdraw entirely from the conversation. Secondly, if an instructor has not given the students specific tasks to solve within certain time limits or is not warily taking part in and pushing the conversation, it can quickly deteriorate into a list of unsupported assertions, especially when dealing with undergraduates.

There is a third related downside which has seen a tremendous amount of critical interest, the so-called “flaming” problem. A “flame,” is a sudden fiery outburst aimed at another member of a virtual conversation. In traditional classroom discourse, students speak to one another within certain norms of civil behavior, and most teachers generally expect their students to retain those behavioral norms in the virtual classroom. What many have found, however, is that the anonymity of the Interchange and the perceived ‘distance’ of the instructor gives students not only the freedom to speak their minds but to ridicule, harass or demean as well. Almost every instructor who has taught in the CWRL has had to deal with it in one way or another, and it has served as the subject of a pair of excellent articles published by two of the lab’s ex-staff members: Alison Regan and Susan Romano.

Since its conception, DIWE has been used every day of the week by writing, literature and foreign language courses throughout the United States and an extensive critical literature has grown around it. That literature has tended to concentrate on a single, paired issue: whether or not Interchange creates a more egalitarian form of classroom discourse than is possible off-line and whether or not this discourse is universally empowering for students. Broadly speaking, those critics who emphasize the values of student-centered learning argue for empowerment, while those who emphasize the discursive destructiveness of flaming or the tendency towards shallowness, argue for its disempowerment.⁷ As I see it, however, this debate has mistakenly isolated itself from the issues surrounding hypertext pedagogy generally. If hypertextual discourse can be defined by it’s capability for non-linearity and user-driven signification, then Interchange must also be considered a form of hypertext. Moreover, now that instructors increasingly post interchanges to the WWW and ask students to link them to their responses, primary texts and term papers, as far class practices are concerned, the boundaries between synchronous conferencing and the hypertext class have become completely blurred. Together, I call them the “hyperclass.”

Politics and Hypertext Theory

In his book *Writing Space*, Jay Bolter argues that hypertext creates the conditions for a material realization of post-structuralist theory. Its power, he claims, lies in its potential for spatial rather than linear textual relationships and the freedom it gives readers to organize those relationships and add to or subtract from them. Print texts and most forms of non-computer discourse generally require that a reader follow

⁷ A representative sample of the empowerment argument can be found in Faigley (163-99). Gruber summarizes and cites a representative sample of the disempowerment arguments (74).

a single line of reasoning, a line of reasoning fixed by the author. Hypertext, allows readers to choose from "many, possibly conflicting" lines of argument, to alternate between several lines of argument and to change those lines of argument (117). Consequently, it transfers the power of discursive signification — of creating meaning though language — from a single writer to a multitude of reader-writers, all of whom can choose to read and revise the text in different ways. For Bolter, then, hypertext not only signals the post-modern death of the author, it takes part in the actual murder.

George Landow's book, *Hypertext*, serves largely as an effort to explore the theoretical and practical implications of that post-structural discursive world. As Landow explains it, hypertext "denotes (a form of electronic) text composed of blocks of text — what Roland Barthes terms a *lexia* — and the electronic links that join them." These links connect lexias "external" to a work to the work, say for example, a note or critical commentary. They also connect the lexias "internal" to a work, say for example, chapter to chapter or paragraph to paragraph or even, sentence to sentence. "Although conventional (linear) reading habits apply within each lexia," Landow writes, "once one leaves the shadowy bounds of any text unit, new rules and new experience apply" (4). In other words, the concept of lexias doesn't make Hypertext, the concept of links does. For Landow links are everything. The more links and the more nonlinear and multiplicitous they are, the more hypertextual the text becomes and the more the reader controls the text she reads. This provides the ethical ("ideological") justification for hypertext: the individual is never subject to the discourses of power (184-5).

This struck me, and strikes me still, as rhetorically naive. His key supporting example, I believe, makes this clear. The example has to do with authorial copyright as defined in Western Europe, and the desire to prevent the undesired exploitation of one's own texts:

As John Sutherlands explains,... Anglo-American law treats copyright solely in terms of property. "Continental Europe by contrast enshrines moral right by statute. In France and West Germany the author has the power to withdraw his or her work after it has been (legally) published... In [France and West Germany], publishers who acquire rights to the literary work do no 'own' it, as do their Anglo-American counterparts. They merely acquire the right to exploit it (200).

The result is that when The University of Texas Press sold Francis Nicosia's *The Third Reich and the Palestine Question* to, according to Nicosia, a pro-Fascist publisher and the American author complained, he had no recourse. In Europe, he would have. The question arises then, for Landow: wouldn't the restriction of linkage, and the preservation of authorial property be a morally and socially justifiable act in such a case? Wouldn't this be a perfect example of the dangers of hypertextuality? To Landow, the answer is no. True, hypertext would allow German neofascists, white supremacists, homophobic skinheads etc. to link up to our texts and (mis)use them for their own *arguments right there on the virtual page of our texts*, but then, he argues, we would be able to link up to theirs as well. No other format grants the author, Landow claims, this direct ability to respond.

There is, however, a format quite close to this kind of discursive system of exchange. It is, the Oprah Winfrey Show or Geraldo or the talk-radio call in show. We've all seen or heard this type of show before, even those of us living beyond America's borders: the host announces a discussion on race, and introduces, as panel

members, a professor of sociology, a Black Muslim, a woman of mixed parentage and a skinhead. They answer questions from the host, argue with one another and then respond to (often unscreened) questions from the audience or from callers. Myron Tuman, who posited my present metaphor (85) rightfully points out that this kind of discursive form is far from an ideal of egalitarian fairness, much less intellectual depth, but I would argue that this kind of form does present a kind of egalitarianism — a leveling of significance.

To a very large degree it doesn't matter how the sociologist responds to the skinhead. What matters is that he's sitting on the same stage, the same plane, as that skinhead — perhaps even sitting next to him — and must respond to claims about the biological inferiority of African Americans and their natural tendency toward crime and licentiousness. The link itself, in other words, the connection the forum imposes, can only demean the discourse of the sociologist and elevate the discourse of white supremacy. Any political campaign manager will tell you the same thing: juxtaposition itself is often more significant than the contents of that juxtaposition. Association is a persuasive power in and of itself.⁸

The Human Factor

At the same time, however, it must be kept in mind that the relationship of such theoretical problems to teaching practices exists more in theory than reality, something which the promoters of hypertext have been somewhat reluctant to recognize. In fact, at one point even discussing the amount of time teachers spend in off-line discourse was, a great issue at the computer classrooms at the University of Texas. My feeling now is that our argument missed the pedagogical point. No instructor I know of communicated with students only in hypertext. At some point, despite the theoretical coherency of some hyperclass pedagogies, all classes interact as bodied selves. Instructors may announce reminders about assignments; we tell students to finish and send their last messages; we give brief lectures on say, a hypertext assignment, just to make sure that everyone gets what everyone needs at the same time. Even 'distance' courses occasionally meet for just that purpose. If a class is meeting in a LAN classroom and someone merely comments or even laughs out loud at an Interchange message, the theoretical, organic coherency of the electronic class ruptures.

I have seen classes in which a number of overt, off-line discourses are going on at the same time that their members are "interchanging." These classrooms demonstrate the potential complexity of a multi-discourse pedagogy. The off-line discourses communicate reactions to, instigations and continuations of the online discourses, and vice versa. They impinge upon each other, and they shape each other. They are inseparable. Hyperclass pedagogy should, it seems to me, be able to incorporate this complex, multilayered process. It should take advantage of the individual and relative value of each of those interconnected discourses.

I emphasize the word value, because my experience has also been that a class cannot successfully run solely as hypertextual discourse, that it cannot be completely

⁸ For similar reasons Alan Liu has chosen not to create a link from his encyclopedic humanities index on the World Wide Web, *Voice of the Shuttle*, to the Unibomber's "Manifesto on Industrial Society and its Future." We are, he writes, "beholden to reconfigure. . . [the unibomber's acts and arguments] within intellectual contexts not of his choice so as to reflect upon, critique, protest and perhaps finally even forget [them]" (<http://humanitas.ecsb.edu/liu/whyna.html>).

virtual. My first sense of this value was as a student in a graduate course, entitled, "Electronic Discourse." The course was run exclusively in DIWE; there was no face to face communication. We never "talked" to each other, and although we were all people who had chosen to work with computers, the impersonality of the situation slowly became unbearable. Toward the end of the semester we asked for a "face to face" meeting; the instructor resisted, so we demanded one. The class, we argued, had become alienating and somewhat dehumanizing. We wanted to connect names to faces. We wanted to connect language to the selves that produced it. It is a demand some of my own undergraduate students have made after the first or second days of class.

As one of my students put it, he didn't know "anybody" in the computer class. When he read the messages, he just saw "words," and he wanted to talk to "people too," not just words. What he objected to, much as we graduate students did, was the absence of clear authorship that the Interchange creates. Neither he nor we were willing to give up our sense of selfhood, so important after all for a notion of self-expression, to the post-structuralist classroom. We wanted — we required — a more complete presence of the rhetorical triangle than we were getting in hypertext, and I believe that planners of computer-assisted education who fail to take this into account do so at their peril.

But if disembodiment can be both liberating and repressive for the student, how can we position it within a proactive pedagogical system for hypertextual instruction? My own answer has been somewhat "commonsensical." I have balanced it with other forms of discourse: some face to face small-group work, some face to face round-table discussions and even the occasional, traditional lecture. No method (and hypertextual discourse is one), it seems to me, can be pedagogically absolute or total. No one pedagogical practice is applicable to all contexts, conditions, or, as James Kinneavy would remind us, aims. As such, they need to be considered, as Kinneavy would remind us again, according to some principles of Kairos. We should look to the ways in which multiple forms of discourse can be highlighted and benefited from in the computer classroom as a whole. No doubt the principle of Kairos will serve as the foundation for such a pedagogy.

In other words, we are already choosing to emphasize self/encoder-text relationships within classroom discourse for certain aims or within certain contexts. We and our students apparently both value that relationship to a certain degree, and there is little reason to forcibly reject that value.

The question is then, how a kairotically governed, multi-discursive pedagogy should be conceived for the computer classroom. First, we are going to have to more fully develop the important concept of reader-writer and to do so in a way that doesn't completely submerge the values of authorial personae to reader-response theory. Second, we are going to have to more fully develop, as the authors of "Writing Ourselves Online" conclude, a pedagogical theory that incorporates the roles of teachers as shapers of classroom discourse. I would add, of course, that we need to include the roles of students as reader-writers as well. They too are trying project their own personae and read the personae of others in the discourse they are also trying to shape. We must, in other words, begin to understand the hypertextual class as functioning within the terms of a more complete discursive triangle, as a more complete form of discourse, framed by selves defined by what Patricia Bizzell terms "multipositionalities."

This figuration can provide the grounds by which we can systematically compare the hyperclass with the other forms of classroom discourse that make up the whole pedagogical environment. As Kinneavy argues, the aims of discourse (*A Theory...* 48) and the contexts of discourse (Kairos... 100) cannot be effectively separated from the forms of discourse. If the form of hypertextual discourse is valuable we must ask, "under what circumstances and toward what pedagogical ends?" If instructors and their students find other forms of discourse valuable, we should be asking the same questions. How are they valuable? When are they valuable? It is in the answers that practical differentiation will occur. It is in this practical differentiation that we will be able to develop a systematic pedagogy for the hypertextual education.

The principle here is not to prescribe a determined set of discourse types for a determined set of Kairotic conditions. Nor is it to isolate one "appropriate" form of discourse per pedagogical task. Rather it is to recognize explicitly that varying forms of discourse have different pedagogical and communicative values, and to encourage the use of the full range of forms to their best advantage. The computer classroom should be conceived of as a place where the multiple forms or multiple layers of discourse can be increased. Why? Because the more tools of pedagogical value we have in the classroom, it seems to me, the more effective we can make that classroom.

The Ethical Authority

This conclusion also impinges on the ideological grounds for hypertextuality, however. As Myron Tuman puts it the "advocacy of the networked classroom often cannot be separated from a broader and more-thorough-going rejection of teacher-centered instruction.. (as well as) the entire (hierarchical and authoritarian) social apparatus its supports" (93). To many of hypertext's advocates, in other words, all authority — even the authority of the instructor — functions as part of the same system of traditional, oppressive social authority, and thus all authority is equally oppressive. According to Carolyn Handa, for example:

choosing to keep a traditional, noncollaborative classroom could mean choosing to run the risk of preventing students from realizing their own power as writers and from challenging the competition, chauvinism, and class structure that have played such a major role in capitalistic societies and academia (168).

Tuman counters that this ignores the positive educational role of authority can play by modeling. Piaget argues that learning requires both imitation and play, and Tuman wants to remind hypertextual theorists and hypertextual pedagogues that an assumption of authority is essential to that model. There is no learning without emulation and no excellence without emulation (97-8). If we value our own education, our own ideological perspectives or our own skills as writers, why would we want to remove ourselves or our input from the necessary process of student emulation? Or, Tuman asks, do we think we have nothing beneficial to offer them?

Moreover, Tuman argues, we cannot escape the power relationships which Foucault has shown to infuse society, and that even the hyperclass is "rooted deep in the social nexus" (106). It would be useless, therefore, to imagine our classes as little

discursive utopias which, through the magic of virtuality, somehow manage to escape power structures — internal or external. Rather, we need to pursue, what John Trimbur terms consensus through the recognition of social difference, consensus through “dissensus.” (107). How Trimbur, or Tuman, envision such a classroom, one that doesn’t fall to absolute relativity or the universal acceptance of all opinions, remains unclear to me. However, we might simply and untheoretically conceive of it as an open recognition and a healthy respect for different student backgrounds, some thing which, as Tuman and Regan both imply, requires some amount of intellectual and ideological modelling and a recognition that the off-line, physical lives of our students mustn’t be ignored in the glare of post-structuralist, hypertextual theory.

Richard Lanham has argued that Tuman is needlessly worried about the threat to the “central self” because hypertext doesn’t erase individual identity. Rather, it “permits a genuinely styled public life, one with formal roles that we can play and that are not isomorphic with our ‘real selves.’ They allow us to create . . . [a] genuine social self” (219), constructed in language. In my view, Lanham is missing the point somewhat.

Notably, he doesn’t address the demonstrated problems with what Romano terms the “egalitarian” myth of hypertextual discourse, and, I think, this failure to deal with the widely discussed difficulties actual students have with hypertextuality is reflected in his failure to deal with ethical issues outside of post-structuralist theory. It has long become clear that the real ethical battles in the political and educational institutions of contemporary America are being fought within the debates over multiculturalism, and it is in them that the post-modern values of differentiation and dissonance have been tested (Gutman “Relativism”). Regan’s recognition that human dignity can be under threat by hypertext is an argumentative turn in that direction. Regan’s article stops at this recognition, and no one that I have seen has taken up where she left off. That critical movement must now begin.

The basic assumption of Lanham’s response is that we can — and ought to — disembodiment ourselves in hypertext, give up our physical, cultural and racial identities for virtual replacements. What the proponents of multicultural politics have argued, however, is that these identities are essential for a public discourse, that they and their social histories must be recognized and responded to before any truly just conversation can develop in the United States, or, as Jürgen Habermas proclaims, in modern Europe (142). Post-structuralist arguments for the “overcoming [of] totalizing figures of thought” and the deconstruction of power structures, Habermas argues, “contribute little to the analysis of struggles for recognition” (120). What we need in its place are arguments that can come to grips with what Charles Taylor calls, “the politics of equal dignity. . . based on the idea that all humans are equally worthy of respect” (41). And, one must continue, that this respect must begin with an acceptance of their bodies (Fisher 96) and their racial and cultural identities (Gutman “Introduction” 9). If this is true for public discourse, it is equally true for classroom discourse, traditional or hypertextual.

The question is, however, how a “political ethics” of recognition, what F.C.S. Schiller would have comfortably no doubt understood as a derivation humanism, can be applied to the conditions of the hyperclass (xxi-xxix).⁹ I would argue it is dependent on two assumptions, both of which require us to sacrifice one of the sacred cows of hypertext theory: the undesirability of authorial presence. The first assumption is that a

⁹ “The humanist, accordingly, will tend to grow humane, and tolerant of the divergences of attitude which must inevitably spring from the divergent idiosyncrasies of men” (xxi). Obviously the classical notion of Protogarean *humanitas* is the root concept here

certain imposition of authority — a demand that all discursive participants perform or write in a certain manner and that only certain kinds of associative moves will be accepted — can be discursively productive rather than destructive. The second assumption is that facing students with each others' actual bodies, their human presences, is also productive rather than destructive. As Regan, Faigley and Romano have suggested, group hypertexts are not always inclusive or universally empowering. In other words, even in post-modern discourse there is such a thing as tyranny of the majority and perhaps even tyranny of a minority. It seems to me, that the question is not how the hyperclass can overthrow all pretenses to authoritarianism, but how we, as teachers, can best use our authority to help construct and preserve the liberating and/or ethical qualities of post-modern discourse and to restrain the debilitating qualities that come with it.

Humanist Pedagogy and the Hyperclass

In this way, my Singaporean student, Landow, Bolter and the anti-authority school of hypertextual theorists Tuman discusses all share the same misunderstanding of the networked computer classroom. They all believe that somehow the technology will take care of itself, whether that be in the grading of papers, as my student suggested, or the creation of egalitarian, socially empowering discourse communities, as the theorists suggest. Such claims are not only naïve; they are largely insupportable. At the same time however, it seems to me my student was a good step ahead of Landow and the rest. What "purpose," he asked, "will... (teachers) serve" for the computer classroom, if it is not "moral instruction?" When he wrote it, I thought it was a naïve question, demonstrating a complete misunderstanding of the teacher's role in the class. In retrospect, however, it seems a very, very good question.

If we replace the word "moral" with "ethical," we can connect the issue to a highly appropriate and, in the context of the hyperclass, practical theoretical discourse: the humanistic ethics explored by Emmanuel Levinas. I call them humanistic as they assert that the foundation of ethics lies in the relationship between human beings, between "self and other" "face to face" (79-81). In this way, Levinas' revision of Protagoras's proto-humanist proclamation that man is the measure of all things toward "multiplicity" and away from "egosim" (220-1) can be understood as a rearticulation of Schiller's claim for pluralism and attack on "solipsism" (249-68). At the same time, it must be admitted that what makes Levinas's writing so important is precisely what separates it from Schiller's. For Schiller, the power of the ego should give way to the recognition of the separate but mutually dependent identities of subject and object, the mind of the self and the mind of the other (264-5). It is a humanist ethics of passive acknowledgement and toleration. For Levinas, the world is a much more confrontational place, in which the relationship of subject and subject cannot be understood as the relationship between subject and object and in which both violence and ethics "face" the "Other" directly (73, 224-5). However, if violence "takes aim at [and erases] the face" (225) through murder or the generalizing philosophies of "androgeny" (63, 298), ethical discourse submits itself to the face (72), to 'reconstitute' "the personage on the basis of" his "language" (67). It welcomes the speech of the addressed as all important, and it assumes the principle of communication is learning from another as a physical being (73).

In practical terms, we might imagine Levinasian discourse that originates in conflict and develops through patterns of listening to, questioning and engaging with

selves that have an acknowledged, social, cultural and physical existence. Its end result is not merely the statement of respect or the acknowledging of a point of view, but actions -- discursive or otherwise -- that reveal mutual respect and mutual self-critique. Of course, as James Crosswrite notes, "educators whose charge is to teach" toward such ends "face an immense challenge," particularly in contrast to those who see the goal of education as the transference of knowledge or the fostering of formal skills (71). However if we are to take humanities education seriously as humanistic -- as being grounded in ethics -- then the challenge is inescapable. If we are to take hyperclass pedagogy seriously as a means of humanities education, then the challenge is also inescapable. At the same time, in my opinion, it is a challenge that most instructors working with hypertext or conferencing technologies have ignored. The technology has been the means of achievement and not their use of the technology. How many instructors teach rhetorical strategies for questioning people and not just texts or teach rhetorical strategies for balancing acknowledgement with critique? How many of them require their students to employ these techniques in on-line conferencing or in hypertext linking? And how many assign conferencing tasks -- or perhaps, more importantly, post-conferencing tasks -- that encourage Levinasian ends for the hyperclass? The answer to all of these questions is surely, "not very many."

Perhaps part of the problem with much hyperclass pedagogy is that it assumes that on-line discourse is fundamentally disembodied, that the selves behind it are less important than the non-linear text they jointly produce. A humanist pedagogy should always seek to undermine that kind of assumption. It should find moments and methods to rupture the illusory universe of post-structuralist textuality which theorists and educators have typically believed the hyperclass to create and which the class members' virtual interaction seems to promote. A humanist, on-line pedagogy should thus concentrate the appropriate times and methods for -- to return to Levinas' metaphor -- face-to-face interaction, for the reminder that classroom discourse is a product of the shared struggle of students and that the goals of this discourse is the shared development of mutual understanding. Hence, the principle of discursive Kairos is not merely a means of making computer-assisted education more effective or its hypertexts less prone to flaming. It is a means of making it meet the fundamental ends of humanist education.

Consequently, I would now assert that the kind of managerial role which I earlier posited for the computer classroom can be a "moral" one, that it can form a kind of ethical authority for hypertextual discourse. This kind of authority acts to moderate the discourse, guiding it toward productive topoi and away from unproductive or destructive ones, as well as possible. It seeks to model students' rhetorical techniques for on-line expression and response. It tries to lead students, by way of critical writing, from hyperclass debate and dialog to shared self-critique, and it controls when, how and why educational technologies are used.¹⁰ In other words, it sets itself up as and functions as an ethical force with ethical aims for the class community, and it takes on the humanistic obligation of making the discourse an empowering one. Patricia Bizzell argues that the educator must be willing to consider the relationship of her role to the struggle for "social justice" beyond the classroom walls (295), and I see no reason why that should change for the computer-assisted educator.

Bizzell couches her proclamation within a course proposal which would work fabulously well in hypertext: asking her students to participate in the "collecting,

¹⁰ Gere, for example, correctly argues that the transformation of a "class into a community where all members feel secure" will not happen on its own (cited in Tuman 99).

selecting” and connecting of noncanonical materials for the study of “American negotiations of difference” in colonial New England. It would be interesting to peek in on that course and watch the ways she encourages critical selection and connection, the strategies she uses to deepen analysis and the various discursive means she employs to confront students with their own constructed identities and their own arguments about cultural difference in the literary past. The hypertext classroom allows us to do that much more easily, and a number of researchers have begun to examine how instructors manage the hyperclass by examining their performances within it (DeWitt). Until we recognize, however, that this virtual classroom is not a totalizing means of discourse and must be contained within actual human interaction and meta-hypertextual choices, we will remain incapable of constructing more ethical, empowering and educationally pedagogies for it. After all, the technology is not important; the teachers and students using it are.

Diagrams

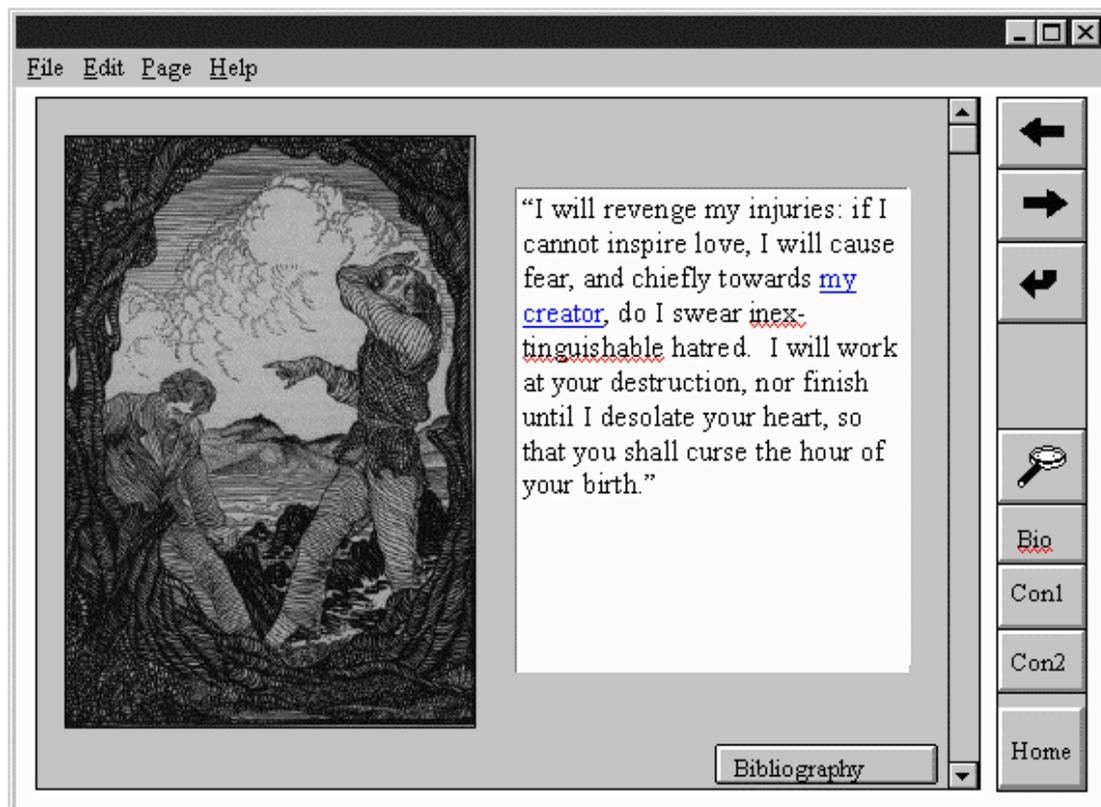


Diagram 1

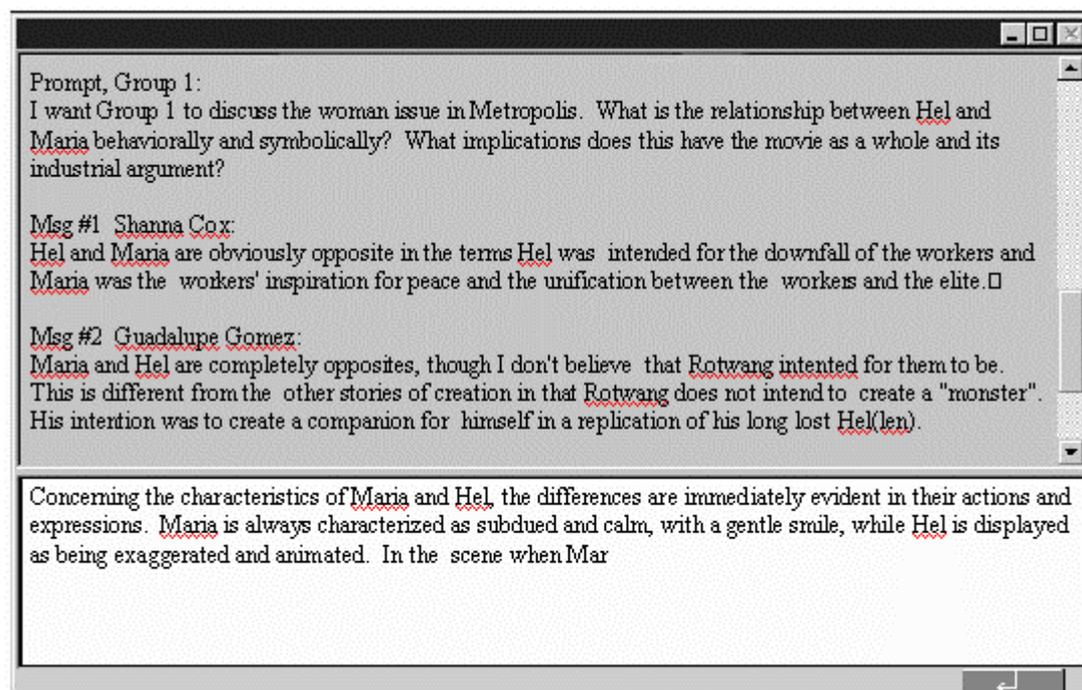


Diagram 2

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