Inkshed

Contents

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

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," for $40 [$20 for students and the un(der)employed] to the following address:

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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/inkshed—maintained by Russ Hunt.

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From the Editors' Desktops

On December 6 the Writing, Rhetoric, and Professional Communication program held a one-day conference entitled "Teaching Writing with Technology" on the campus of the University of Western Ontario to explore how our relationship with technology affects the way we teach writing. This issue of the *Inkshed Newsletter* attempts to bring this issue to a larger audience.

Three speakers led the way: Doreen Starke-Meyerring spoke on "Beyond Use: A Conceptual Framework for Integrating Technologies into the Teaching of Writing"; a version of this talk appears in this issue as "Writing in Digital Environments and Online Privacy: Insights from Bounty Hunting.**"** Amanda Goldrick-Jones gave us a glimpse of, among other things, her "Second Life" in her talk, "To wiki or not to wiki?" and Doug Brent gave a technology-free presentation called "Teaching as performance in the electronic classroom" based on an article published in 2005 (http://www.acs.ucalgary.ca/%7Edabrent/mystuff.html). His reflections on the talk and the day appear in this issue.

Interspersed with these talks were sessions in a computer lab where participants were asked to engage with the technology. One session demonstrated how the new WebCT/Blackboard system can be used to tutor students using a real-time voice connection and the ability to edit a student's word processing document. Using this system allows the tutor to actually make changes to the student's document on the student's computer in real time. This raised questions, of course, about how the technology might just make it easier to remove ownership of the text from the student—not a good thing.

Another session involved participants in updating pages on a wiki; to take a look at the textual trail of these exchanges, view this page:
http://collaborativewritingonline.wikispaces.com/Online+Collaborative+Writing+and+the+Chat+of+Mankind
Amanda's retrospective comments at the top of this page note that asynchronous use is the way to go with a wiki—or at least direct people to edit different pages if they are working synchronously. If you feel so moved, edit that page yourself! Roger just did.

Doug Brent led the discussion during the final part of the day, a welcome respite (for some!) from the lab and the screen. Technology creates the expectation for a different kind of teaching performance on the part of writing instructors. Partly this results from what Doug called the "textualization" of courses that results from using online technologies. This textualization of the learning experience—freezing the materials in time so that they tend not to be revised—leads to seeing education as a thing rather than a performance embedded in social engagement and interaction.

In the end, we hope that these talks and the reflections that Lisa Macklem, Patrick Kennedy, Suzanne Boles, and Terence Green wrote in response to them will prove interesting and thought provoking to the readers of the *Inkshed Newsletter*.

Roger Graves   Heather Graves

Writing in Digital Environments and Online Privacy: Insights from Bounty Hunting

Doreen Starke-Meyerring ✍

Like many people, I am not fond of flying. Yet, there are a number of ways to while away the uneasy minutes of crammed seating, recycled air, or even turbulence. Sometimes, it's a good book; other times, it's simply sitting next to people from all walks of life. When I got onto the plane from Toronto to London, Ontario, to attend the "Writing with Technologies" Conference at the University of Western Ontario, serendipity placed me next to a former bounty hunter. In less than an hour, I had learned more about bounty hunting than one does from the average Hollywood film, including who is usually hunted down, why, how, and under what conditions.

Although the practice of bounty hunting by itself says much about our human condition, I realized quickly as well that there were also surprising connections to be made between bounty hunting and writing in digital environments. Of the captivating details my fellow passenger shared, there were two remarks that struck me as particularly pertinent to writing in digital environments: One was about the role of the internet, and the other was about the role of human relationships in bounty hunting. The first pertinent remark my fellow passenger made was that he was considering returning to the business since now with the internet, of course, hunting people down would be much easier. According to the bounty hunter, the internet makes finding fugitives surprisingly easy and efficient, efficient enough to make bounty hunting a potentially even more lucrative job than in the past.

Somewhat related, the second remark, the one about relationships, pertained to the most efficient way of hunting down fugitives. Apparently, in my fellow passenger's account, what a bounty hunter can rely on the most is the importance of human relationships and them working well— that is working well for the bounty hunter, not necessarily the fugitive. Apparently, the easiest way to track down a fugitive is to promise head money to a family member or friend, who then simply needs to call the bounty hunter as soon as the fugitive visits and to reveal his or her whereabouts to the bounty hunter in order to claim the money. Evidently, someone even on a fairly lucrative bounty of say $25,000 can be had for as little as about $300 in head money, depending perhaps on the care with which past slights had been mended.

These remarks by my fellow passenger gave new meaning to my presentation on writing in digital environments at the conference, which would argue for drawing on our key strengths as rhetoricians—our long-term emphasis on collaboration, communication, and critical thinking— that is our understanding of writing and discourse as processes, as social practice, and as steeped in power relations, as we as writing teachers think about the role of technologies in the teaching of writing. Given my long-term interests in what Christina Haas (1996) and others (DeVoss, Cushman, & Grabill, 2005; Horner, 2001; Wysocki, 2004) have identified as the materiality of writing and the issues that ensue from this materiality for writing in digital environments, my focus was to be on our tradition of critical thinking as particularly vital to teaching writing in these environments, specifically for issues of privacy. Here, I share some brief reflections on the materiality of writing in digital environments, especially in relation to privacy, and suggest some implications of this changed materiality for the teaching of writing in digital environments.

The Changing Materiality of Writing

In moving from pen and paper and even from the desktop screen to digital internet-based environments, the materiality of writing changes dramatically as it becomes inscribed in the

digital code of online spaces. With this changed materiality, the rhetorical act of writing changes as well, with significant consequences for individuals, organizations, and society as a whole. One of the many ways in which the materiality of writing in digital spaces changes concerns who reads our texts, our social interactions: what happens to them, with what purpose, and for whose benefit? While a letter or telephone call is somewhat limited in circulation, the internet allows for massive access to and instantaneous surveillance of any social interaction. More importantly, texts, often existing in databases of some sort, and any social interaction in digital spaces take on an entirely new function: they become personal data that can be put to uses previously unimaginable. Data can now be shared, copied, searched, mined, mixed, matched, aggregated, or manipulated in previously unknown ways at unprecedented speeds for use and sale worldwide (Starke-Meyerring & Gurak, 2007). Perhaps one of the best known simulations of the ways in which texts and social interactions in online spaces can be surveilled and combined into entirely new social interactions, with previously unknown personal consequences, is presented in this brief video about online privacy created by the American Civil Liberties Union of a hapless pizza lover caught in the web of database surveillance.

While the video merely projects some of the potential or imagined uses of these aggregated texts, there are, of course, many real institutional and business needs for such data. Surely, they are of interest not only to bounty hunters looking to identify a fugitive's social network and whereabouts, but to any other business seeking information about customers or employees. Aside from the usual e-commerce and marketing industries, the insurance industry, for example, has a great need for personal data to determine risks and insurance rates, the banking and credit industry has a similar vital need for such data to determine mortgage and lending rates, and naturally, potential employers have a great need for personal data to make employment and promotion decisions. In addition, law enforcement, national security, and other government agencies have similarly strong needs for such data. With Google entering the business of collecting and storing personal medical and DNA data (Kawamoto, 2007), the extent of such data collection promises indeed to be unlimited. In fact, an entire industry has emerged devoted to the lucrative business of collecting, aggregating, matching, mining, and selling personal data to businesses, banks, law enforcement, and government agencies (see, for example, this American Blackout video of Congresswoman Cynthia McKinney investigating the use of such industry collected data in the 2000 Florida presidential elections).

In addition to massive access to exponentially proliferating personal data, the materiality of writing in digital spaces changes because of the unprecedented stickiness and spreadability of texts and /as data. Texts can be cached, stored, archived, copied, and can in any case be difficult to remove from servers, especially as these can be located anywhere in the world. This change in materiality has given rise to yet another industry in the form of services (e.g., such as Reputation Defender) that assist clients in clearing past confessions and other texts in public chat rooms, social network sites, discussion blogs, and other spaces from the eyes of potential employers and other previously unanticipated, but now important, readers.

What is perhaps the most challenging change in the materiality of writing in digital spaces is the lack of transparency with which data can be collected. Digital technologies and policies regulating their use tend to be designed in such a way that it is difficult for people to realize when and for what purposes texts and /as data are collected, manipulated, and transferred. The concealed nature of data collection is inscribed in the digital code in the form of cookies, web bugs, spyware, obscure internet browser options for interaction with and on the web; enticed by ostensibly free offerings in the form of screensavers, cell phone ring tones, email or social networking services; and secured by obscure and tedious privacy policies or terms of use policies,

which are designed to serve certain interests rather than others, mostly those that lead to the maximum collection of data (Markel, 2005).

This changed materiality of writing with its increased potential for massive inconspicuous data collection has been a concern for many researchers for some time now. Mark Poster (1990), for example, labeled digital network technologies a "superpanopticon," invoking Foucault's (1977) key insight that societies have been moving from predominantly disciplinary control mechanisms to surveillance mechanisms, where the mechanisms of who is collecting data on whom, for what purpose, under what conditions, and with what legitimation becomes a critical element in power relations. And in contrast to the panopticon, digital technologies provide decentralized opportunities for inconspicuous, but ubiquitous surveillance. Similarly, Lawrence Lessig (2005) emphasized the ways in which the surveillance potential of digital technologies outdo Orwell's imagination in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. In the novel, after all, as Lessig remarks, it was possible to tell where surveillance was taking place and therefore to identify places where it might be escaped. And as Foucault has demonstrated persuasively, omnipresent surveillance has consequences not only for individuals (and not only for fugitives or pizza lovers as illustrated in the ACLU video), but for society as a whole when self-discipline and self-censorship in the face of omnipresent surveillance threaten to stifle public dissent and robust deliberation, which, of course, are vital to democratic decision making.

Lessig (2005), however, stresses that technologies do not simply accidentally support this kind of materiality of writing. Digital technologies do not have to enable inconspicuous omnipresent data collection. Instead, they tend to be designed or shaped with particular interests in mind. Many of the data collection technologies that now characterize the internet, such as cookies, for example, were not part of the original design, but were developed to serve particular interests in data collection. As Chuck Bazerman (2007) observes, it is "large economic stakes along with the complexity, stability and power of …[exisiting] social systems" around which technologies tend to be designed or to be "bent."

As numerous rhetorical studies of technology have demonstrated, the ways in which technologies are designed, shaped, used, and regulated are legitimized by discursive regimes that naturalize and normalize certain practices and marginalize, discredit, or even criminalize other practices that are enabled by these technologies. For example, the sharing of digital files, such as music, films, and books or articles for purposes of new creation and knowledge making tends to be broadly criminalized as piracy (Lessig, 2006; Logie, 2007; Murray, 2005)—often to protect established business models. In contrast, surveillance designs and the taking of personal data for e-commerce, marketing, or government purposes through inconspicuous data collection are often normalized, with concerns about personal data collection discredited as stemming from reclusive non-normative social behaviors characteristic only of ogres like Shrek. As Lessig (2006) notes, in this discursive regime, the theft of personal data is usually legitimated; rarely is it identified as data piracy.

Moreover, in line with Foucault, Poster (1995) argues that participants in digital spaces partake in their own subjection to the power and surveillance practices of these spaces. In this context, the second remark about bounty hunting, the one about the importance of human relationships in power practices, takes on new meanings in digital environments as this participation is often induced through presumably free services for connecting with others. In other words, they rely on what Bazerman (2007) calls our deeply human "hunger for connection." Accordingly, much participation in digital spaces designed for the purposes of data collection is secured not by force, of course, but rather by enticement, most notably through providing presumably free spaces for maintaining and building personal relationships as in viral marketing sites such as Facebook or

MySpace. Perhaps most poignantly described by popular Web marketing consultant Ralph F. Wilson (2005), "viral marketing describes any strategy that encourages individuals to pass on a marketing message to others, creating the potential for exponential growth in the message's exposure and influence." The name, Wilson explains, draws on the power of viruses to replicate: "Like viruses, such strategies take advantage of rapid multiplication to explode the message to thousands, to millions." And as key principles of viral marketing, Wilson names ostensibly free offers, the exploitation of social networks and of common motivations, including the "hunger to be popular, loved, and understood"—the hunger for connection.

It is this hunger for connection that makes the practices of social networking particularly conducive to ensuring participation in viral marketing spaces. After all, why settle for spam emails to push marketing messages or to phish for personal data—messages that may end up only in a recipient's spam or trash folder—when the participatory web, and especially so-called social networking sites, now entice participants to disclose their personal data *en masse* voluntarily and to pass on marketing messages as they connect with their friends, colleagues, and strangers. As Aristotle discovered more than 2000 years ago, what matters most in persuasion is not what is said or what logical or emotional appeals are made, but rather the relationships, connections, and credibility we have or create with an audience, what he called ethos: "it makes much difference in regard to persuasion…that the speaker seem to be a certain kind of person" [1378a]. More than 2000 years later, Foucault as well as my fellow passenger observed that human relationships not only matter, but are also central to surveillance practices.

Given the changed materiality of writing in digital environments and the many diverse interests in the data that are solicited through our need for connection, a key question then becomes what happens as our texts and interactions become data? While privacy policies such as that of Facebook assure their site users that "you should have control over your personal information" (Facebook, Privacy Policy, Dec 6, 2007), the policy then states that users are going to be tracked even beyond the site: "Facebook may also collect information about you from other sources, such as newspapers, blogs, instant messaging services, and other users of the Facebook service through the operation of the service (e.g., photo tags) in order to provide you with more useful information and a more personalized experience." No "opt out" opportunity is provided, let alone an "opt-in" approach advocated by fair information principles (Bennett & Raab, 1997; Starke-Meyerring, 2007). Finally, when moving onto the site's Terms of Use, users can only wonder why the company might require them to grant the company "an irrevocable, perpetual, non-exclusive, transferable, fully paid, worldwide license (with the right to sublicense) to use, copy, publicly perform, publicly display, reformat, translate, excerpt (in whole or in part) and distribute such User Content for any purpose, commercial, advertising, or otherwise." Even once user content is removed, "the Company may retain archived copies" (Facebook, Terms of Use, Nov 15, 2007); there is no information about the purpose or about the length of time data are being kept. Given these policies, performing viral marketing services for the company in exchange for "free" social networking software may be of the least concern for site participants.

Implications for the Teaching of Writing

Surely, more so than pen and paper, or perhaps in different ways, digital writing spaces are highly contested sites in which the battle for the materiality of writing is fought out with significant consequences for individuals and society as a whole. What implications does this changed materiality of writing and its contestation, then, have for the teaching of writing? No doubt, there are many implications, three of which seem particularly relevant here:

First, digital writing spaces and the policies that regulate them have—like all discourse and technologies—real consequences not only for society, but also for students as individuals. They

therefore raise important questions for the writing spaces into which we invite students, how we discuss these spaces, and what role the spaces in which the students participate play in our pedagogy. To some extent, some of these decisions are made by institutional policies or by federal and provincial laws. Many institutional policies, for example, stipulate that students cannot be required to engage in non-university or non-college provided writing spaces. Similarly, several Canadian provinces have moved to stipulate that student data cannot be held on servers located outside Canada, or that professors may not take laptops with student data across the border into the United States (Keller, 2007). In the United States, data protection is regulated rather differently than in Canada and other countries (Starke-Meyerring, Burk, & Gurak, 2004), and as the Facebook privacy policy states, for example, "By using Facebook, you are consenting to have your personal data transferred to and processed in the United States." Nevertheless, the choice of writing spaces in which students engage holds rich opportunities for discussing the contested nature and the interested regulation of these spaces.

Second, perhaps most importantly, digital writing spaces raise questions about the kinds of opportunities we create in writing classes for both critical analysis of and critical engagement in the writing spaces in which the students participate. As Bazerman (2007) urges, "Beyond providing students with facility in design tools and multi-media rhetoric, teachers of rhetoric need to provide students with analytic tools to understand the changing locations and informational richness of encounters they will be creating, the larger knowledge, social, and activity environments that surround the particular encounter and activity spaces they are working in, and the ways in which communications will mediate transformed work, citizenship, and personal relations."

Critical thinking in the form of critical analysis and engagement are, of course, mainstays in most writing courses. Drawing on this long tradition, I don't identify critical thinking with "saying negative things" about something or uncovering "hidden truths." Rather, I use the term critical thinking in the sense of rhetorical thinking in the ways in which rhetoricians ask questions of discourse, for example: What rhetorical work is to be accomplished by a given text, for whom, how, and why? Who sponsors particular discursive or literacy practices (Brandt & Clinton, 2002) and why? Who is called on to play what role, and who is silenced? Whose knowledge and interests are normalized, affirmed, or privileged? How? Whose are marginalized? What is rendered normal, what marginal or abnormal?

Like discourse, technologies are never neutral; instead, they are highly implicated in social and institutional power struggles and invested in particular interests. Specific designs (cookies or other designs for inconspicuously tracking and recording people's actions) privilege the interests of some groups—those who stand to profit from that practice—and marginalize the interests of others. Critical thinking about technologies therefore involves critical analysis and appraisal, not of whether something—a technology or a technology policy—is good or bad, but rather whose interests are being served and how; who benefits; who is included, marginalized, or excluded; what the consequences of particular technology design, use, and regulation are for different groups. Just as writing courses ask students to engage discourse critically, they need to provide opportunities for students to learn how to engage technologies and specifically digital writing spaces critically. And rooted in our long rhetorical tradition, critical thinking has always involved both analysis or what McKerrow (1991) identified as rhetorical criticism, and critical rhetoric or what in digital environments Selber (2004) conceptualized as functional, critical, and rhetorical literacies.

Examples of student involvement in the contested discourse around the shape of digital writing spaces abound. For example, in a much discussed blog entry, a journalism student, Trent

Lapinski, presents his research on the sponsors and the development of Myspace. Tracing the origins of the site to a history of direct marketing, spam, and entertainment companies as well as questionable financial dealings, Lapinsky questions the rhetorical emphasis on social networking in a site designed for data collection, mining, and marketing. Similarly, a widely discussed Youtube video titled "Does what happens in Facebook stay in Facebook?" attempts to trace the links and networks of Facebook sponsors with e-commerce businesses such as PayPal and government surveillance initiatives such as the Total Information Awareness Project, a past data surveillance project designed by the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA). Facebook as well has given rise to a number of mass protests against newly introduced privacy invading features that were originally designed to pass on all updates to a user's site through Newsfeeds and recently also information about purchases and other activities on other web sites through a feature called Beacon to a user's network. Only after massive protests and online petitions initiated by or involving students was the software code changed for users to have the right to turn these features off. The commentary these blogs, Youtube videos, Facebook protest groups, and online petitions have elicited themselves provide rich opportunities for learning through analysis and engagement. For example, they give rise to such questions as what makes a Youtube video, blog entry, petition for the purpose of such critical engagement persuasive? Particular kinds of evidence or documentation? Particular endorsements? Appeals to particular authorities (in the widest sense of individuals considered credible with particular groups in particular areas)? Certain ways of invoking particular kinds of readings, viewings, or responses? To what extent do seeming protest victories in the case of blatant privacy invading features address fundamental privacy practices of the site or perhaps serve more to give the illusion of due process of user inclusion and decision making?

Finally, as teachers of writing in digital environments, we are as DeVoss, Cushman, and Grabill (2005) argue, uniquely positioned to make vital contributions to the deliberation and shaping of infrastructures for writing in digital environments at our institutions. Many universities are working to provide digital writing spaces that allow for the kinds of connections and sharing of knowledge that social networking software can enable and facilitate, without subjecting the students to viral marketing software with questionable privacy practices. To name only one example, the University of Manitoba has included social networking software within its institutional portal for students and faculty to connect and create groups across courses, disciplines, and other traditional institutional boundaries (Johnson, 2007). As DeVoss and her colleagues argue, as writing teachers, we have a vital role to play in shaping "rhetorically, technically, and institutionally—what is possible for our students to write and learn" (p. 37).

Surely, there are many more implications to be drawn from the constantly changing and highly contested materiality of writing in digital environments for the teaching of writing. Whatever these may be, as rhetoricians and writing teachers we have a vital role to play in helping students shape their participation in these spaces—to learn how to engage critically in them not as docile users but rather as citizens who participate in the deliberation, contestation, and shaping of these spaces and the human connections they allow us to make.

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Teaching as performance: A retrospective and some thoughts from 2008.

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Doug Brent ✎

In 2005, I published an article in *First Monday* called "Teaching as Performance in the Electronic Classroom." That article, in turn, was based on talks given and thoughts thought several years before. Five years or so is a very long time in the life of electronic technologies, so when Roger asked me to speak at a workshop on Teaching Writing with Technology at Western, the event gave me an opportunity to look at where we have come in the years since and to ask whether there has been any fundamental shift in our attitudes to teaching technologies and the ways in which we deploy them.

On the whole, the intervening years have presented us with an ever-widening array of technologies, and with students who seem ever more ready to embrace them—even to demand them. But the basic issues that are layered on top of these ever-changing technologies are remarkably similar: the constant struggle between social groups over the *meanings* that we assign to these technologies.

I will not rehearse my entire *First Monday* article, since you can read it if you want by following the link above. But I'd like to reaffirm some of its key points, points which I find as salient today as I did in 2005 and before, prior to moving on to some of the new thoughts that arose at the workshop.

I find that Pinch and Bijker's classic concept of "interpretive flexibility" is helpful when thinking about new technologies (1987). Pinch and Bijker argue that when a technology is young, it is in a state of high interpretive flexibility, by which they mean that its social meaning is not stable. Technologies do not necessarily assume the shapes they do because of inherent advantages of one form of technology over another. When a technology is young, it comes to mean different things to different social groups. The shape it ultimately assumes represents the ascendancy of one set of meanings over another—which in turn means that one social group has been more successful than its competitors in asserting the dominance of its particular set of meanings.

The other conceptual handle that I find particularly useful in talking about educational technology in particular is Ong's venerable distinction between orality and literacy (1982). For Ong, the oral represents the performative: oral knowledge must be constantly re-performed, recited, reenacted in order to continue to exist. In the process it undergoes more or less subtle shifts over time to keep in step with the social milieu in which it is generated and reproduced through re-performance. Literacy by contrast is relatively static. Its power is in the permanence of texts: their ability to produce and reproduce the same message over both time and space in relative independence of immediate circumstances.

Teaching is perhaps the ultimate in resistance to textualization. Literary teaching from the textbook to the chalkboard have informed teaching practice, but have left virtually untouched the performative act at its centre: the human being performing knowledge along with other human beings whether in the lecture hall or the writing workshop. Teaching, or good teaching at any rate, remains alive, the performance changing gradually over time with the changing audience

and the developing craft of the teacher. As anyone who has taught the same course in the morning and again in the afternoon will testify, no class is ever the same class twice.

New teaching technologies introduce a new state of interpretive flexibility into this age-old story. New teaching technologies are, or can be, relentless in their textualization of the performative act of teaching. At one extreme they can be highly interactive, requiring the constant presence of the human performer, even at a remove of distance. Discussion boards demand to be responded to and moderated, synchronous distant technologies (from the text-based to the highly visual and auditory) demand the presence of the human actor on either side of the screen and keyboard. But teaching technologies also invite the creation of a broad spectrum of more or less static texts: on-line notes and assignments, recorded presentations, Breeze powerpoints with voiceover, and any number of other texts.

The engaged teacher, when permitted to do so by an engaged administration, will remain in control of this spreading wake of texts, reconfiguring and rewriting the texts as they are reperformed. But the natural tendency of texts is to remain static, to repeat themselves over and over with little interaction with human agency. The canned distance course, repeating itself over and over with the assistance only of markers and perhaps "tutors," is a theoretical end point that is often too tempting to ignore. And thereby is generated the concept of "intellectual property," a constellation of *things* that can be bought and sold but which are relatively resistant to incremental development.

Since the early days of the new teaching technologies (a decade or so ago, more or less, coincident with the explosive popularity of the Internet personal computer), some aspects of intellectual property have settled down a bit. Owning to bitter experience, institutions are wiser about spelling out the contractual obligations of courseware developers, usually negotiating a royalty-free license for the right to use the developer's handiwork for a specified period of time. Developers are in turn much more careful about how they read the fine print in those contracts, and both sides seem to have reached an uneasy truce over the matter. But the relative calm over legal issues masks a fundamental interpretive flexibility that continues to hover around them. Technologized education continues to be interpreted in an unstable fashion, with education as performance and education as a set of things continually trading places as foreground and background.

Contemplating the state of things today, I respond to two recent examples at my own institution, examples which I think represent the continued resistance of education to total textualization and to the persistence of the performative.

Recently, the University of Calgary ran a grand experiment using podcasting as a means of augmenting or replacing the classic lecture. Four courses in four disciplines—Communications Studies, Chemistry, English and Sociology—were selected. Each instructor used podcasting in a somewhat different way, but the essence of the technology is simple—audio files which students can download and listen to on a computer or any MP3 device.

We quickly realized that over-complicated proprietary software such as iTunes simply gets in the way, and began simply posting the podcasts on a website for anyone to download. If anyone "unauthorized" happened to download the files and got some pleasure out of listening to them, what matter? If they had not paid to register officially in the course, they would not get a credit for it, which, like it or not, is one of the main reasons that people pony up $450 for thirty-nine hours of course time. After that, we had relatively few technological problems.

I was not personally involved in the development and offering of Communication and Culture's version of this course, but I watched with close interest as my colleague, Dawn Johnston, went through the throes of developing and offering the course. Her course was an introduction to communications theory, a course that is by its nature fairly lecture-heavy and therefore a good candidate for this delivery method.

One thing that became evident was that personal style is particularly important in this medium. A prerequisite is a style similar to that of a radio host, with an ability to talk animatedly to empty space and image an audience so vividly that the audience can really imagine you imagining them. She found herself recording lectures on a headset, on Saturday mornings, sometimes while walking about the house and doing light chores. She also found that she was relating aspects of her lectures to events and discussions in the weekly face-to-face tutorial sessions, blending on-line and face to face interaction relatively seamlessly.

Students reacted well to the course. There were three aspects that they liked particularly well. As one might expect, most reported that they enjoyed the any time/any place aspect of the course. They could not only time-shift the classes as they wished, but also listen to them on the bus or while making dinner. The multitasking nature of the modern student seemed particularly amenable to the hands-free aspect of the podcast.

They also liked the fact that the lectures were not interrupted by other students' questions. I have to admit that I found this response pretty disappointing. I have always thought that the ability to ask questions was one of the things about a face-to-face lecture that partly redeems it from pure monologue. But I suppose that having to listen to other students' questions and the answers to them does not especially suit the need for speed and efficiency that also seems to characterize the modern student. (If you have not seen the youtube video, [A Vision of Students Today](), do take a break from reading this and view it!)

The third aspect that students particularly liked was the ability to listen to segments more than once. This is perhaps more gratifying than their disinclination to listen through other students' questions, but it also accords with the needs of a rerun generation who will happily pay twenty dollars to own a DVD and watch it ten times. It also represents an interesting blend of the performative and the textual. After all, one of the things that most of us particularly value about texts, and what according to alphabet theory gives them much of their transformative power, is their ability to hold still while we read and reread them at our own pace. This intersection of the transformative and the textual suggests that podcast can be a medium of interesting power if used knowledgably.

One other narrative of performative teaching technology before I'm done.

Every program in every institution seems to have at least once course that seems doomed by its own success. Ours is Communications Studies 363, better known as Technical and Professional Communication. It is required by the entire faculties of Engineering and Business, plus a miscellany of other departments including Geography and (until recently) Computer Science. Like most writing courses, it needs to be taught in relatively small sections, with the result that we have historically taught as many as thirty sections a year. Of course this has financial implications—we do not get funded according to the number of students we serve. Pedagogically, though, the more disturbing result has been a scattering of the course as legions of instructors, mostly sessionals, struggle to make it work for them. Of course everyone makes it work for them in their own way, which is arguably the triumph of the performative and of the individual style. But the variety of backgrounds and rhetorical training of the instructors meant that every student

got something different, sometimes almost unrecognizably different, and the amount of rhetorical theory backing each section varied widely.

We tried to fix this by creating gigantic lecture sections in which the basic theories and orientations would be laid down once a week, followed by two much smaller workshop sections led by graduate students and sessionals. It sort of worked -- at least the basics of the course were consistent, and students continued to get the rich layer of individual feedback that a writing course demands.

But students would not come to the lectures. Five of our most experienced full-time faculty members, some of them past winners of teaching awards, cycled through the course over a period of several years, using every pedagogical technique in the book to make the lectures interesting and engaging. Nothing seemed to work, and attendance regularly dwindled to a handful, most of whom politely pretended to be taking notes on their laptops as they checked out their Facebook sites. One student regularly sat near the front reading a physical paperback. I appreciated his honesty.

Of course you can't lecture about writing. It's hard to believe our collective idiocy. Our students were telling us what we should have been able to figure out for ourselves -- writing is a performative act and you can't tell people how to do it from the front of a lecture hall. But students did seem to like doing the assignments (although they did not always appreciate the grades they received), profited from the feedback they received, and mostly told us that they had learned something, sometimes a lot. They even liked the copious handouts that the instructors and the teaching assistants prepared together and shared.

So last year we did a 180 and eliminated the lectures entirely. In fact, we eliminated classes entirely. My colleague Jo-Anne Andre and several members of her Writing Centre team had had a great deal of success with several entirely on-line writing courses, and despite my initial surprise, it stands to reason. At its heart, a good writing workshop is nothing but an exchange of texts. There is little else to do in the classroom, and most good teachers of writing turn their classrooms into extended facilitation sessions with little or no talk from the front. True, responding to writing in the form of more writing can be clumsy and time-consuming, and it can be easier to sit a student down face to face and ask straight out "what did you really mean here." But the heart of a writing course is nonetheless text, text and more text.

So we are back to big sections with markers to respond to the writing. This has its own serious problems—we are, admittedly, trying to cut financial corners, so it is hard to retain people who are good at what they do and are willing to respond to the volume of writing required for frankly miserable pay, without even the satisfaction of getting to perform in front of an audience. Being the instructor of record also takes its toll in terms of administrative tasks: keeping a vast number of students on track, answering a deluge of e-mails, and working with the markers to achieve some level of consistency. It may well not be sustainable.

But interestingly, the students seem to be getting some real value out of it. Evaluations are overwhelmingly more positive than when we tried to make students suffer through our lectures. As with the podcasts, students can read and reread the posted materials, and they even report finding value in the brief multiple-choice quizzes that make them go back through the materials and mine them for the answers—which they can look up rather than trying to memorize. Since it is a pilot project, we have run the on-line sections side by side with a number of FTF [face-to-face] sections. The FTF sections filled up first, and the on-line sections only filled up when the FTF sections were all full. This suggests considerable initial skepticism on the students' part.

They are clearly not self-selected as fans of on-line learning. Yet when asked whether they would take another online course in future if given the choice between that and a FTF section, fully 85% said that they would choose the online form again.

Even more interestingly, the course evaluations carried a strong thread of praise for the instructor as a person. Students found Jo-Anne helpful, supportive, knowledgeable and, well, just plain useful, despite the fact that few of them had laid eyes on her. This may simply indicate that Jo-Anne is part of the relatively small group of people who respond regularly, promptly and helpfully to e-mails. But as part of the larger argument I am trying to make here, I think it also indicates performative engagement with the course. It has been slightly different every time Jo-Anne has offered it—she is now starting her fourth cycle—as she regularly massages the content to foreground what seems to work and cast what doesn't to the outer darkness. This general characteristic of teacherly attentiveness seems to be able to reach through the screen and pull people into engagement with the course.

This term it is my turn to teach this course. I am torn between my own performative urge to play around with it and make it over into my own image, and what I hope is a sensible desire to run it once more or less the way Jo-Anne has done it until I at least get the feel of it. I have no wish to monkey with what's working—and yet if I don't, I fear that I will just be going through the motions of teaching without truly engaging in the material. So far I have struck a compromise with myself on this, tinkering with material to give it more of my own voice while keeping the general shape and rhythm of the course intact for now.

So where are we now? The virtues of textualization—its stability, its ability to improve in iteration after iteration as "new editions" come out—are still in deep contest with the virtues of the performative: its just-in-time engagement with the present audience and its refusal to be satisfied with stability. Maybe in that struggle lies that ability of technologized education to resist becoming a packaged product and yet to take advantage of the stability and repeatability of textual technologies.

This 2008 version of this story is a little more optimistic than the 2005 version. When I wrote the 2005 article I was in a grumpy mood as a result of a succession of big and little incidents that made me concerned that we might be losing this battle for middle ground. Since then I have been involved in projects such as the ones described here, which have made me somewhat more optimistic. I have no certainty that I will stay this way, but so far things seem to be going pretty well as we grow into the latest round of the context between text and performance.

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To wiki or not to wiki

Amanda Goldrick-Jones ✍

Visit the link below to view Amanda's presentation slides and to view the wiki.

http://collaborativewritingonline.wikispaces.com/

Introduction to "Room 1786"

Terrence Green ✍

The story "Room 1786" is unique for me in several ways. It is the only piece of fiction I have ever written "on commission;" it is the shortest story I have ever written; and its original appearance was in a most unlikely venue.

In 1982 (25 years ago!), I received a phone call from John Robert Colombo (Canada's "Master Gatherer"—author/editor of more than 190 books devoted to the literature and lore of Canada, including Colombo's Canadian Quotations, Colombo's Canadian References, etc.), asking me for a "short-short" story (5-600 words), using the techniques of speculative fiction, centred on the future of education in Ontario (I was a teacher then... still am... with a modest reputation as a fictioneer in the field). He was commissioning two similar short-shorts (different topics) from writers Andrew Weiner and Robert J. Sawyer, and would write an introduction to the trio. They would appear in the magazine LEISURE WAYS ("Three for the Future"), the venerable publication (still going strong) of the CAA (Canadian Automobile Association), and we would be paid professional rates.

I wrote "Room 1786."

It was subsequently reprinted a couple of times in the intervening years (once in a textbook), but by and large, as most things do, it slipped into the past silently, and was seldom reconsidered. Until... Until...

Until I I was involved in the "Teaching Writing With Technology" Conference, hosted by Roger Graves at the University of Western Ontario, on December 6, 2007...

Listening to the speakers, sharing computer-discussions with the participants, absorbing the question-answer sessions, it began to surface, swimming an ancient crawl along my synapses.

Had it dated? Yes and no. It is certainly of its time. It is pre-internet, pre-wiki, hardly prescient in its technological detailing. Yet, in its educational sensibilities, perhaps it can lay claim to some small prescience. And in that manner, perhaps it can offer an oblique look at the issues raised and discussed at the meetings I attended – issues that are as unresolved today as they were 25 years ago. Judge for yourself.

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Random Thoughts on Teaching With (and Possibly Against) Technology

Lisa Macklem ✍

I love technology. I am not saying that I am in any sense an expert with it or on it, but I do have more than a passing affection for it. No one is more surprised by this than I am myself. I resisted video games and the internet for years. I believed that teaching need never go farther than the blackboard and chalk. In fact, I disliked white boards intensely. I tend to talk too quickly when I'm excited and teaching excites me: chalk forced me to slow down. There is no question that I can talk faster than I can write. Now I have to slow down as students copy down the information from a current PowerPoint slide. And I do love my PowerPoint slides. I don't have a lot of flashy video, backgrounds and sounds in my slides. If I had to describe my slide-style it would be practical with a bit of whimsy thrown in. I do love clipart, but the editor in me demands a certain clarity and cohesiveness to my slides. The information on my slides could be described as the point form, bare bones of my lectures – a jumping off point for what I hope is the value added portion of the lecture: me! I have come to the game a bit late, however, and many students are past the point at which PowerPoint was new and amusing. This brings me to the first drawback of technology – trying to stay up to date as technology is always evolving, and students seem to always be at the cutting edge of it. I feel a little like Dorothy in Oz at times as people do seem to come and go so quickly.

It seems at times that technology can be as much of a barrier to communication with our students as it is a conduit to them. I post my PowerPoints online with our school's student system – Owl [WebCT/Blackboard]. This allows students to download the slides at home and bring a hardcopy to class with them if they so choose. If they bring a laptop to class, they can call the PowerPoint up and follow along or add notes to the slides as the lecture progresses. Owl has allowed me to live in a fairly paper-free environment. I don't hand out syllabi anymore; they can access it online at the course site whenever they wish or download a hard copy for themselves if they so choose. All assignments are likewise posted on line. Students can access links to other sites to help them with their writing as well. Is there a downside to all this helpful technology? Possibly.

It has probably never been easier for a student not to come to class, and that, to me, is a huge barrier to communication. I am not, after all, teaching an online version of the course. Most of what I feel are the most important components to the course are delivered live. The bare bones of the material are highlighted in the PowerPoint but the applications and connections are only really applied in the classroom. One-on-one feedback on writing takes place in the classroom through drafting sessions in which students get both my feedback and peer feedback. The classroom affords the ability to gauge students' understanding of the topic at hand. They can ask questions as can I.

Technology, of course, now allows us to do all of the above electronically. In fact, I do almost all of my one on one student meetings by email. I answer on average ten to twenty emails each week (more when assignments are due), and I've never seen more than a handful of students in an entire semester in my actual physical office hours. The fact of the matter is, students are very comfortable with the technology, and they prefer to communicate using technology whenever possible. I like the fact that it forces them to be reasonably focused and concise in asking questions, and they genuinely seem more comfortable asking the questions over email. They can also ask the question whenever they feel like it – usually at the time it comes up in the writing process, as opposed to remembering to ask when they visit my office, assuming they want to go

to that much bother. For my part, I encourage emailing frequently within class: I ask them to email me with questions, especially when an assignment is due. I tell them that I am online constantly (almost not an exaggeration), and I pride myself on giving them positive reinforcement by responding as quickly as possible – sometimes within 10 minutes of receiving their questions.

I have not had the opportunity to use a tool such as Wiki or MSN which would allow for an actual, virtual conversation (yes, I see the irony in that phrase), but I can see how this could be an excellent tool, particularly in the drafting stage of a document. Of course, the irony is that the virtual conversation is replacing the actual conversation. When time and tide allow, I will always favour a physical meeting with students over a virtual one; there is still a lot to be said for eye contact and body language in the communication process. These physical manifestations bring me to some of the greatest drawbacks and downsides to teaching with technology.

I have recently had the unique experience of being on both sides of the teaching desk – I am attending law school and teaching writing – wearing both student and teacher hats. Being a student has shown me how students use technology in the classroom during lectures. There are professors who would like to see laptops banned from classrooms because they see them as a distraction. While I do not want to see a ban placed on laptops, there is no question that the technology is frequently a distraction for some students. As I sit in the lecture theatre diligently typing my notes, I can see a sea of laptops displayed before me. Some other students are busy typing notes as well. Some are on Facebook. Some are on MSN with their friends. Some are playing tetras (a current favourite apparently). Most are doing a combination of all of these, keeping multiple windows up during a lecture. I applaud many of these students for their ability to effectively multi-task. And yes, I have been known to do more than one task at a time myself. Interestingly, the ability to do more than one task varies more between professors than between classes. Some professors fill their lectures so full of content that it is impossible to do anything other than concentrate on the material being presented. Other professors leave ample opportunity to squeeze in a chat or a quick look at what's new on Facebook. The question then becomes whether the technology really needs to be restricted in the classroom. At least if students feel they can fill any potentially wasted time with another task, they will still come to class. Of course, this also presupposes that students can adequately assess the importance of the material being presented to them.

At least one student in my class spent a great deal of his time on Facebook in my lectures. This is where body language and facial expressions come into play. You know when a student is looking at his/her laptop and grinning from ear to ear that he/she is on Facebook, MSN, or youtube – unless you as the teacher have just said something amusing. The student in my class who seemed to have the most amusing lectures failed to improve significantly over the course of the semester. The student frequently completed assignments incorrectly because instructions were either missed or misinterpreted. BUT this student was not the only one with a laptop, and other students with laptops did very well and showed a marked improvement over the semester.

My biggest reason for supporting technology is that it is the communication tool of choice for our students. They are comfortable using the technology, and most importantly, they do use it. There are a myriad of writing opportunities available to them whether it is on Facebook, MSN, email, texting, or any of the newer forms that I am currently unaware of. At the end of the day, students are writing. It may not always be perfect according to our standard definition of English (How r u 2day?), but at least they are writing. Most of these tasks are two sided so effective communication is also being encouraged. This is two sided communication that we as instructors can embrace to make our courses more accessible and more relevant for our students.

As a student, I appreciate those professors who are willing to use technology. Of my two favourite professors, one uses technology and one does not. Both are riveting lecturers. I never find myself wishing that the one who uses PowerPoint did not, but I do occasionally find myself wishing that the one who does not use PowerPoint did. The use or avoidance of technology is often a personal statement. As a writing instructor, my primary concern is that my students learn to communicate effectively. Technology can help us to achieve that goal. It encourages students to write. Technology encourages (and often forces) us to find ways to adapt it to the teaching process. Technology is not going anywhere, so it is in our best interests to embrace it and harness it for good.

Teaching Writing with Technology

Suzanne Boles✍

Would I suggest that these tools are the future for teaching writing? Maybe.

We have started that already with Web CT. But the trick is getting everyone—instructors and students—on board. And, ensuring that they all have access to the technology.

Personally, I found that some of my students were having difficulty logging into their Web CT. Some weren't set up for their current courses and had their courses from last year in their files. So it was inconsistent in terms of who could and couldn't use the tools. If everyone can't use them they aren't valuable to do the work.

I was able to use the software myself, but because the students were not ALL using it I resorted to sending e-mails instead of posting announcements. I photocopied materials because I wasn't able to get some of them loaded up on time (being my first time teaching the course) and some students still couldn't access the course information online anyway so photocopying was easier (and less expensive than running off handouts on my computer printer).

Overall, the quickest and easiest method would have been to e-mail the documents to them. Then I would know they were received. I have no way of knowing if students download material from my Web CT course space.

As for having computer access in classes, at this point I would vote against it. Sometimes student brought in laptops but you cannot monitor what students are doing on the computers when you're teaching. Are they taking notes or chatting on MSN or Facebook? If there's a reasonable reason for giving them access to computers in class I'd be open to hearing about it. But I don't see it for the course I taught. I teach a similar course for University of Western Ontario Continuing Education and have not had access to computers for my students and we are fine with that as well. Writing for publication is a course that uses collaboration of minds. I encourage group discussions. Students are too busy after class to log into a discussion group. I can monitor in-class discussions and group work. We all come back together and discuss our findings as well. It's much more instantaneous if you have everyone, physically, in one place.

Finally, technology is driving many of us crazy. As a part-time instructor I have to access UWO E-mail. I have my business e-mail and e-mail set up for organizations I belong to. I use collaborative tools for clients and UWO's Web CT/OWL now too.

There doesn't seem to be one platform to do everything and it's frustrating. It makes it hard to get work done when you have to check various sites for e-mail, for example. I download what I can into Outlook but I had to remove one of my e-mail groups because I was starting to get too much spam. I am also subbed to several listserves. I have resorted to receiving them in digest format. Sometimes I get to read them. Sometimes I just delete them.

Technology is great and interesting, but is it enabling us to do more, or making it harder for us to get our work done? I'm sure you'd get a variety of answers from a survey on the topic, and it would depend on who you were asking.

Change Generates Its Own Reward

Patrick Kennedy ✍

I thought I knew how to teach writing. After all, I had been doing it for seven years, and for most of my pre-teaching working life I made my living as a wordsmith. As a newspaper publisher, journalist, sports editor, advertising copywriter—print and broadcast—I knew how to write. It seemed no great stretch, therefore, to assume that I knew how to teach writing.

However, it is a characteristic of the humanist project that one believes in the notion of personal growth and development and the idea that acquiring new knowledge changes one's view of the world. That's what moves teachers to attend conferences and read the literature in their field: the quest to improve what we do.

Listening to and reading the ideas of others lead me to experiment with what I do as a writing teacher; I began to imitate the practices of others. The area of greatest change is in my approach to marking papers. My grading habits were developed in response to the need to process volumes of student essays as quickly and efficiently as possible. I learned early that the easiest and arguably the most defensible standard of grading was to use grammar as the yardstick to measure student writing.

The net effect of this teacher-as-copyeditor approach to evaluating essays was that it turned me into a pathologist of grammar; marking student papers was equivalent to conducting post mortems. These autopsies lent a new dimension to the term "dead" copy; by the time I was through marking an essay, there was usually enough red ink on the page to discourage any student writer from ever thinking it could be resuscitated.

I'm uncertain as to when or how I began to interrogate what it was I thought I was doing as a teacher of writing. Perhaps it was an introduction to the notion of writing as process or concepts found in Erika Lindemann's *A Rhetoric for Writing Teachers*. It might have begun with a remark by a colleague who said, "It's not your job to edit student writing." Whatever the influence that challenged me to reframe my approach to teaching writing and how I mark papers, the result was unexpected.

My first foray into a new approach to teaching writing began with an appreciation for the premise that students do not learn to write by reading books about writing or listening to lectures about writing; they learn to write by writing. So I began to build more individual and collaborative writing tasks into every class.

The next change was to implement some of the ideas in Lindemann's chapter "Responding to Student Writing." This was not as easy as I had first envisioned. Resisting the impulse to identify every grammatical error was—and still is—a real challenge, but I am developing the practice of labeling errors in the left margin of an essay with a simple check mark leaving it to the student to identify and remedy.

Equally challenging was the need to reformulate comments on student papers so they were meaningful to the student. I soon realized that identifying grammatical errors was easy compared

to the task of providing feedback that helps a student understand why his or her writing fails to communicate.

I began to limit my comments to two issues that—if addressed—would make the biggest difference in a student's writing. I promised that if these issue were overcome the student could expect to see grade improvements in every essay course. I made a record of the writing issues in my class file, and on the next writing assignment I referred to them to see if the issues had been overcome. Generally, there was improvement, and my first written comment on the student essay was a positive reinforcement acknowledging the student's success.

If the writing issues remained, I reframed my remarks and invited the student to see me for clarification or help; I stressed the importance of overcoming the identified issues early in the course so that future writing assignments would not be undermined.

Integrating these new practices into my teaching has taught me that the number of issues that sabotage a student's capacity to write effective communication is small, and if they can be targeted and clarified for the student, huge gains in personal confidence and writing quality can be achieved. My job begins by accurately identify those issues.

At the beginning of each term I tell students I cannot promise them an "A" in the course, but I do promise them that they will be better writers at the end of 13 weeks. In the final class of this past term, I asked students for a 250-word impromptu essay responding to the question "Am I a better writer now than I was 13 weeks ago?" There was one caveat: "You do not need to put your name on the paper."

While the responses varied, it was unanimous that students thought they were better writers. Perhaps this response was predictable, but what was not predictable was how students characterized their improvement. Some of the comments were as follows: "I think now before I write," "I am much more careful with my work," "I have become more confident in my ability to write effectively," "I learned the value of editing my work," "I believe I have learned how to better formulate ideas and communicate them more effectively," and "My love for writing has skyrocketed."

I did not know how students would respond to my question, but I needed to know if the changes I had introduced were working, and they were the only ones who could tell me. After all, students are not the only ones who need positive reinforcement. Change requires effort, it's uncomfortable, even risky, but as these student comments clearly demonstrate, change also generates its own reward.

New Book ✍

Rhetoric, Uncertainty, and the University as Text: How Students Construct the Academic Experience
Andrew Stubbs, Editor
Regina: CPRC (Canadian Plains Research Center), 2007.

Rhetoric, Uncertainty, and the University as Text… contains thirteen articles on writing and the writing classroom by Composition-Rhetoric scholars (classroom instructors, curriculum designers, program administrators in English and other departments and/or support services) based in Canadian and American universities. The articles focus on the classroom as a socio-rhetorical construct, exploring the unique, "felt," or locally resonant features of classroom interaction, with a view to marking the classroom as a site of continuity and difference, direction and collision—in effect "uncertainty." Questions are addressed about how indeterminacy—as a rhetorical factor—affects teaching and learning, student motivation and performance, as well as criteria for assessment: How and when does the space of the classroom become a component of the lesson? The mandates and responsibilities of universities as suppliers of "communication skills," of literacy, in light of transdisciplinary forms of knowledge, and knowledge informed by rhetorical considerations, are examined and critiqued.