Writing Bytes: Articulating a Techno-critical Pedagogy

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This dissertation titled
Writing Bytes: Articulating a Techo-critical Pedagogy

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This dissertation examines how “modern literacy” and “contemporary writing” are increasingly influenced by technology from a critical pedagogical perspective. The study develops a definition of literacy that takes into account a reliance on technology, particularly computers, in our writing classes and writing lives. With a focus on one particular institution of higher education, and an emphasis on a qualitative, narrative perspective, the dissertation traces how “traditional” perspectives concerning writing and the job of a writing class influence the technological resources at instructors’ disposal. The study focuses on the well-known critical pedagogical work of theorists such as Freire, hooks, and Giroux in order to tease out the critical and political imperative of developing a modern literacy attuned to a more broadly defined kind of modern writing. More specifically, the dissertation focuses on the work of Henry Giroux, by utilizing his theory of “border pedagogy” in a way that centers on borders of different literacies in different mediums, rather than borders between different social groups. As a series of “texts” for examination in order to develop the practical applications of techno-critical pedagogy, Multi-User Domains Object-Oriented (MOO) technology is explored in a qualitative study. The dissertation also explores a techno-rich freshman composition course, focused on matters of online representation (from MOO to Second Life to violent
videogames), as a text for elucidating techno-critical pedagogy and its relation to our students’ compositions and in composing themselves in electronic environments.

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In “Petals on a Wet Black Bough,” author persona Myka Vielstimmig (an authoring partnership between Michael Spooner and Kathleen Yancey) argues that collaboration in writing has profound effects on the writing itself. In the Academic culture afforded to us, even in a discipline such as Rhetoric and Composition, in which we may be more likely to engage in questions about the nature of collaborative writing, the Western conceptualization of written texts as owned products still hounds us. Yancey and Spooner’s decision to author the essay under a persona Myka Vielstimmig (the first name being an abbreviated conglomeration of their first names and the last name meaning “many voices” in German) is an attempt to represent the reality of the impact of collaboration on the ownership (and the product) of writing.

This dissertation, ostensibly written by Paul Shovlin, is a case in point. I’m compelled by the norms of Academia, the requirements of my institution, and the demands of my degree to condense the influences on my dissertation in the form of an “Acknowledgements” section, which few people will actually read, and obtrusively slip it into the front matter of the text. If I were quirky enough to take Vielstimmig’s tact, the reality of the effect of collaboration in the production of this text would compel the author persona’s “name” for this dissertation to run at least a couple of pages and be incomprehensible.

I’d like to thank my advisor, Sherrie Gradin, for support during the process. I am grateful that she undertook collaboration with me and am thankful for the advice she offered in terms of the slew of issues that occur in the midst of any undertaking such as a
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I would like to express my gratitude to Candace Stewart for her continued interest in my professional trajectory. I appreciate the support she gave me as an employer in the Writing Center before and after 9/11. Her guidance, in part, led me into the field of Rhetoric and Composition, and for that I am grateful.

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I am lucky to be surrounded by many great colleagues who’ve made my life as a graduate student and graduate student administrator more palatable. I thank the following: John Borczon, William Breeze, Rachel Brooks-Rather, Don Dudding, and Talinn Phillips for their extensive help in writing groups. Their voices are represented throughout this text. I thank the additional current members of my writing group, Jessica Hollis and Marton Markovits for the support they’ve given me while I was wrapping my dissertation up.
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INTRODUCTION

“Technology is necessary to the critical nature of the pedagogy I’m developing because it provides a major means for the kind of communication we focus on in writing classes.” – Page 42

This dissertation concerns the articulation of a techno-critical composition pedagogy, one in which our practices related to technology are an integral part of the critical\(^1\) element of our pedagogy. Because electronic environments have become so central to modern lifestyles and our success at work and at play, it is important that we develop critical pedagogies that are informed by the political implications of electronic writing; I say political in reference to the powerful effects facility with electronic writing can have on our agency, as well as the agency of our students. With few exceptions, in the past, critical essays into the use of new technologies have been restricted to brief forays into the terrain, at most article-length, with much of the work done by a few concerned practitioners. Usually, and more alarmingly, these explorations are pigeonholed\(^2\) into a sub-category of rhetoric and composition studies (for example, computers and writing, or digital rhetoric), rather than constructed as a general concern in the field. Bizzell and Herzberg’s *The Rhetorical Tradition*, for example, as far as I can determine, only includes one piece concerned with technology as it applies to rhetoric,

\(^1\) I cover the definition of terms such as “critical” on page seven.
\(^2\) I feel compelled to mention *Literacies and Technologies: A Reader for Contemporary Writers* edited by Robert P. Yagelski. Yagelski’s collection is excellent. Some of the texts I’ve responded to in this dissertation come from that first-year reader. The book was published in 2001 and almost immediately fell out of publication. Two years later, when I first found the book, I was unable to get bookstores to order it. While the book itself struggles not to be pigeonholed, as “A Reader for Contemporary Writers,” I’m afraid that one reason it wasn’t widely adopted was because of our tendency to view technology as a sub-specialty of the writing field.
and that’s Plato’s *Phaedrus*, which warns us we are going to lose our memories if we participate in the new-fangled technology of writing.

*A Short History of Writing Instruction: From Ancient Greece to Modern America*, edited by James Murphy, does include technology as a focus. For the most part, the chapters, written by different scholars, focus on the effect of antiquated technology on writing instruction in a historical context. So, while we may get plenty on styli, inkwells, and typewriters, the “Modern America” part of the book covers modern writing technologies very quickly and too briefly (in comparison to focus in the earlier chapters and in terms of import). The chapters follow a rough chronological pattern. The last chapter, “Chapter 8: A Century of Writing Instruction in School and College English,” written by Catherine L. Hobbs and James A. Berlin, relegates scant more than a page (285-286) to the issues that new technologies are raising in writing instruction. To be fair to Hobbs and Berlin, they are trying to cover an entire century in a short chapter. Murphy offers us another page on contemporary technology in a paragraph on page 296. What I take issue with in Murphy is the time and space the earlier chapters are given to look at historical concerns in depth compared to the shallowness of coverage of contemporary technologies. The focus on writing in “Modern America,” especially in the 21st century (the second edition was published in 2001), is tangential. If *A Short History of Writing Instruction* is to be framed as a survey of where we have been, its current form is fine. If it is to be framed as a survey of where we’ve been and where we are, the picture it provides is one in which contemporary writing technologies are recognized, but only as a tiny sliver of compositionists’s concerns. My dissertation will position advanced writing
technologies as a central concern of our classrooms, from a critical pedagogical perspective.

Even when offered in anthologized collections, the dissemination of scholarship on advanced writing technologies is still problematic, as such collections risk being considered specialized reference “go to’s,” rather than material vital to our job of preparing modern writers. I realize that might be a contentious statement, but, in my composition teaching preparation class we were not given Hawisher and Selfe’s *Passions Pedagogies and 21st Century Technologies*, or, Handa’s *Visual Rhetoric in a Digital World*, as primary (or even secondary) textbooks, nor was the issue of how technology impacts composition even brought up. *Strategies for Teaching First-Year Composition*, edited by Roen et. al., seems to belie my argument, with its “Teaching Writing with Technology,” section. But, far from the first chapter, “Contexts for Teaching Writing,” Chapter 11 on technology feels stuck among the other technical and/or distasteful things that have to be included (creating teacher portfolios, teaching grammar, and teaching research). In addition, the focus on activities teachers might use neglects the contextualization (pedagogical theory) needed to integrate such concerns onto the radar of the average new Teaching Assistant (TA). This is what I mean by becoming a “go to” reference. The chapter is like waterproof matches stuck in a survival kit…to be saved for a cold wet day and not relevant in most cases.³ Rest assured, in the rest of the introduction and in the following chapter I will focus extensively on some of the forces

³ To be fair, there are many things that contribute to what I am describing. Those in leadership roles might not be effectively technologically literate to conceptualize training that integrates technological concerns in a broad way or as part of a general concern in the field. Also, partly in relation to that, it often feels like there is a long lag between the development of more advanced hardware and its implementation, at least in terms of writing programs, but even institutionally, in general.
that prevent us from being technologically rich\textsuperscript{4} in first year composition. Further, as I explain in this introduction, although I am focusing my own observations on one particular and very specific context, that at Ohio University, I will argue that the trends I describe that hold us back are symptomatic of larger maladies at work in our field and that those trends cut, for the most part, across institutional lines.

Waterproof matches are good and fine, but in the non-electronic writing classroom, students are often left to rub two sticks together to compose. While some voices in our field have criticized departments that utilize green TAs, sometimes poorly prepared, to be the predominant teachers of composition classes for proliferating the idea that “anyone can teach writing,” likewise, as a field, we are guilty of proliferating the idea that the concerns currently relegated to the computer classroom only are relevant there and muted elsewhere. An indication of this problem can be found in sources like Critical Pedagogy: Where Are We Now? (2007), edited by McLaren and Kincheloe, representative of the field of critical pedagogy, offer one chapter explicitly focused on technology and critical pedagogy, “From Social to Socialist Media: The Critical Potential of the Wikiworld,” written by Juha Suoranta and Tere Vaden. While wikis are certainly of interest to me as a techno-critical pedagogue, I realize they are just the tip of the iceberg, and a specialized tip at that. I mean that there are still many instructors that have few ideas about what wikis are. I argue that a broader and more generalized theory of how technology relates to critical pedagogy is necessary than what is offered in the book and more indicative of where we are now. The index of the Critical Pedagogy: Where

\textsuperscript{4} By technology rich, I mean incorporating at least a few different writing technologies such as blogs, wikis, or Web texts into current practice. Chapter Four will give a picture of what I consider to be a very techno-rich class.
Are We Now? has one single entry for the words computers, technoliteracy, and technology in a 400-page book with twenty chapters focused on where critical pedagogy is now.

In general constructions of literacy (reading and writing) “specialized” literacies, such as “computer literacy,” have been compartmentalized as different animals. While there may be some use in considering such literacies on their own terms, figuring out their characteristics only relevant to their own subset, it does us a disservice in closing us off to their characteristics which are shared by and necessary to other literacies. In Chapter One, I will explore how technology relates to literacy, how concepts of literacy affect our access to technology, and locate a redefinition of literacy in a techno-critical pedagogy.

Thus, this dissertation seeks to bridge the gap between techno-enthusiasts and techno-exclusivists, those who may be inclined to view the integration of and issues that arise from technology as exclusive from other more traditional concerns of the writing class. The bridge, then, as I construct it consists of a critical pedagogy. I would consider this project a wild success if, in the process, it brought a techno-phobe or two to the table to consider how the use of technology (and perhaps more specifically, who gets to use the technology) needs to be incorporated into the mainstream of writing pedagogy. As a work of theory, this dissertation attempts to dance between canonical critical pedagogical concerns and those more specifically focused on technology.
Inherently Political

I have come to the conclusion that there is no getting around it…writing instruction is inherently political. I believe that we are part of an economic and social system in which some groups (based on different identifiers, such as class, race, ethnicity, sexual preference, religion, among others) have better access to success than others. Given the complexity of all the structures at work, this is often not an either/or proposition that posits supreme power to some and total oppression to others. Rhetorical (or persuasive) communication offers one strategy for agentatively operating within and negotiating the economic and social systems that overlay our lives. A writing classroom is a site for politics because it is focused on written communication and developing writing skills. From the standpoint of traditional critical pedagogy, critically conscious teachers should be aware of such power structures and students’ potential for agency via writing and integrate that awareness in their pedagogy and practice. Pedagogies that ignore the critical implications of writing still play a role in the politics of economic and social structures by constructing writing in ways that limit students’ awareness of the connection between writing and agency.

This is why I claim writing instruction is *inherently* political. In my opinion, we are either working towards (however clumsily) solutions to the powers that attempt to define and confine us, or participating in the reification of our students’ culturally assigned identities and reinforcing the power structures that privilege some at the expense of others. While in this introduction I intend to make a broad argument about the politics of writing instruction, it does bear noting that issues of access directly relate to the
integration of technology in education. In “Teaching English across the Technology/Wealth Gap,” Charles Moran and Cynthia Selfe claim that “in our educational system, and in the culture that this system reflects, computers continue to be distributed differentially along the related axes of race and socioeconomic status, and this distribution contributes to ongoing patterns of racism and to the continuation of poverty” (emphasis not mine, 48). While I’m getting a little ahead of myself here, bear this argument in mind as I later characterize the student body of my university, as, more or less, “privileged,” and the liberatory potential of a techno-critical pedagogy.

While some may view my project as participating in the trend that Moran and Selfe describe as a reinforcement of racial and socioeconomic privilege, I see a shifting continuum of oppression (especially related to an interpellating consumer structure inextricably connected to technologies we depend on to communicate and get ahead with), rather than a strict binary between oppressed and oppressor. I will explain more later, but I am basically arguing that we are all consumers when it comes to advanced technologies and while there may be unequal access and technological literacy, the businesses that produce the goods want us to depend on their products and their products alone. In such a case, personal agency, in terms of the choices we have for determining

5 Literacy inequality is not unimportant or a cause that lacks my concern. Different writers’ access to technology and technological literacy is often a point of study and discussion in my classroom as we negotiate texts that ask us how modern technology changes our writing/composition/communication. As I’ll describe later, one method of study explores how the absence of computer technology, writing an entire essay by pen(cil) and paper through multiple drafts, affects our writing process. While I implement critical pedagogy in more traditionally visible ways in my classroom, as we show a concern for understanding the general milieu of technological literacy and different groups access to it and to hardware, one thing I am keenly interested in, as I develop my dissertation, is leveling devices that, to some extent, cut across identifiers such as race, class, gender, sexual identities, and the like. The consumer development of software (and perhaps hardware configurations) that continually dumbs down our interfaces (such as graphical user interfaces) is one such leveling device that works across the board at divesting us of agency, as I will explain further here in the introduction.
how to communicate best, outside the bounds of what they are offering is the last thing they consider in the development of their goods. While some of us may be more “privileged” than others, we are all in the same big boat (think Titanic). Some consumers might be in steerage, others first class, but ultimately that won’t matter much when our potential for agency through dwindling technological literacy sinks like a rock with most hands still on deck.

Every writer of a dissertation grapples with a particular question that goads them throughout the process, “So, what are you writing your dissertation about?” More often than not, this question comes from a non-academic, such as one of my family or friends. Usually, I forget and spout off some jargon, “I’m developing a techno-critical pedagogy” before realizing they hear language differently than the way colleagues in my field do. Often, I follow up with “I’m making an argument that using advanced technology in writing classes is actually a political act and something we should be doing with an awareness of just how political it is.” By the time I say this, I’m figuring out that the word “political” is just as ambiguous as critical. I’m reminded that such differences exist in our field as well. I’ve been thinking a lot about the term critical because it’s so simple, yet ambiguous. In all my classes I ask students to exhibit critical thinking in their written responses to me. I’m not sure they understand what I mean by critical. Princeton University’s Word Net offers a several definitions in terms of the word critical, which relate to a techno-critical pedagogy, the following are applicable:

- “characterized by careful evaluation and judgment”
- “urgently needed; absolutely necessary”
• “forming or having the nature of a turning point or crisis”
• “being in or verging on a state of crisis or emergency”

(http://wordnet.princeton.edu/perl/webwn?s=critical)

A techno-critical pedagogy, then, is “characterized by [the] careful evaluation and judgment” of particular technologies, in this case those found in a writing classroom. I’ll often use the term “advanced technology” or refer to “modern writing technologies.”

To be fair, I am specifically referring to various computer-based technologies…such as blogs, wikis, MOOs, IM’ing, Facebook, MySpace, computer software (such as Word, Excel, Dreamweaver, etc.), Second Life, videogames, YouTube videos, and so forth.

In terms of developing a techno-critical pedagogy, I’m going to argue that we are in the midst of a turning point, one in which we must realize the political implications the integration of such technologies in our writing classrooms has for the agency of our students. The crisis lays in the subtlety of the obstacles we face and our intuitiveness of the importance of technology. That is, if I argue that advanced technology is something we should be using in our writing classrooms, most people will perhaps agree without thinking about it. And, technology will continue to be integrated into our classrooms, as it always is…in the form of structures we take for granted like the word processors we require our students to submit material via. Other technologies or software applications may sit on the shelf or be denigrated as a distraction to supposedly more important aspects of writing instruction. After all, new technologies we are unfamiliar with can threaten our construction of authority in the classroom if our sense of power is centered

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6 Often when I invoke these terms, I’ll be referring to knowledge of, facility with, or the use of these software products, web applications, and even computer hardware.
in our belief that we know more than our students do. Further, teachers may feel that technology dehumanizes relationships in the classroom by offering a screen to hide behind. It may feel flat and unemotional to them. I’ll explore how this has played out in my institution later in Chapter Three, in which I chronicle some teachers’ and students’ reactions to multi-user domains object-oriented (or MOOs), chatroom-like environments.

By teasing out the political implications of such a pedagogy (and such practices) I hope to reach an audience already knowledgeable of and interested in critical pedagogy in general. For one thing, I believe these people are truly and dearly invested in their pedagogy because they feel how vital their role is in their students’ education and the development of their agency. I think if I can make that link for them, they will see the role of technology in writing classes in a new way. Chapters One and Two will cover what’s at stake, basically, our literacy and agency as they relate to the kinds of communicative technologies we are immersed in during our lives.

What is “a” Pedagogy?

It occurred to me that readers outside of the discipline of Rhetoric and Composition might be confused by the way I use the term pedagogy in my dissertation. Originally, when I considered writing this explanation, I was going to muddle things up even more by bringing up the terms epistemology and ontology. What I wanted to claim was that I was aligning pedagogy more closely with the term epistemology and ontology with practice. Epistemology is a branch of philosophy concerned with establishing how we “know” or construct knowledge. In that regard, I consider pedagogy relating to the theory, or more realistically, theories that define what we “know” as teachers. In this
model, then, what we know manifests itself (at least we hope it does) in the reality of our classrooms as practice. That is, if ontology is concerned with interfacing with the world to explore reality, then practice in the classroom is the interface between theory and reality. What I am offering through the development of a techno-critical pedagogy is a mindset, a way of looking at teaching and a way of constructing teaching knowledge and a means for determining the nature of the forces that get in the way of our teaching. If offering a focus on practice is like giving a person a fish, then developing pedagogies is like teaching them how to fish or offering them another way to fish. The reality of teaching is that to be good teachers we may have to be spear fishing with one hand, while holding a rod with the other, and keeping a net in the water at the same time. When we focus on different aspects of teaching or the classroom, we mobilize different pedagogies. The power of a pedagogy is the perspective it gives us for developing and determining effective practice, as well as understanding the larger structures that surround and inform our teaching and our classrooms.

Critic of Critical

This project grows out of, ultimately, a realization that I am a critical pedagogue, although, until very recently, I never thought of myself in that way. In fact, I had very little idea of just what a critical pedagogue was; I was just sure that I wasn’t one of those people. For me, a notion of critical pedagogy was located in a host of critical perspectives focused on social issues. Although feminism, Marxism, and other obviously critical viewpoints informed my teaching, I never characterized it solely by those perspectives, afraid that such teaching might be too exclusive in terms of its applications. Obviously, it
would be, if it were even possible to exclusively teach from one perspective. But, I had a
faulty understanding of critical pedagogy, that one focused on a particular theoretical
framework, while ignoring or neglecting other critical perspectives; when we bring one
issue into focus, others tend to blur. To some extent, I saw this play out in terms of how
my students reacted to bell hooks’s “Killing Rage,” in which their focus on race
completely negated the import of gender in the situation, a characteristic that hooks
repeatedly mentions, probably a result of most of my students’ subject positions, many of
them identifying as white. Jennifer Trainor’s work, which I refer to later in this
introduction, will shed some light on their reaction.

It was easy for me to say, “I’m a Marxist,” or “I’m a feminist,” in particular
contexts, but not so easy to say, “I’m a technoMarxofeminist who studies
postcolonialracialsocioeconomic structures.” This pedagogical soul searching came to a
head when a colleague in the department asked me if I was a critical pedagogue. I’m
tempted to write this narrative as a coming out story, in which we begin with denial,
move on to reflection, and end up at acceptance (after my father has disowned me for
being a critical pedagogue, but my mother understands). But, that isn’t really how it
happened. Which is to say that is exactly how it happened. At least, that’s one feasible
explanation. Some of these anxieties could arise from the deeper politics between my
literature background and the move I’ve made to rhetoric and composition. The point
blank question forced me to consider the politics of my teaching and my motivations for
teaching in that way. So, I started with what I knew about myself.
I knew that I was a nerd, integrating various computer-based technologies in my writing class with a growing reputation as a techie in our department. Part of my job as a doctoral student entailed administrating a multi-user domain object-oriented\(^7\) or MOO (as described earlier, something like a chatroom). I had begun experimenting in class using course blogs (online journals), wikis (easily modifiable Web sites), and techno-pop culture for analysis. Among the other freshman composition instructors, those of us doing such things were in the minority. This led me to wonder, “Why don’t more instructors utilize these kinds of writing technologies in their writing classrooms?” While some may have reasons that are centered in pedagogical concerns (concerns I’m interested in hearing and responding to), others may ignore such technology merely because they are new to it, consider it too confusing, think it takes too much time to learn, or consider it to be a part of computer literacy and not what we are obligated to teach in the writing classroom. In my opinion, the latter are the wrong kinds of excuses governing classroom practice. While it may be a strong motivating factor in my practice to not engage in something because I am afraid of it, feel ignorant about it, and am ignorant of its importance, that does not mean such practice is not important given my job of preparing college writers. Others may have neglected a focus on advanced writing technologies due to the lack of facilities, in the form of computer labs, giving into the “out of sight, out of mind,” tendency fueled by the non-integration of technological concerns in general.

\(^7\) One challenge of this dissertation is being clear about confusing computer terminology and applications. In this case, I’d prefer to just say “MOO,” because giving the whole name, multi-user domains object-oriented is just as confusing as its acronym. When I do that, though, readers invariably request the name spelled out with the acronym in parentheses. Obviously, it’s possible to do this the first time and use the acronym afterwards, but the term is so nonsensical to many readers that they forget they even read it the first time.
composition instruction preparation, but the question remains, do these situational aspects excuse these instructors from considering the pedagogical implications of not employing technology?  

In my private life, as I played massively multiplayer online role playing games (MMORPGs), like *World of Warcraft (WoW)*, I believed the real world was changing and that graphical environments would slowly but surely be on the rise in writing classrooms. When I discovered *Second Life*, an online computer application which hosts a 3D virtual world to explore and “live” in, without the game-background baggage of MMORPGs like *WoW*, I was thrilled and began seeking the resources we’d need to use it as a medium for instruction at Ohio University.

As sometimes happens, technology can overpower our practice. The bells and whistles of hardware and software and eye-candy of virtual worlds, like *Second Life*, can draw our attention away from the reasons we use them, even if those reasons remain, unarticulated, and perhaps, undernourished, in the background. When I was motivated to develop these various technologies for composition instruction, the pedagogical theory behind it (way behind it) remained intuitive to me, and therefore inscrutable to others. In order to educate other teachers about technology, though, it is vital to foreground those pedagogical concerns, because they function as the overlap of knowledge. A teacher new to *Second Life* may be completely ignorant of it, but they are not ignorant to the

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8 I would like to take a moment to respond to readers concerned that I am playing all offense here (by focusing on what we are neglecting to do) and no defense (by explaining why we should be doing something). This tendency may be fueled by conventions of the dissertation that call for exposing a gap in research, pedagogy, or practice. Throughout the dissertation, but specifically in the next chapter (focusing on modern evolutions of literacy and how those relate to writing instruction) I will make the case that there are a lot of good reasons to be thinking and practicing techno-critically.
pedagogical concept that might motivate its use for instruction. By foregrounding pedagogy when introducing technology we start with the common ground, borders of knowledge between agents, which can then be extended into previously uncharted territory. I’ve seen this play out in terms of my more successful attempts at introducing new TA’s to technology like the MOO. Likewise, in this dissertation concerns related to critical pedagogy will motivate us to implement technological practice. The border metaphor is apt since I’ll be borrowing from border pedagogy and the concept of contact zones to investigate a techno-critical pedagogy.

A few years ago I gave a conference presentation entitled “Pwning jur sux0r n00b Students: Embracing Your Inner Nerd and Teaching with Technology,” experimenting with a border I saw between my own subject position, that of a nerd, and that of my students; that border consisted of technological practice and exploration in the classroom. The conference was being hosted at a Catholic school and a few weeks before the presentation I was contacted by a panicked host asking what the heck I meant by the title. In “leet” speak, or l33t, if you want to get really leet, it basically means beating, in terms of winning against, say at a game, your beginner students. I argued that it was productive to take on the role of a computer nerd in a computer classroom in order to access the technologies in more literate, fun, and accessible ways. In part, this

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9 I’m arguing, in part, that the perspective that positions computers and writing in the niche as a specialization, rather than a general concern for all practitioners, is what establishes a gap. Border pedagogy, then, seems to provide a framework for constructing the level ground between the subject positions of computer specialist and writing instructor.

10 L33t originated among computer programmers as a set of codes related to those “in the know.” Later, gamers would appropriate programmers’ l33t speak, much to the chagrin of the coders that felt it had been sullied by the masses. To some extent, it is now considered a juvenile move to use a lot of l33t, even in gaming circles. On the other hand, there are some l33t references, such as “pwn” (to beat, as in win against, another player) that have made their way into generally acceptable terms for conversation.
dissertation is a retooling of that idea to encourage critical pedagogues to explore ways
two different kinds of nerdiness (that of the critical pedagogue and that of the computer
nerd) overlap in modern writing classrooms. This notion may seem silly but you’ll note
here and there in the dissertation that space exists for play, even flourishes, as we allow
some sorts of electronic spaces to influence us. We’ll look at this notion of play a little
more closely as we discuss the work of Albert Rouzie, James Paul Gee, and others here
and in Chapter Two. Rouzie, with his term serio-ludic theorizes a rhetoric of how
playfulness can fruitfully intersect with seriousness in composition and discourse,
especially in, but not limited to, electronic spaces. Gee argues that videogames offer a
more engaging model for learning than traditional modes of education. While I don’t
wish to belabor the issue here, I just wanted to argue that the sense of humor you may
occasionally see surface in the dissertation relates to the influence of new media and
electronic writing technologies in general. At a basic level, it’s probably a result of the
fundamental interactivity that new media and electronic writing offer that leads to
playfulness in composition. It is ironic that the more advanced we get, the more we
compare modern evolutions of technology to old standards, whether it be in the form of
Ong arguing that new technologies mimic the effects of oral literacies or Vielstimmig¹¹
arguing that the “new essay” is based in the Montaignian project. I say ironic because I
argue in the next chapter that there is a tradition of critics who argue that new

¹¹ Myka Vielstimmig (Kathleen Yancey and Michael Spooner’s persona) is probably best known for
“Petals on a Wet Black Bough.” Vielstimmig’s peculiar academic style, influenced by jazz, embodies the
“new essay” form that Yancey and Spooner explore and describe in the essay. Their work surely influences
my dissertation, the development of techno-critical pedagogy, and my personal style.
technologies are replacing the old ones to negative ends rather than recursively coming back around and emulating or building on older models.

The more I thought about the reasons I’ve been consistently using MOO technology, for example, which sometimes feels like an uphill battle, I realized my motivations fit with a critical pedagogy, but a critical pedagogy that I am piecing together from a number of sources that overlap, though they remain distinct unto to themselves. Some of the sources have very little explicitly to do with technology, for example, hooks’ transformative pedagogy and Freire’s libratory pedagogy, which is partly what I wish to remedy. The points they raise about the politics of teaching and their implications for pedagogy, especially for those of us in writing classrooms, are inseparable from the role modern technology plays in writing. I would like to continue explaining my position and some of the terms I’ll be using, particularly the term critical pedagogy, before we get to the review of literature in Chapter Three.

Coming to Terms

Recently, a discussion on the Council of Writing Program Administrator’s listserv made me aware of the slipperiness of terms often synonymously used with the term critical pedagogy. Radical, progressive, transformative, liberatory, and emancipatory, in addition to critical, were adjectives linked to pedagogy that were being discussed. In the course of the development of this project I’ve struggled with such terms because, to be honest, there is no easy source to go to in defining how the terms are different. I’ve decided to use the term “critical,” as a larger umbrella term, to describe the pedagogy. While it’s difficult to get at specifics in terms of what some of the other terms related to
critical pedagogies mean, since they mean different things to different people, it is possible to locate some of the major schools of critical pedagogy and identify how they relate to this new project.

The WPA listserv conversation, mentioned above, surfaced the work of David Seitz, specifically *Who Can Afford Critical Consciousness? Practicing a Pedagogy of Humility*. In his first chapter, Seitz chronicles “A Range of Critical Writing Pedagogies,” in an attempt to define some of these terms that arise. Seitz describes a continuum of schools of critical teaching, with “liberatory” teachers on one side (characterized by teachers like Ira Shor, who “claim their pedagogies should serve to liberate their economically and socially disenfranchised students” and “liberal realists” on the other side “who believe educating nonmainstream students for mainstream institutions constitutes by itself a critical act against reproducing the status quo” (5). Seitz argues that these two ends of the spectrum cater more to students from marginalized or working class backgrounds, he identifies three positions for critical teaching that have evolved for students from the middle class, critical citizenship, post modernists, and cultural studies. While critical citizenship focuses on “fostering students as critical citizens for participation in larger realms of public debate,” post modernism “encourages students to value critical complexities of discourse and the material world, but resists grand narratives of emancipation such as the utopian neo-Marxist assumptions of Shor, Freire, and Giroux” (7) and cultural studies “assert that the machinations of late capitalism have transformed the role of citizen into that of consumer,” and accordingly, cultural studies “encourages students to question this transformation, and capitulation, of citizenship to
reclaim a more active critical role” (9). My feeling is that for an accurate description of
the pedagogy I am articulating, one has to take different aspects from each of the
pedagogies described here to form a whole. Due to that fragmented and tangential nature,
it might be characterized as post modern, while it does not buy into any grand narrative
the construct of “post modernism” often falls into, itself. Basically, I’m talking about the
bind that many critics of postmodernity have noted, that as a system that privileges itself,
it sets itself up as a privileged alternative to all other constructions, almost as some sort of
universal Truth in its own right. I’m arguing that rather than an end, we view postmodern
theory as a perspective with which to understand a shifting structure.

Figure 1. “Mapping a Range of Critical Pedagogies” (from Seitz, 6).
I’ve included Seitz’s graph here because it illustrates the major movements in critical pedagogy while designating their usefulness to various socio-economic classes of students involved. In defining my project, I’ll need to cut across sections of Seitz’s graph, illustrating as we go, not only explaining the way a techno-critical pedagogy is different than traditional modes of critical pedagogy, but also what it might entail.

How a Techno-critical Pedagogy Plays Out

To requote Seitz, cultural studies “assert that the machinations of late capitalism have transformed the role of citizen into that of consumer,” and accordingly, a focus on cultural studies, “encourages students to question this transformation, and capitulation, of citizenship to reclaim a more active critical role” (9). Seitz argues “not surprisingly, this approach has been predominantly a pedagogy for middle-class college students who perceive themselves as smart consumers of popular culture and material goods” (9). Citing Seth Kahn, Seitz points out critically that “the danger here is that even if students buy into this faith, it can further reinforce their view of critical thinking as more shrewd consumption” (9). Techno-critical pedagogy salvages cultural studies from such “dangers” because shrewd consumption is a vital part of critical thinking when many of our major modes of modern communication, for work and play, rely on consumer goods (hardware and software, kit and caboodle) and are developed via consumer models, for example Microsoft Word. I’m currently using Microsoft Word 2007 to draft this chapter. Just recently, a lab attendant complained to me that he did not like the labs “forced” move to Office 2007. In particular, he argued that the new version was confusing and not
at all easier to use. This is interesting because *Office 2007* had been marketed as being developed as more intuitive with designs built in response to users’ concerns.

Commercial strategies, such as setting a default document type to .docx rather than .doc, requiring a software update for prior versions of *Office*, which may be confusing to some consumers and encourage them to buy the new software, are more evident than user friendly features.

Other common technological goods many of us and our students rely on are the iPhone (or any cell phone, or cellular technology, in general), *Facebook, MySpace, Powerpoint, Keynote*, Email hosts, IM clients, *AutoCAD, Oracle Calendar, Blackboard, Second Life, YouTube*, etc. Further, many other computer technologies, as basic and fundamental as the operating systems¹² (OS’s) that facilitate our computing and as advanced as particular software applications that allow us to alter digital photographs, such as *Adobe Photoshop*, are consumer goods. Shrewd consumption is vitally linked to our agency when different technologies and software versions directly affect our means of communication and ability to communicate. Even those who espouse an open source philosophy do so in the face of the consumer realities I’m detailing here. Yes, it is problematic if our students think shrewd consumerism is the end of critical thinking, but it is just as problematic if we bury our heads in the sand to the consumer facets of the technologies we depend on or choose to use to communicate. Literacy is tied to consumer goods through technology. To some extent, then, to be more critically knowledgeable of the communicative technologies we use can translate into a more advanced kind of

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¹² Various versions of Microsoft Windows, such as Windows XP or Vista, the popular open source OS Linux, or the Mac OS X Leopard.
literacy and can also give us options outside the realm of corporation controlled/design
applications through open-source software.

Perhaps, as an aspect of the post modernism at work in my critical pedagogy, I
don’t want to reduce students to “good citizens,” but critical agents in whatever they
pursue. I think this caters to the realities of our classrooms. Even in a setting such as ours
at Ohio University, in which we’ve had a fairly homogenous group of middle-classed
white students most years, there are often some students from different backgrounds in
our classes. Likewise, I imagine there are students of different backgrounds, means,
ethnicities, political parties, religions, etc. in any class.

As a human being, it is unavoidable for me not to address my critical beliefs in
regards to politics in the classroom. Rather than center the class on them and bend
students to my will regarding, say Marxism, I’d rather focus more on how a skill set of
critical tools and literacy enhances personal agency. Lest this be mistaken for some kind
of relativistic view in which I pave the way for the Nazi party to be reborn, I tell my
students that every point of view is not equal. We have to negotiate the points of view
that come up in our class as a community within the class. Accordingly, the more liberal
elements traditionally associated with critical pedagogy come to play. Other teachers may
mobilize other political views or avoid them. I view liberalism as my personal input to
this pedagogical framework. Different instructors may value different politics and may
make the pedagogy their own. The critical element of this pedagogy relates to structures
that govern our lives and choices related to systems of literacy. Thus, the critical element
does not disenfranchise so-called “privileged” agents, but seeks to encourage agency for
all students.\textsuperscript{13} Some early readers of my dissertation have pointed out that the cultural critique inherent in techno-critical pedagogical theory is a critique on the larger model of capitalism, as well. I don’t deny that, but I believe that techno-critical pedagogy is a framework that still leaves room for teachers of varying backgrounds to make it their own.

To some extent I feel this motivation (the desire to leave flexibility in a pedagogy for the possibility of diverse political perspectives depending on the instructor, the institution, and the population being served) is what makes this project of discussing the role of technology in the writing classroom a critical pedagogy, because it recognizes the necessity for respecting the agency and humanity of its students (and teachers, for that matter). While our own politics may come into the classroom, the point of a techno-critical pedagogy is the way we relate to technology and the way it relates to our writing/composition and communication. This stance could be viewed as postmodern, since it seeks to devalue a particular stance, or ancient, as a similar project to that of the Sophists. The crux of it is that a techno-critical pedagogy is interested in fostering students as agents…period.

\textsuperscript{13} Does techno-critical pedagogy leave out those without access to technology? Even though my goal is to develop technological literacy in my students, which requires access to technology that is available institutionally (which obviously varies from pedagogue to pedagogue, even sometimes for those working in the same institutions), in my classes, as I’ll detail in Chapter Five, we often focus on a lack of access to technology in order to highlight what technology means for us or how it affects our writing. So, for example, we’ll read Wendell Berry’s “Why I Am Not Going to Own a Computer,” the title of which pretty much speaks for itself. One activity calls for students to write an entire paper with pen/pencil and paper and explore their experience in light of Berry and others’ negative critiques of technology and its affect on writing. We also discuss how our identity and social forces related to it can affect our access to technology. I believe that although the focus in my classroom explores political questions of access to technology, it is not a de facto requirement of techno-critical pedagogy to do so.
My next point is that structures of consumerism and technology interpellate people and divest them of the agency that advanced literacy offers. For me, Seitz’s category of liberatory teachers, who “liberate their socially disenfranchised students,” is problematic. For one thing, such a standpoint is difficult to access for a teacher like me, a straight white male of middle-classed background. In short, a privileged practitioner flirts with setting himself up as a Christ like figure at worst with such a scenario and as elitist at best, especially when the power structures in question rely on the passivity of consumers. To some extent this is ironic, considering the position I am taking in terms of the “interpellation” of students. By interpellation, I’m borrowing from the Marxist interpretation of the word, especially as developed by Althusser. Wikipedia describes how interpellation, the establishment of Subject-hood by the powers around us, has been understood:

This has been a particularly useful insight for understanding the power of media; the extent to which media (especially advertising, but also news and entertainment) "speak" to viewers by addressing them is [sic] a part of their emotional and persuasive appeal. In this context, the interpellation is rarely as specific as being addressed by name, but rather being addressed as a member of an audience, in terms of a specific demographic, or as a part of a subculture. When we recognize that we are being spoken to, we not only engage more deeply with the text, we also accept the social role being offered to us: young, white, female, gay, athletic, liberal, etc.

(Wikipedia February 7th, 2008)
I am purposefully using Wikipedia here as a source because I’ve heard too many teachers disregard it out of turn. It’s a bad idea, in my view, to pretend that references that people use outside the Academy are easily and totally ignorable. Likewise, it ignores the fact, that for some us, Wikipedia or the Google search engine, are the first places we go to look things up, informally or recreationally. For one thing, the explanation on Wikipedia is much more accessible than that which I might have quoted from a card carrying Marxist theorist. To some extent this motivation to resist attacks on popular technology relates to the subject at hand, interpellation. By constructing epistemologies that deny people meaning from sources they personally rely on, we interpellate them, change them into something they are not or make them suspicious of themselves. This has played out with calls for standardized or “proper” English and likewise it plays out with technology, technologized epistemologies, and the affects of technology on writing practice, for example what some see as the infiltration of AOL speak in student writing.  

The new social role we are constructed as is that of technological consumer. Critics, such as Richard Ohmann have warned us that trends in computer development and related technology follow capitalist trends, particularly the separation of conception from execution in the workplace. For computer applications, this means that programs and interfaces are continually dumbed down to the point where advanced literacy isn’t necessary (and therefore falls by the wayside). Sherrie Turkle in “Seeing Through

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14 AOL speak refers to IM conventions, for example the abbreviation of words and acronyms used for phrases. “C u l8r,” translated as “See you later,” is a good example of AOL speak. The term AOL speak might be anachronistic, as cell phone texting (to say nothing of Twitter) is a newer technology influencing such conventions. I can attest that I’ve seen “u” substituted for “you” in some of my students’ writing and I’ve seen myself write “lol” (laugh out loud) in the margins of some their papers.

15 Especially in “Literacy, Technology, and Monopoly Capitalism,” which I cite and explore elsewhere in this dissertation.
Computers: Education in a Culture of Simulation,” describes that while former basic lessons for computer literacy centered on programming skills, since the early OS’s relied on such commands, “the lessons of computing today have little to do with calculation and rules; instead they concern simulation, navigation, and interaction” (330). In concrete terms, while students might know how to use Dreamweaver to construct a Web page, the html code that it builds for them through its interface may be as unintelligible as hieroglyphics to them. Now imagine that scenario across the board in terms of the myriad applications we use with computers. While new interfaces and particular software titles do make things easier, they also limit us to the scope of the particular title and its developers and programmers. At the same time, without advanced or critical literacies we aren’t encouraged to think outside the box, about the limits particular software places on us or alternatives we might discover elsewhere. We become trapped as consumers and as communicators. Problems arise when alternatives present themselves, such as when students email teachers documents with .wps or (god forbid) .abw extensions, rather than word documents. The fact that the new Word formats its files with the .docx extension is evidence that the software corporations themselves don’t expect consumers to understand how file extensions work and how they might use current applications to view or create different extensions, but to be obliged to purchase a new version of the software to support a new extension. The “natural” tendency to fall into this role of dependant consumer is what I mean when I say that structures of technology and consumerism interpellate us and divest us of agency. Further, a reification into dependant consumer, in terms of technology, happens across class lines. While class, race, sex, age, etc. may offer

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16 It’s a little akin to expecting “Cliff’s Notes” to serve as a reasonable substitute to, say, Hamlet.
us different access to technology, and ostensibly technological literacy, the capitalistic forces that work at whittling away our agency have the potential to affect us all, to a degree.

To sum up, and revisit some of Seitz’s categories of critical pedagogy, a technocritical pedagogy is liberatory because it liberates us from structures (consumer models, traditional views of literacy, and the institutions that fail in preparing us to be agents in a technology rich world) that can rob us of agency. A techno-critical pedagogy is currently liberally realistic in that critically educating students (“mainstream” or “nonmainstream,” while disadvantaged in different ways, most are disadvantaged) about and in the use of technology, especially in terms of literacy, constitutes by itself a critical act against reproducing the status quo. By status quo, I mean students critically equipped to work with and think about technology stand in marked contrast to those who aren’t so critically equipped. It may appear that, like Marxists have been criticized for, I am claiming that the masses are blind and that those that conscript to a techno-critical pedagogy can “see the light.” It might be better to say that some of us can read, and others can read really well. The fact is that the only terms we have to currently describe those with more agency in this context include descriptions like “computer nerds” which refer to a minority. In our own field we refer to them as specialists, digital rhetors, computer compositionists, and, of course, nerds. In the next chapter I’ll seek to revise our definition and conception of literacy to include more nerdy characteristics. It is the aim of this pedagogy that we all make a move towards the status of computer nerd and “nerdiness,” and specialists, ceases to exist. A techno-critical pedagogy aims at affecting
students’ agency first through their facilitation of the structures that offer them communication and second by turning a critical eye to the political implications of such structures. A dissertation on the articulation of a techno-critical pedagogy aims at engaging teachers in a dialogue about such concerns.

**Cultural Studies** is an important part of a techno-critical pedagogy because the technologies we communicate with are consumer goods and developed from consumer models, further these consumer technologies affect the ways we communicate (imho\(^\text{17}\)). Finally, the above configuration, the multi-faceted composite of different critical pedagogical perspectives, the fragmented identities fused together in the form of a techno-critical pedagogy signals its **postmodernity**. Rather than divest it of the power of a uniform (illusory) position it is facile and adaptable to different perspectives in different contexts. It is **rhetorical**. For me, the crux of rhetoric is choice. Agency emerges from the range of the bag of tricks we have at our disposal which we might adapt to persuasive ends. In a basic way, if rhetoric is so tied to agency, its instruction is inherently critical, as I state on page three. We might refigure our terms here, then, to refer to a techno-rhetorical pedagogy, but I’m afraid its real meaning would be obscured by other ways we understand the words.

Richard Ohmann’s “Literacy, Technology, and Monopoly Capitalism” offers a great place to start because it implicates the development of technology and ambiguous

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\(^{17}\) Short for “in my humble opinion. Imho is a convention of AOL-speak, instant messaging (IM’ing), and texting. Like lol (laugh out loud) and omg (oh my gosh), these conventions have infiltrated other mediums for communication, such as email, and even, in some circumstances, students’ formal writing. As a participant in the use of such language, I’d argue that imho, lol, and omg are not simply abbreviations of terms I’ve used to translate them, but feel different when they are used. For one thing, the lack of formality informs the meaning of the words. Anyway, I used imho above to embody what I was writing about in the sentence.
calls for computer literacy in their undeniably capitalist context. While I will go more in-
depth to this article in the following chapter, I want to bring it up here because it 
complicates our understanding of literacy as it relates to the agency of our students. 
Among other things, Ohmann argues that computer technology serves to deskill the lower classes and continue to cement the power in “the professional-managerial” class. As everything is relative, to some extent this is the case at an institution like Ohio University in which technology undeniably plays a part in our daily lives and educational and professional success. The truth is, though, that aside from those who major in a field in which high computer literacy is necessary, most students are literate in a particular commercial aspect of modern technology, whether that commercial element is reflected directly in technologies like file sharing (downloading music), media consumption (watching the last season of *Lost* via iTunes), to a lesser extent, production (for those *YouTube* savvy), or social networking (stalking each other on Facebook), or indirectly, as students are taught how to produce/work with particular software products, like how to use Microsoft Office or Adobe Photoshop. This is akin to a carpenter who “knows” how to make beautiful tables, but can only do so with one particular set of tools. Some pockets of resistance do exist, of course, in terms of the ways students subvert commercial interests via applications like *Limewire* or via torrents, with which they download/steal commercial products. Often, these subversive activities rely on software applications built by someone else. Even our access to revolution in the electronic world is constructed by a few highly literate individuals. In this regard, even with the experience I
bring to the table, I am painfully aware of my own limitations. Perhaps this is what fuels my concern about the limitations of those around me.18

I can, however, explain how I am using my terms and why. As I develop the pedagogy and get deeper into the literature, though, I may find myself refining the words to describe my current project of developing a “techno-critical” pedagogy. That said, I’m taking a more postmodern perspective in terms of my focus on power structures, systems that privilege some at the expense of others based on characteristics such as race, gender, sexual preference, socio-economic status, etc. While for some it stops there (with a binary between the oppressed and the oppressor), I view such systems as continuums of oppression. Kate Bornstein, in her *My Gender Workbook*, for example, bases her workbook on the idea that structures of power based on gender affect everyone in the system in negative ways, including those on the so-called privileged end of the spectrum. Specifically, I am initially less interested in how to affect specific social change based on my political beliefs and more interested in encouraging my students to think critically about the power structures, even in terms of the literate structures, that contain them. I’ve located this position as postmodern (ala Giroux, and possibly Jarratt and Faigley). As, I’ve said, I’m aware that my take on it is a potentially dangerous one. It may sound like it washes its hands of any resulting politics, that it is relativistic. It shouldn’t be forgotten, though, that it necessitates a critique of the power structure it seeks to step outside. Also,

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18 Anecdotally, as I’ve said, I’ve heard many instructors make references to students’ advanced technological literacies when they discuss some of their own misgivings, specifically related to being “teacher” in classroom where they feel like they know the least about computer technology. While it’s important to remain humble in such classrooms (students do have a lot to teach us) it is also important to remember that techno-critical pedagogy entails a certain way of exploring writing technologies and technological literacy which may not be intuitive to many users outside the classroom. It’s about facilitating connections between literacies that may uncover new ways to interact in different mediums.
it is, undeniably, informed by radical pedagogy, as well. Rhetoric depends on choice. The rhetorically equipped student is one who has many choices at her or his command to apply for a purpose in terms of a specific audience. By focusing on power structures we take for granted, which influence the options we feel we have at our disposal, I want to encourage students to be able to think outside the box, if they decide to do so. This, I believe, empowers my students because they gain some sort of agency in making choices, as opposed to having those choices made for them.

I say “empowerment,” because it originates outside the machinations of the structure. If all they know is Word, then that’s all they have at their disposal. If they consider other options like Open Office, an open-sourced suite of office productivity applications, they may be offered different choices in compositional tools. This empowerment is related to economic systems, such means of communication are potentially commercial, but also in terms of literacy, students can potentially communicate differently and have more choices on how their communication is configured. This is also what I mean when I claim the pedagogy is potentially liberatory. I’m sticking with the term techno-critical pedagogy, because it includes two concepts that I think are intertwined, which others seek to separate. Technology is necessary to the critical nature of the pedagogy I’m developing because it provides a major means for the kind of communication we focus on in writing classes.

In her article “A Plea for the Revival of Sophistry,” Sharon Crowley offers that “no teaching is done in a social and political vacuum” (332), countering the “prescriptive” view of those who “technologize” writing by focusing on teaching the
mechanics of a skill. Presumably, then, considering writing instruction as apolitical, and incorporating a focus on grammar, punctuation, and mechanics, is political due to its effect on students who may be encouraged to conceptualize writing as a thing to be mastered for its own ends, rather than a means to their ends. Crowley argues that the Sophistic objective of encouraging the growth of critical participants in civil discourse is a starting point for the establishment of a critical pedagogy in the writing class. It is interesting to me that Crowley describes “prescriptive,” perhaps similar to what Berlin calls current-traditionalism, views of writing instruction with the term “technologize,” in effect setting up a binary between agency-invoking pedagogy (critical thinking) and structuralist pedagogies (mechanics-based). In some ways, what I am arguing for here seeks to repair the fissure, not through a focus on “prescriptive” instructions for writing, but through a re-envisioning of technology, its role in literacy, and how it relates to critical pedagogy. Personally, grammar and mechanics are probably the last thing I’m interested in as a writing instructor. But, the nerd inside me is fascinated with what an understanding of a different system of grammar and mechanics related to technological facility and literacy can do to offer us more opportunities and more powerful rhetoric in an electronic world. If I know a trick to enable the proper formatting for an MLA works cited page in Word, then I am going to have an advantage over another English student who doesn’t.

Except, perhaps, as a technology. This lack of interest, though, does not mean that I don’t believe grammar, punctuation, or traditional conventions of genres are unimportant. I tell my students they are important contextually. If it is my job to develop their writing skills so that they have the potential to have more agency, then it is my job to make sure they can ask the right kinds of questions about who they are writing for, what their audience’s expectations might be, and what resources (if any) they may personally need to be able to approach those expectations.
The way we conceptualize writing for our students and instruct it affects how our students are able to operate within, what I call, the broad and important semiotic domain of discourse. A semiotic domain is a category used to represent a field of expertise or subject in which one can become adept. A semiotic domain of discourse represents a body of knowledge regarding communication that allows one to practice it skillfully, but also be able to talk about it, as well. We are working within the semiotic domain of discourse in our writing classes. Communication, written, and otherwise (think new media) is a means of agency in that system. It can also be a means of agency (or ruin) as it bucks the system. In my working understanding of critical pedagogy, it situates itself in its relation to social systems or power structures.

A critical pedagogy operates against dehumanizing systems, or caters more to our students as agents, rather than to the system that they are taught to maintain. That said, some aspects of the critical pedagogy that I am developing here are potentially liberatory. This is particularly important to explain, given the makeup of the general student body at Ohio University. Though the university is striving to make that body more diverse, our students are quite a homogenous group, based on race and socio-economic contexts. Most undergraduate students are of white, middle and upper-middle class backgrounds. The latest statistics I have access to regarding ethnicity are from 2007, in which 86.3 percent of students were reported as Caucasian. This number has hovered around 88 percent for the last 10 years before 2006, when the numbers went down as graduate students were included in the numbers. Economic statistics are little more difficult to come by. The SAT reports from 2006-2007 include a self-reported statistic regarding family income for

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20 I was introduced to the term in the work of James Paul Gee.
incoming freshman. 44 percent of students who responded claimed that their gross family income was 80,000 dollars or over, and an additional 27 percent claimed between 50,000-80,000 dollars as their gross family income. While these statistics are somewhat questionable, since they are self-reported, we had 16 percent more students claiming a gross family income above 80,000 dollars than national averages. Statistics aside, I can attest in an anecdotal way that this is the perception at work for many writing teachers I know. These numbers may be changing. This year the average students reporting 80,000 or more in gross family income was only 29 percent, but that number is still higher than state and national averages (http://www.ohiou.edu/instres/student/HistoricRace.html, and “ACT Class Profile,” Office of Institutional Research).

Often, when critical pedagogues construct binaries of the oppressed and the privileged, our students at OU are considered to be the privileged side of the construction. Like other teachers I’ve known, I, too, have been guilty of categorizing them that way in my own head, even though I come from a white, middle class background. Jennifer Trainor details this issue in her article “Critical Pedagogy’s ‘Other’: Constructions of Whiteness in Education for Social Change.” Trainor argues that critical pedagogies often set up binaries between the privileged and oppressed much as I’ve described above which result in “white” students feeling demonized and reacting in a defensive or even offensive manner. Her discussion of “whiteness” includes a middle-classed, straight, and probably Judao-Christian, dimension along with assumptions about ethnicity. Trainor calls for an exploration of such students’ discourses (constructions of whiteness) we would “[prefer] not to honor, even with our gaze” (648). It is the hope of such a pedagogy that an
exploration of that discourse will offer students the conceptual ground they need to consider the implications of their assumptions for themselves, rather than having those implications projected on them from a “critical” point of view. Thus, I’m arguing that at least at this institution, students can be said to be “liberated” from an alienated position resulting from one brand of critical pedagogy as a result of another brand of critical pedagogy, in this case techno-critical pedagogy.

While I am interested in encouraging my students to critically consider how they might reinforce and contribute to the system, I am also interested in understanding how systems of power have negative consequences for all, ala, the previously mentioned theorist, Kate Bornstein. I think that our interest in how we affect others within a given system may be piqued after we feel concern for ourselves within that system. This may sound naïve. Common sense would suggest that if we are busy being concerned with ourselves, we are not paying attention to others. In my experience, reflexivity works as we begin to feel for ourselves what we envision someone else might feel. Racism did not become real to me until I experienced it by proxy while having dinner with a colleague21. That experience caused me to consider ways in which I was racist in a much more visceral way. I want my students to explore how they might gain agency to operate outside the bounds of constraints placed on them in, for example, the physical classroom.

21 After a hard day of Peace Corps recruiting (as minority specialists, no less), an African-American recruiter (older than me), named Leslie, and I went to a TGI Friday for dinner and drinks. When we ordered alcohol, the waiter told me he wouldn’t need to see my ID, but he pointed at Leslie and said “But, I will need to see yours.” Leslie had to drive back to the hotel room to get his wallet, while I painfully sat there. I was confused and upset at the conflict, and made apologies to the waiter. When Leslie got back, he requested seating with a new waiter, because he was upset at the racial overtones of the incident. In my upper-middle class, white mind it took a few weeks of thinking hard at my reaction to the whole thing (especially the apologizing) to be able to approach and embrace Leslie’s point of view. Years later, after reading bell hooks’s “Conflict in the Class Room,” a chapter in Teaching to Transgress, which I cite in this dissertation, my avoidance of conflict made perfect sense from a class (and race) perspective.
I will try to explain this further within context of critical sources related to border pedagogy, which I intend to bring to bear in the development of my techno-critical pedagogy.

While the term techno-critical pedagogy is quite broad, my experiences with the MOO (remember, a chatroom like online application) and one aspect of the classroom, particularly suited to our field, discourse (a subject we study and the means through which we communicate with each other) are what initially led me to such a pedagogy’s conceptualization. Specifically, I am interested in how various critical pedagogies, for example border pedagogy, may be adapted to understand how a hybrid classroom engaged in both face to face (f2f) and virtual MOO meetings can inform an investigation of discourse (how we communicate via a MOO, how we speak and write in a writing classroom f2f, and how that can influence how we use and conceptualize communication in the “real” world outside the writing class).

The virtual vs. real binary is layered and does not just apply to online vs. offline environments. Referring to what we do in the Academy vs. what we will experience in the “real” world is one example of how our f2f classrooms can still be considered virtual by our students. Put simply, MOO discourse is useful as a comparison to f2f discourse, especially as part of a hybrid class, one which meets virtually and f2f, in order to explore how discourse is shaped. As we surface the social structures that are part of our experiences in both realms, it is my hope that we can begin to reconsider our options. I will detail this when I begin to draw on the work of Paolo Freire. What began as theorizing about borders between MOO and f2f classes exploded into considering all
kinds of borders, borders between tech specialists and composition instructors, computer literacy and general literacy, virtual lives and “real” lives, computer classrooms and traditional classrooms, and so forth.

As an instructor who uses a variety of computer technologies in the classroom, I will not limit myself to my MOO experience, but will draw on it as sort of a case study. I will draw on five intensive years of experience, two past studies that have gathered data regarding student perceptions of MOO, and a number of sources on critical pedagogy for this project. While many sources on MOO use and critical pedagogy touch on issues that are important to this project, none present a unified and developed theory regarding a critical techno-pedagogy, for example the kind of treatment I argued in the first few pages of this introduction is missing from resources such as *Critical Pedagogy: Where Are We Now?* or to sources more specific to our field such as *The Rhetorical Tradition*. In fact, I see a split between projects that detail critical pedagogy and proponents of technology that focus on effective practice. Few researchers bridge that gap in a developed and detailed way, in their published works.

For readers still confused as to what I’m talking about when I talk about MOO, a MOO is an online written-text environment, similar in some ways to a chatroom, but with the added dimension of space. Users log on to our MOO, Bobkat MOO, (feel free to log on and check it out at wac.citl.ohiou.edu; sign in as a guest and leave the password blank) through a Web browser like Explorer or Firefox. Teachers and researchers were originally drawn to MOOs in the early 1990s, both because of their relatively simple technology (easy to replicate and use) and textuality (consists of an environment of
words). MOO research has focused, broadly, on MOO’s peculiar brand of textuality, self-representation, and communication. In Chapter Three, I will focus mostly on research that relates to self-representation and communication, which I find to be more easily transferable to real world issues. I don’t mean to demean the work of researchers who study the textual nature of MOO; it is especially interesting as it is something that is very different than other forms of writing. I believe, however, that MOO communication has been under-theorized. Bobkat MOO has been operating for the last 4 years, as a site for writing (and writing-enriched) instruction, professional development (for Writing Across the Curriculum), and online writing tutoring. I have been partially responsible for development, recruitment of use, and training in terms of those three functions. MOO technology serves as the backdrop for this project, although it should be obvious that the project on which I’m working on, the development of a techno-critical pedagogy, relates to other technologies carefully selected and integrated into a class for critical purposes.

As I have said, this dissertation concerns the articulation of a techno-critical pedagogy. I will establish how the politics of technology, especially in terms of our communication, is inextricably tied to our agency and thus is a de facto part of a critical pedagogy. Further, I am interested in how our personal experiences with technology show this. Rather, than hold common practices, such as the use of Wikipedia or Facebook, apart from Academic practices, I seek to explore how they can productively intersect. In addition, I seek to focus less on research and theory coming from techno-enthusiast positions or publications that can be dismissed or poorly perceived by non techno-enthusiasts. While I don’t wish to dismiss the work of my colleagues, I am
interested in searching for sources from critical pedagogy that might be more familiar to those interested in understanding why the integration of advanced technologies is so important and offering connections. To that end, I'll focus more on theorists like Freire, hooks, and Giroux, than the Selfes, although it’ll be impossible to ignore them given the contributions they’ve made to the field of computers and writing. Indeed, I must seem quite thankless, considering they were the first to link border pedagogy to technology, in their article “The Politics of the Interface: Power and Its Exercise in Electronic Contact Zones.” I will cover this article later, but one critique I have is that it focuses on more obscure (and very interesting) analyses of power and contact zones in terms of computer technology, computer desktops of different OS’s. My dissertation does the job of more broadly unpacking the import and repercussions such concepts have for writing classrooms and I hope will make it more accessible to other instructors. I really see my job here as a project of synthesis. Obviously, that emphasis on synthesis makes sense from an author influence by and writing about electronic spaces in which there is no dearth of ideas or information. Our job in such environments is to figure out how to make sense of it all and effectively hyperlink it together to make it user-friendlier.

Indeed, my desire to use more general/traditional critical pedagogical theorists has become problematic. I feel a lot of pressure to focus more often on and more centrally on theorists like the Cynthia and Dickie Selfe and the new work focusing on new media and writing (for example that of Jonathon Alexander) that is constantly being published. I’m engaged with the idea of using non-tech sources to talk about the importance of technology, because I believe they are more likely to be engaging connections for those outside the realm of the techno-enthusiast. But, there has been some seepage from sources more centrally focused on issues around technology and writing. It is my hope that I don’t fall into the trap of talking about such sources in ways that exclude a general reader and reinforce the argument I make about the construction of technology-concerned research as a niche specialty that applies to those who are interested and who have a level of technological literacy that makes such research accessible to them.
Chapter Outline

Introduction:

In this opening, I’ve set the scene for the project. I’ve focused on some of the larger terms related to the techno-critical pedagogy, particularly the concept of critical pedagogy, in general. In detailing different schools of critical pedagogy, from liberatory pedagogies to liberal realist pedagogies, I’ve argued that a techno-critical pedagogy bridges the different contexts, mainly as a result of its structural nature.

Chapter One:

While the Introduction described the subject of the dissertation and began by wrestling with umbrella terms like “critical pedagogy,” Chapter One begins to focus on terms more directly related to the project, specifically literacy. In Chapter One, I develop a definition of literacy that takes into account a reliance on technology, specifically computers, among most of our students at Ohio University. I also trace how notions of literacy affect what we are expected or assumed to do in writing classrooms and how such expectations relate to resources we are offered which, in turn, can shape our pedagogies.

Chapter Two:

Chapter Two serves as the literature review proper. Continuing my process of focusing my discussion of terms (critical pedagogy in the Introduction and literacy in Chapter One), in this chapter I focus specifically on critical pedagogies as they relate to the techno-critical pedagogy I am constructing. I trace a thread from Freire through hooks and finally to other more technology centered pedagogues. Further, by focusing
specifically on Giroux and border pedagogy and pedagogies that employ contact zones, the focus will become more specific in terms of the fundamentals of a techno-critical pedagogy.

Chapter Three:

While the former chapters have focused on terms and the fundamentals for a techno-critical pedagogy, in this chapter I focus on the concrete practices that relate to this pedagogy. In particular, I’ll detail my experience as both an administrator and teacher on the Ohio University Bobkatz MOO. I detail how and why I’ve used the MOO over the past several years despite various pressures to give up. I also argue that resistance to the MOO that I’ve experienced from administrators and other teachers relates to the arguments I’ve made through the literature review regarding educational structures of control, which hooks claims are class-based. This chapter looks at how specific practice has led to an exploration of pedagogy. Over five years of experience with and two studies of MOO culminate in this chapter.

Chapter Four:

In this chapter, I’ll relate experiences with other technological practices in the classroom that have influenced the development of a techno-critical pedagogy, for example blogs, wikis, Second Life, Web videos, etc. While Chapter Three offered the depth of experience with one technology, the pallets of technologies covered in this chapter offer breadth and thus tie up the loose threads of proceeding chapters.
The Conclusion:

Finally, in the conclusive chapter, I consider the ways in which a techno-critical pedagogy might be further developed. I chronicle current instructional technologies at Ohio University and consider changes that may be coming, for instance an emphasis in future applications towards the visual, as is evident in environments like Second Life. In particular, I argue that the basics of a writing class, composition and the nature of texts are going to change in reaction to new multimodal environments.

A Final Caveat…

I would like to stress that my narrative focal point is that of Ohio University as I progress through the dissertation. You will see me drawing quite extensively on my experiences in this institution. Obviously, it is different at other institutions, and as I’ve mentioned in this dissertation, access to technology can be a different story for different instructors at the same institution. Further, a programmatic focus on technology can differ from department to department in an institution. Some readers may feel that the situation I describe here is better or worse at other institutions. In particular, some readers have told me they felt that the placement of technology was worse here than a lot of other places in terms of relation to writing (both in the context of the English department and institutionally). Frankly, I’m skeptical about that. From my experiences on the job market, visiting vastly different kinds of universities, although admittedly in the state of Ohio, I’ve seen different access to technology at the departmental level for writing programs, but, and more troubling, different approaches to conceptualizing the benefits that computer hardware and applications can have. That is, I’ve seen institutions that
seem to only consider accessibility to computer hardware (any computer hardware) as the end of the matter. For example, an institution that had secured millions of dollars for technological development used the money to fund a computer lab, but the administrators were unable to explain to me how it might be integrated (I’m only referring to the technicalities here…for example, how many computers are there compared to how many students are enrolled in the writing class, what kinds of hardware the systems have ((other than merely being “new”)), and what kinds of software are loaded onto the systems) in a prospective class I’d be teaching. At other institutions, I’ve seen all writing courses taught in hybrid environments, but built into the first year course a description of a focus on word processing, an important computer technology that directly relates to writing, but hardly constitutes an end. At C’s I’ve attended many presentations focusing on technology that have not dissuaded me from my skeptical position. One year, I sat in on well-attended roundtable discussion on electronic writing tutoring. By and large, all those with greater professional authority (the writing center directors) wanted to talk about was writing tutoring by email, even when another graduate student and I asked them to consider the pedagogical implications of asynchronous vs. synchronous tutoring.23 Our concerns were not addressed; they were ignored. Meanwhile, when I do research on more advanced programs, like Rutger’s focus on multimedia in its writing classes, I find it hard to find out online how and where the integration of technology fits in their general writing classes.

23 Another colleague and I presented on the idea that synchronous (real time, like a chatroom), as opposed to asynchronous (lag time in between communication, like with email), might be more conducive to writing tutoring following the non-directive philosophy.
But, let me put my skepticism aside for a moment. Let’s imagine that there are a few programs where technology is instituted in writing programs across the board. Programs where all writing instructors consistently integrate technological literacy as part of their writing instruction. Programs where leveling devices provide a high standard for technological integration and where there is enough foresight and hardware to provide effective computer lab environments for all writing classes. Programs that don’t conceptualize resources in terms of the lowest common denominator (light web surfing and word processing) but anticipate new technologies that might only be accessible with better hardware configurations than the most basic. Even if this is/were the case, it does not make it any less of a concern for our field, in general, or our specific contexts. Let me put it another way. If I were to show that Brown University had an excellent Feminist Studies department, which collaborated with other departments to integrate feminist theory to inform pedagogy across the curriculum, it wouldn’t render a dissertation written about feminist pedagogy informing writing instruction by a Ph.D. candidate at Ohio University moot. Nor, would it render it meaningless for other instructors at other universities where such integrations were more or less commonplace. Heck, Freire was writing about a much worse case, peasant oppression in a totalitarian government, than any of us are likely to encounter here in the United States, at least. And yet, Freire is still considered relevant by many American pedagogues and by my students when we read and talk about what he had to say and how it relates to our educational experiences. Like feminist theory or Freire’s liberatory pedagogy, techno-critical pedagogy constitutes a way of looking at the world and requires a lot of reflection, from its application in our
classroom practices, to what we say and do, more personally, in the classroom, to how we see forces supporting or getting in the way of our teaching from that pedagogical perspective in our institutions. I hope that readers will find my dissertation relevant to their own reflections on their classrooms and institutions, which may differ from mine.
CHAPTER ONE: REVISING “WRITING” AND MODERN LITERACY

“Techno-critical pedagogy posits that developing modern literacy is more attuned to a shotgun method,24 as I’ve been describing throughout the dissertation, a juxtaposition of different applications that become a focus for analysis and reflection.” – Page 68

Orienting Ourselves

In the introduction, I’ve offered a broad outline of the issues I’m covering in this dissertation. Each chapter will operate like a microscope, starting with a broad view or scope and as we turn the knob the subject will increasingly come into focus and offer more specific detail. At the same time, as a clearer picture emerges, it becomes evident that with more magnification there is more to focus on. After starting, then, with a broad outline, we now turn the knob and focus on an issue more central to techno-critical pedagogy and one I’ve mentioned in the past chapter, but not delved into nearly enough: the issue of literacy. Literacy is relevant to this discussion because it provides the overlap between traditional concerns of the writing classroom and the new imperatives we face as we develop our students’ skill sets according to new media they operate in.25 When we see overlap between traditional expectations regarding literacy and so-called new literacies related to computers, we can begin to establish how technology fits into the

24 I’m employing a shotgun metaphor to describe practice integrating many different technologies, not necessarily in order to learn about the individual technologies for their own sake (individual pellets), but in order to develop the skills that interconnect them (a tight shot pattern). A shotgun is most effective when the pattern of shot is evenly distributed over a particular area, kind of like the overlap in a Venn diagram.
25 Whenever I discuss overlap, anticipate border pedagogy, which exploits the conflict between two entities or concepts in order to shed light on both. More on border pedagogy in the next chapter.
domain of our writing classes. When we neglect to explore such overlap, literacies are
more apt to be regarded as different animals, each roaming its own field.

Given the recursive nature of this chapter, a wheel serves as an appropriate
metaphor for understanding the various perspectives regarding what counts as literacy.
Consider the spokes as the stakeholders, instructors, administrators, parents, and students.
Each include their own assumptions and expectations about what good writing instruction
serves and what it should consist of. Rather than being entirely separate entities, they are
joined in informing and, sometimes, misunderstanding each other. The hub might
represent their common understandings while the rim might relate to their own particular
perspectives, which may differ. One main argument that winds through the chapter is that
as writing instructors, it is important for us to consider the perspective of each
stakeholder, because what we can do and what we are expected to do in the classroom is
affected by other stakeholders. Finally, after a look at how various perspectives of
stakeholders relate to literacy and writing instruction, I’ll focus a little more concretely at
how I’ve seen this at work on the ground as an instructor trying to integrate a new
technology, that of Second Life, in the classroom.

Three Claims about Literacy and Techno-critical Pedagogy

Academic books on the changing face of literacy are being published like crazy as
composition theorists struggle to keep current and make sense of new developments.
Many of these books are published as texts for specialists. For example, Jonathan
Alexander’s *Digital Youth: Emerging Literacies on the World Wide Web* is published in
the New Dimensions in Computers and Composition series. Personally, when I
begrudgingly wear the hat of the specialist, I enjoy this book.\textsuperscript{26} Alexander does critical analyses of many concrete examples of new media. He even mentions some texts (like homestarrunner.com’s Strong Bad\textsuperscript{27} cartoons) that I use in the computer classroom. But, its relevance (as well as the relevance of similar texts) for my discussion here of literacy is limited by its specificity. Rather than focus on examples of new literacies merely from the lives of our students that are more narrowly defined and somewhat diffuse (for example, again, homestarrunner.com), as I’m arguing many technologically themed books in our field do, I’d prefer to construct my argument on broader terms.

I’d like to lay out three opening claims about literacy as they relate to a “technopedagogy,” the concern of this dissertation.

1.) “Modern literacy” incorporates/depends on/integrates advanced technology as advanced technology is increasingly becoming part of our daily lives. I’ve previously explained this in terms of describing many of the ways we communicate via electronic mediation in our daily lives. This is important because we are expected, at the university and in the private workforce, to communicate frequently and capably through many of these mediums. An alum of Ohio University, working as an engineer, told me that his job felt like “pretty much just responding to emails,” as he showed me his new Blackberry supplied to him by work. For him, practical literacy is different than what he experienced in school. When I’ve asked my students what their five favorite technologies are, and

\textsuperscript{26} I like that he entitles his introduction “Hidden Literacies.” Rather than literacies that are hidden from us, I think a more apt description is that these literacies are hidden because we’ve collectively buried our heads in the sand ala the strategy of the ostrich.

\textsuperscript{27} Strong Bad is a cartoon character, a lucha libre (kind of like Mexican pro-wrestling) fighter. Go to homestarrunner.com and click on sb emails. Scroll down the list and check out “Englilsh Paper” (sic). I often use this short feature to discuss what students may think and how they may feel about academic writing.
how they would do without them if they were marooned on a desert island, students told me they “didn’t know how [they’d] live” without their cell phones and computers.” Furthermore, a national survey conducted by Belden Russonello & Stewart, a research firm, for the National Writing Project, entitled “The 2007 Survey on Teaching Writing: American Public Opinion on the Importance of Writing in Schools,” found that many Americans do believe that technological facility is an important component in children’s education. On their press release of the Belden Russonello & Stewart survey, NWP notes specifically, Americans believed that:

- A variety of computer applications contribute positively to students' growth as writers.
- Creative applications such as PowerPoint presentations, doing homework on a computer, creating Web pages, writing blogs, and emailing friends and family actually help young people to become better writers. (“Americans Believe Computers Have Positive Effect On Writing Skills”)

But, “mixed or negative views were registered on some specific uses:”

- Spell-check programs received a mixed response, with 51% saying they hinder learning to spell, and 43% saying they help.
- Instant messaging received a negative response, with 60% of Americans saying it gets in the way of young people becoming better communicators.28 (“Americans Believe Computers Have Positive Effect On Writing Skills”)

28 Conveniently, just what “better communicator” means is left up to the respondent. I’ve seen my students, though, make texting via T9 technology look like it’s an art form. There is certainly some bias from older
On further consideration of the actual report that NWP cites in their press release, though, it’s evident that there are contradictions at work that shed light on that doublethink, or contradictory thought, I mentioned previously. What we see through these statistics is a complicated mindset in which respondents believe their own brand of writing instruction (presumably pre-computer) was better than current instruction for students, in spite of the fact that they argue computers are good for their children’s writing. They believe that computers make us better writers but impact our writing in negative ways. The reader should keep these dueling perspectives in mind later when I discuss contemporary writing instructors and what we know (or say) and what we do.

Over 80 percent of parents\(^{29}\) who responded to the survey said their children had access to computers at school, with a slightly higher percentage reporting that their children had access to computers at home. 56 percent of all respondents believed children should begin writing instruction at pre-K/1\(^{st}\) grade levels. 53 percent of all respondents believed that children should begin learning to use computers at ages 6 or under. 61 percent of all respondents strongly or somewhat agreed that new technologies help the teaching of writing. 52 percent of all respondents argued that computers make

\(^29\) The survey was conducted on adults, people of at least the age 18, of households. “Parents” signified any adult responding with a child of 25 years of age or younger.
students better writers. Nearly half of all respondents argued that computer literacy was at least as important as learning to read and write. The picture these statistics paint is of a technological renaissance in which the majority of students have computers which positively affect their writing and well-supported computer instruction in writing classrooms. But, while 77 percent of all respondents (again, adults of the household) graded their own writing instruction A or B, almost half (47 percent) claimed that today students are not learning to write as well. 84 percent strongly or somewhat agreed that “computers make writing faster and easier, not better.” 51 percent believed that computers’ impact on spelling was negative. 60 percent believed that instant messaging hurts students’ writing. The majority (45 percent) believed that videogames have a negative impact on children’s critical thinking skills. The conclusions the report reaches focus mostly on the positive responses involving computers and downplay the relationship between the negative and positive responses as they relate to the population sampled. These results suggest the public is of two minds. On one hand, very few in the survey (and few people in general) would claim that computers aren’t important in our education. On the other, many adults in the survey (and, again, in general) believe computers and new communication environments are eroding our children’s’ writing skills.

The fact is that we can know that computers are important for writing and we can simultaneously believe that they are bad for writing when it is convenient for us to do so. Further, as I reported in the paragraph above, many of those surveyed (18 years or older, the adult in the household), claimed that their own writing instruction was better than
current instruction (in other words, “the kind of education I had is better than what the
kids have now”), even with the proliferation of computers at home and school (even
though they believed that computers make students better writers). Another bias is shown
by negatives views of instant messaging and its effect on writing and videogames’ affects
on critical thinking skills. But, as much as folks try to mitigate the effects of a technology
like instant messaging on writing, students will continue to use it to benefit their own
lives, and as they matriculate into the work world, they will surely bring such
technologies and the writing conventions within them to bear in their places of
employment, at the very least for communication with their peers. They do so already. In
the future, as such innovations become the norm; adults will complain when their
children don’t know how to IM the right way because they’ve been infected by the
conventions of some newer brand of communicative technology (“Kids today don’t even
know how to properly Tweet!”).

Recently, a colleague told me of her primary school student child’s writing
instruction as part of a language arts program. Children were not allowed to do any
writing on computers, because it presumably eroded the “art” part of language arts in
relation to writing. This is, perhaps, a slightly more polarized, but real life, example of
the way some educators, school systems, and parents regard the potential impact of
computers on writing. As for my own education, I was a poor handwriter before
computers became the norm at school, but as an early adopter of word processors,\textsuperscript{30} even

\textsuperscript{30} In the fifth grade, in the eighties, I used \textit{WordStar} to type up our spelling homework. We were supposed
to include each word for the week in a sentence. I wrote short prose stories that incorporated all the words
in the form of detective stories. I read each installment out loud to the other students who were eager to
after I earned my D in handwriting, I learned to love writing. Later, I take a look at the positive effects of computer-based writing for students with some disabilities in order to counter the mass of negative perceptions concerning technologies’ affects on writing.

2.) **Literacy-initiatives such as our college writing classes should approach literacy as a means for developing personal agency.** Ostensibly, the skill-set we are transmitting is an enabling one. The idea is that the more literate our students are, the more successful they will be in their further endeavors. Personal agency is related to the rhetorical strategies we have at our disposal.\(^{31}\) Literacy, especially in its advanced forms, indicates a larger and more complex knowledge base regarding a subject. In the case of writing, advanced literacy means more choices, strategies, or a larger toolbox to choose from in terms of rhetoric. By viewing literacy, especially techno-literacy, as will be covered in the next claim, as a means for personal agency we employ a critical pedagogy that approaches student’s personal agency, rather than some sort of critical pedagogy with a framework related to specific social values. I don’t mean to demean the work of pedagogues that focus on a particular brand of social criticism, for example those who analyze texts from a Marxist perspective (I take such stances in the classroom myself). In my opinion, a techno-critical pedagogy includes the development of a major set of skills hear about the next adventure of the inspector from Scotland Yard. The printing was done on a dot matrix printer. It occurs to me now that the spellchecker function in modern word processors renders some of the point of the assignment moot.

\(^{31}\) I say “related to” because personal agency is not directly equivalent to rhetorical ability. Obviously, there are some identities of my students that may constrain their personal agency regardless of rhetorical strategies in written or other communication. Other than exploring those constraints in discussion and mobilizing traditional critical pedagogical stances that seek to encourage the development of students as “good citizens” or ethical or whatever you’d like to call it, focusing on literacy as means for personal agency through rhetoric is one thing we can “control.” In a way, I’m filtering the Aristotelian ideal of “the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion” through a technological lens, given the diffuse scope of technology in our daily interactions.
that can be employed by students in regards to their own worldviews and beliefs, should they find their teacher’s social criticism or political perspective unsatisfactory. Literacy offers liberties unavailable to people who are limited in their ability to communicate with others. For instance, for my students at OU, this might mean getting an internship over another candidate, or knocking ten dollars off their cable bill through a well-written email to their cable TV company, or designing a successful flyer for their band’s performance on the weekend, or writing an effective statement of purpose for an application to medical school.

3.) A critical pedagogy (one which seeks to develop individual personal agency) in a “writing” classroom should be based in approaches that utilize advanced technology as part of a “modern literacy.” In this chapter I argue that “traditional” models of writing instruction relate to writing as it was conceptualized in a non-electronic world, for the most part. Technology is developed and implemented faster than it can be integrated into our mainstream pedagogy. That can be a good thing, if it keeps us considerate about which practices we pedagogically choose to use. But, it can put our students at a disadvantage if our field takes too long in considering writing technologies pedagogically and implementing them programmatically. I’m arguing in the Introduction, Chapter One, and Chapter Two that at this institution, which I believe is relevant to the location of other universities32 (although not every one) in the spectrum of technological integration

32 While I’ve made the argument that our field as whole is having a problem integrating technological practice in writing classrooms because it positions technology as a specialty rather than a component of general literacy that applies to all instructors, students, etc., I also draw on my experience as a candidate on the job market for the last two years and on my experience as a Teaching Assistant conducting professional development for other faculty in other writing programs in Ohio. I argue that my personal experience is reasonable perspective for the argument that in most institutions we have more to do in integrating technology into our writing programs. There are more schools with writing programs similar to those I’ve
in their writing programs, we need to catch up with teaching the kinds of literacy that are expected of our students in the quote unquote real world, even the world they are a part of when they go back to their dorms or as they sit in class ignoring us and texting each other.

Claim three is a sum of the two prior claims. “Modern literacy” incorporates the use of a whole different host of electronic mediums for communication. We are more literate when we are more capable in those different mediums. The more literate we are, the more control we have over our communication and we have more potential for agency. Thus, a critical pedagogy centered on a writing class should include practice with advanced technology as part of its aim of developing the agency of its students. In addition, “writing” also takes on extra meaning as it entails multi-modal composition in some electronic contexts.

But, please take these claims with this caveat: while these claims may not all be that sensational, we need to take a careful look at how our writing programs, faculty, and administrators and how students and their communities outside the Academy respond to such claims. Finally, we may need to take a closer look at our own integration of technology in our classrooms to ensure that our practice remains informed by techno-critical pedagogy.

experienced at Ohio University, Cleveland State, and Youngstown State, Ohio State University, than there are like more specialized programs such as that of Rutgers or other programs that may or may not be more tech-oriented. While the schools I cite may represent bigger programs, I’ve seen a similar lack of implementation of practice focused on writing technologies in programs related to smaller colleges I’ve interviewed for. The institutions I cite above, including my own, are not “bad guys” but more like the common denominator. Every institution could do a better job of focusing on the integration of technological practice (and an articulation and understanding of its pedagogy).
“Writing” Decomposed

Fulfilling our obligations in our first –year composition classes requires complicated reflections on modern literacy. What does modern literacy mean? First, literacy is about reading and writing critically (one might say rhetorically). It is not simply enough to read the words and understand them, but to understand them in a critical way…that is, to be able to analyze (break down) and synthesize the meanings conveyed by the text. The ability to read critically is vital for contemporary democratic citizenship; Literacy is connected to agency. In a modern world, print-text is surrounded by a host of other media. Rather than erode the importance of print-based literacy, modern literacy expands the subject matter of literacy, the means of communication, how “knowledge” is transmitted. While that original skill-set related to print-text-centered literacy is still important, focusing on it solely ignores other equally important kinds of communications that we are surrounded by and must operate with in the modern world. This may not seem like a big surprise to those who integrate a focus on visual rhetoric in their classes. Indeed, in our English building each room is well equipped for such studies, including TVs, VHS and DVD players, and Web projectors in every classroom. Mostly, such

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33 By “erode” I mean take away from. Often as we revise our canons, critics claim we lose ground by broadening our definitions. In this case, I think it’s a “both, and” proposition.
34 This notion of “computer literacy,” a separate entity, taking time away from a more authentic literacy relevant to writing classrooms was voiced in the Lasarenko quote on pages 75-76. I’ve also experienced it from students, faculty, administrators, and the public. Meanwhile, here at OU most students who want to write on a computer in a writing classroom, have to bring their own, in spite of the fact that most, if not all, formal papers are presumably written on computers. Some readers might argue that the case is surely different elsewhere. Even in programs where all writing instruction is done in computer labs, instructors must be careful about considering pedagogy related to that technology. I’ve known instructors who have taught writing in computer labs without using the computers as part of their coursework. The availability of hardware is a concern of techno-critical pedagogy, but it is not a magic bullet in itself.
equipment is used for media analysis. Rarely, on the whole, do composition classes at Ohio University utilize technology (cameras or recorders, for example) to compose in these mediums. There are a lot of reasons for this. Instructors haven’t been trained and may not be used to thinking about the composition process for, say, creating a YouTube video. Is it appropriate to do so in such a writing class? Most instructors would reasonably agree that it’s something someone could do, if they wanted to. Strangely missing from most of our classrooms here at OU, though, is a technology that the vast majority of our students (and we) use to compose, and one that affects the nature of the writing process, computers. To be fair, many of the classrooms are equipped with instructor computers, but not computers for students to use. In those institutions where writing instruction does happen in computer labs, this techno-critical pedagoge argues that how we use those computers should be a constant point of concern.

Techno-critical pedagogy posits that developing modern literacy is more attuned to a shotgun method, as I’ve been describing throughout the dissertation, a juxtaposition of different applications that become a focus for analysis and reflection. I will write more about this in the third and fourth chapters. What I want to say here is that having the computers and teaching with them is an important start, but just because a school mandates writing instruction with computer labs does not mean that instructors will make good use of the computers or that the coursework will develop students’ modern literacy.

35 In this case are we interpolating students into the role of consumers (albeit educated consumers) as opposed to the more active role of composers in these media? Kahn’s criticism of the shrewd consumer syndrome (ala Seitz) rears its ugly head, as covered in the Introduction.

36 Like the supreme control offered to the instructor by institutional systems like Blackboard, the imperative to furnish only instructor-controlled computers in classrooms dovetails nicely with the structure of power Freire describes in Pedagogy of the Oppressed. If you believe the tradition of higher education has emerged from white patriarchal and upper class origins, and that those in power rarely yield it without conflict, there is no surprise that we still need to revise vestiges of older control structures that are no longer relevant.
For example, facility with *Word* alone, or word processing alone, does not a literate student make. It’s the skills that relate across platforms, or the ability to synthesize between platforms, which offers us a general ability rather than knowledge of a particular practice.

On nearly a daily basis, I am reminded of one of the biggest challenges I face both as an instructor who tries to incorporate advanced technology into the classroom and in my role as an Assistant Director of the Center for Writing Excellence who introduces faculty and administrators to writing-enriching technologies. That challenge is primarily based on others’ perceptions of literacy and how it relates to composition, instruction, and, perhaps broader goals a university holds for students. In my opinion, our training and the resources we are provided correspond with others’ views on what is proper or normal for us to do in our classrooms given perceptions of our purpose. To put it more simply, the tools we have at our disposal relate to the perceptions the tool-givers have of our job. If the traditional view of the writing classroom focused on the production of wooden chairs, we’d be given hammers, nails, and saws to work with and expect our students to work with them, too. Further, parents and administrators might expect woodworking in the classroom. What if, over the years, metal chairs became the common denominator? You’d expect a shift in terms of the tools we’d be given and what we expect our students to work with in class. Often, I’ve found myself supplied with tools

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37 Throughout the dissertation there are pockets of discrepancy based on my identity at the time I was writing. I’m resistant to revise to completely erase that footprint, because my perspectives related specifically to experiences in different roles. While it is still true that I encounter challenges based on other actors’ perspectives of literacy and the job of a writing class in my current position as Interim Director, it may be different given the increase in institutional authority or power I am invested with or at least am privileged to have the illusion of in my new position. While revisions may make it easier to read, I feel that they are disingenuous and close off the potential that different identities located in different power structures might have for enriching a techno-critical discussion.
for carpentry while my students are expected to work with metal. If traditional perceptions regarding literacy and writing govern teacher preparation and the tools we have at our disposal in class, then I believe those perceptions focus on a kind of writing that excludes important issues related to new media and technologies that students face when they do the majority of their college and professional writings. Advanced technologies surely shape their work in ways different from how traditional or conservative modes of writing would have it. If different writing mediums have different affects on our writing it is important to explore that. Writing just doesn’t mean one thing.

When I use language like “traditional” views of writing or “conservative modes of writing” or even “traditional Academic writing” I am referring to a way some people see writing. What exactly this means will come later as we read about Sven Birkerts views on how word processors negatively impact the writing process. But, in part, I’m referring to a perception that views writing as an agonistic, manly, and individual enterprise, one from the school of Hemingway, in which the great white hunter endures torture in the wild savage jungles of creation to wrestle a text into submission.38

38 Kenneth Burke offers an often cited metaphor for Academic discourse by comparing it to walking into a parlor in which a heated discussion is underway. The gendered pronouns Burke uses in the short description are solely male and the manner of discourse is described as argumentative. While individuals collaborate in the metaphor, they do so as allies, individual members aligned on the same team. While I don’t think Burke is reprehensible, he offers a fairly traditional view of academic discourse. Accordingly, I am defending my dissertation as the culmination of my education. It occurs to me that this perception of academic writing falls into the “writing to display knowledge” end of the spectrum, opposite of a “writing to learn” mode. This distinction is relevant as it fits as practice in what Freire describes as the banking method of education. Certainly, there is room for more than one kind of writing at the university, but if traditional views are what guide the kinds of resources we have at our disposal, then we are limited in what we can do. For me, that means that my dissertation will come first in the form of a print-text document, which when put online will still be a print-text document that was just uploaded. While it may have been fine in the past and may continue to be fine for some dissertations, it limits the production of knowledge in others. Some folks in our field may have “gone digital,” but we need to ask questions such as the following: what does it mean to go digital? Are digital dissertations print-text documents that have merely been uploaded or do they make some use of the medium that only the electronic medium can offer? How do the traditional structure or expectations of the dissertation curtail the novel use of the electronic medium? How do institutional requirements regarding the dissertation put writers who want to “go digital” at a disadvantage as a result of the expectations of their committee, standardized requirements related to printed versions of the dissertation, or ethical and cost considerations foisted upon them by electronic dissertation delivery services such as ProQuest who aim to make money of the work of the graduate students who may be a captive audience, if they are forced to use this system by their institution should they choose to “go digital.” We might also ask broader questions such as how have graduate students been prepared in their graduate level classes to “go digital.” Has electronic writing and its Academic potential been effectively addressed systematically in graduate classes and writing assignments as a part of those classes? Conversely, we might ask
perception of writing focused on learning a particular toolkit composed of grammar, spelling, and structure. In our field, as a result of Berlin’s taxonomy, we usually refer to that focus as current traditional. My construct may seem stilted, admittedly ridiculous, and even over-generalized, but it may be boiled down further to the differences between people who view writing as a solitary vs. a social act. Or, those who view it as a static vs. a shifting process. Or, those who view the “product” of it as a text completed vs. a process with a draft attached. Or, those who view it as a skill set to be taught vs. a skill to be developed. There has been much work done on how patriarchal forces have shaped the Academy and even our field. Is it ridiculous to suspect that those forces may still reside in general tendencies regarding how we view and teach writing?

Beth Hewett, in her Web text, “Generating New Theory for Online Writing Instruction,” published in Kairos, calls for a need to develop a “theory generating stance” for online writing instruction informed by empirical research in order to move beyond anecdote. While I don’t believe we’ve exhausted the possibility of anecdote as useful text, especially in an electronic world where culture is often viral, Hewett is interesting to me because she takes a look at four common composition theoretical frameworks, current traditional, expressivist, neo-classical, and social constructivist and identifies how they can translate to online interactions between writing tutors and tutees. I want to be very careful in my description of the influence I’m arguing that current traditional models of writing have. I want to be clear that I am arguing about the perspectives of stakeholders other than compositionists. Anecdotally, I can offer that it is clearly the perspective of my
mother when she is surprised (and slightly disgusted) to hear that we are watching and analyzing the movie *First Blood* in my writing classroom. It is also a perspective that is evident in the first question a couple of journalists asked me regarding the integration of *Second Life* if my writing class; “Why are you doing that in a writing classroom?” Our own histories regarding writing instruction and teacher training and what we had on hand inform our constructions of educational “norms.” What’s important here is not so much what are legit and non-legit practices from some universal idealistic viewpoint of composition theory, but how different stakeholders’ perceptions of past models of composition or writing instruction affect their evaluation of different methods. This is relevant to techno-critical pedagogy, and writing instruction in general, because utilizing advanced technologies in the classroom requires resources provided from other stakeholders. We need support for hardware, but also support for the things we do with that hardware, such as exploring online environments like *Second Life* or videogames, which relate to conceptualizations of writing that are expanded.

Further, traditional models of writing instruction create a self-reinforcing circle. If our academic experience is shaped by conservative conceptualizations of writing we may internalize such conceptualizations and apply them to our understandings of our roles. This may relate to our assumptions about many things academic, from our role as gatekeepers once we matriculate to academia, to our classrooms as we develop our curricula, and to the resources we have at our disposal as we request what we need from the institution. It can also relate to the kind of training we give others as we train them in our discipline. I see it at work in composition instructors who feel the integration of new
technologies, even those related to writing, aren’t within the scope of our job. Most often I see this manifest in the form of statements that include “it’s not our job to teach computer literacy.” For example, I’ve heard instructors complain that their students aren’t highly literate in Blackboard, but that “it’s not our job to teach them that.” I ask, whose job is it? If CMS’s are writing tools used across the curriculum, at this university it’s all of our jobs. Further, those of us interested in developing the agency of our students as it relates to writing should be all the more invested. After all, Blackboard, or other CMS tools, represent more than just delivery tools, but sites of new media for which literacy can translate to other new media. While Blackboard serves as one example, you can insert any new technology that will take some instruction in using, such as Multi-user Domains Object-Oriented (MOOs), Second Life, Blogs, Wikis, Web site creation, videogames, etc. While all of these things are undeniably taught in some form at most institutions, it is rare that they are integrated as a general concern among all instructors of writing or particularly related to a typical first year composition class everyone is expected to teach. Further, less privileged students who have been tracked into developmental courses may be even more at risk to be denied new media focuses, which may be considered the domain of more advanced (i.e. niche) writing classes. Writing instructors are left in a position where many important doors are closed to us or at least made extremely difficult to open in terms of using different kinds of technology, both in order to critique it and also to use it to compose, because such activities/technologies are

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39 We can further extrapolate to instructors likely to teach writing, for example, at many institutions, instructors who teach literature or creative writing.
not considered to be normally related to or essential components of writing classes and are therefore not supported conceptually or in terms of hardware requirements.

What We Know and What We Do

In an earlier draft of this chapter, during a MOO session critique of my writing, some instructor/readers argued that they were put off by my assertions “that everyone thinks writing is about pens and paper.” After all, they felt that “writing is about computers.” So, I unintentionally created a hostile audience. At least at this university, despite what we “know” about writing, computers aren’t, in practice, often more than a second thought, as is evidenced by the resources offered us and expectations about what the basic things we should be doing in class are. For the majority of classes, signing up for computer lab time is something they can supplement their coursework with. Training regarding teaching in the computer labs is short and based on technical issues and a few practices, things we might do, for example “analyze a Web site.” A lack of integration of pedagogy related to technology and writing in teacher training and TA introductory coursework creates a self-reinforcing circle in which we may “know” the role computers play in our literacy initiatives in freshman English, but be unequipped to effectively do much more than what I’ve previously described.40 Few senior faculty members in our department integrate advanced technology into their graduate classrooms. As a graduate student, this was a major detriment to my development as a writing instructor. TA

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40 I see some progress being made here in our situation. A number of new optional short training seminars have been offered that focus on different writing technologies (blogs, Blackboard, Word). There has even been some opportunity for me, as a representative from the Center for Writing Excellence, to offer blog, wiki, and Second Life training to TAs in tandem with the English department. Graduate students would receive credit for attending such seminars, but would have a menu to choose from much larger than technological/techno pedagogical focuses.
orientation and formal development aside, in our graduate classes, in general, we learn how to teach due to our increased sensitivity to pedagogy and practice as a result of our growing pains as new teachers. If the MOO is introduced in two sessions of TA orientation, but never used in TAs’ graduate classes, it may not be considered as a normal or worthwhile practice\textsuperscript{41} for instruction. To be fair to administrators of the writing program and faculty in the department, instructors probably rarely ask for more resources because we’ve established a norm. In our department it is true that only specialists are heavily utilizing computer equipment, desirable of teaching with computers, or making a good use of them. That is why I believe it’s a self-reinforcing cycle.

As fate would have it, while writing this chapter I was orienting our incoming graduate student instructors to MOO technology, which was new to them. While using our MOO is not required, our Director of Composition\textsuperscript{42} believes that new instructors should be introduced to it, so they might have one more tool at their disposal for instruction. This year we did something different and split the orientation for MOO up into two one hour sessions and required TA’s to read Jane Lasarenko’s “So. You wanna MOO?” available at the online journal \textit{Kairos}. Lasarenko’s piece is useful for such an orientation because it voices concerns that are clearly etched in the faces of the TAs I’m orienting. Primarily, those concerns deal with literacy, and what exactly our jobs are in freshman composition classrooms. On the first page of Lasarenko’s Web text, she writes,

\textsuperscript{41} A larger issue, some faculty and TAs from strands other than Rhetoric and Composition may feel less engaged in developing their obligatory composition classes.

\textsuperscript{42} I realize that I risk painting administrators negatively via my critique in most of this chapter. In reality, there are many sites of administrative support that keep me going. The fact that MOO training is included for incoming TAs (and is cited in the Composition Committee’s list of acceptable out-of-class activities) is encouraging and surprising. But, I am interested in exploring some basic premises about writing instruction that focus more on our norms rather than our exceptions.
You just don't have the time to learn computer science and you're not sure you really want to. After all, it's worked just fine for most of us. You're not here to teach computer literacy, you were hired to teach English, and there's not time enough in a semester to teach both.

These concerns are a common sentiment in my experience as I’ve introduced MOO technology to students, faculty, and administrators, often with the intentions of encouraging others to jump on board. I’m not claiming that such concerns aren’t well-founded or that we shouldn’t interrogate new practices in the classroom, but I think this pattern of questioning shines light on the hidden assumption about what is proper to do in a composition classroom. To directly address Lasarenko’s critic’s concern, in my opinion, we’ve gotten to a point where “computer literacy” is inextricably tied to general literacy, especially as it relates to the success of post-secondary students. If literacy is about facility with communication, and communication in many ways plays out technologically in the contemporary world, be it through text messages, cell phone calls, emails, social networking, Course Management Systems (such as Blackboard), word processors, spreadsheets, etc., then our facility with technology is related to our facility with communication. Facility with communication with the written word might entail an understanding of “how to’s” or technical requirements for communicating through writing. We might think of knowing how to form the letters, where to write them, in what sequence, etc. as basic “how to’s.” Spelling and grammar, organization, are more advanced, but still fairly basic “how to” technical things we need to be aware of to be considered acceptably literate.
When our communication is mediated electronically, our technical abilities in the mediums we work within affect what we know how to say. If we are ill equipped in a particular medium, for example, we are unable to change the font in an important PowerPoint presentation for our colleagues, our communication can suffer. I call the amalgam of traditional print-text skills and contemporary multi-modal facilities “modern literacy.” I don’t use the term to denigrate other definitions of literacy, to suggest there is a “primitive” literacy, but to be inclusive of the means through which the people, who we are directly serving when they are students in our classes at the university, are expected to communicate.

What’s the Difference?

Early critics of the invasion of technology in contexts of writing, like Sven Birkerts and Bill Henderson ultimately serve my cause because they establish that there are differences between the way we write via advanced technology versus older technologies (typewriters for Birkerts, lead pencils for Henderson). Birkerts, perhaps more than any other critic, establishes what he and others view as at stake amid the modern proliferation of technologies and their impact on literacy via the title of collection of writings The Gutenberg Elegies: The Fate of Reading in an Electronic Age. His piece “Objections Noted: Word Processing,” collected in the Elegies, details some of the differences between old school writing via typewriters and modern word processors. From Birkerts’s agonistic perspective, word processors make writing too easy. Birkerts believes that the kind of tools at the disposal of a writer via word processors, for example cutting and pasting and rearranging text electronically encourages a different kind of
revision process than available to writers via older technologies. For Birkerts any benefit
in the increased fluidity of text comes at the expense of careful tedious revisions forced
by non-electronic technologies. Wendell Berry, in his “Why I Am Not Going to Buy a
Computer,” voices the same concern evident in the *Elegies* title, when he argues “It is
well understood that technological innovation always requires the discarding of the “old
model”—the “old model” in this case being not just our old Royal standard, but my wife,
my critic, my closest reader, my fellow worker” (104). Henderson, co-founder of The
Lead Pencil Club, argues that new technologies speed up the process contributing to a
culture of speed and immediate gratification. He argues that slower ways are more
deliberate and thoughtful ways.

Although these critics ultimately mobilize these arguments as negative critiques
of newer writing technologies, they do shed light on some possible differences between
writing with pens or pencils and paper and writing with computers. Reasonably, it’s
arguable that most of these differences are tendencies that might be encouraged by new
technology, rather than enforced limitations. What I mean to say is that it is true that a
deliberate and thoughtful writer can be just as deliberate and thoughtful with a word
processor if they consciously want to be and, perhaps, if they are aware of the differences
in writing processes of different mediums. Most people will agree that different
technologies encourage different interfaces with writing and writing processes.

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43 Berry’s process includes writing with pen or pencil and a piece of paper and then relying on his wife to
type it on a typewriter. As she types, she proofreads and makes marginal comments, which Berry responds
to in further revision.

44 When I was writing this I became aware that I was risking falling into the same mindset of those who
claim computers dumb down the process. It’s just as likely you could make a counterclaim that writing on
computers makes us more flexible and compartmentalized writers as we more intuitively work with an
For a more positive look at how computers affect writing, we might look at a recent article by Richard Wanderman, “How Computers Change the Writing Process for People with Learning Disabilities,” available on *LD OnLine*. Wanderman argues that for a writer with dyslexia, like him, pen/pencil and paper writing can’t offer the possibility for him to learn from his own experiences with writing, since it is so frustrated. For him, the essential nature of pen/pencil and paper writing is that “composing and printing are wed.” He argues that the physical act of putting ink/lead to paper encourages a concept of composing as occurring in a writer’s head prior to the writing of the piece. He claims it “puts too much pressure on the writers to have the entire thought they are trying to express in their heads, (clearly and in the correct order).” The fallout of such a situation is that writers like Wanderman merely give up on the medium and become estranged from it. The mediated space the screen provides offers a mental whiteboard for Wanderman in the writing process. I believe, to some extent, this is a possibility for all writers, and one that critics like Birkerts rail against as making writing too easy. Wanderman’s main arguments are that:

- Computers make it easier to get ideas recorded outside of your head.
- Computers make it easier to edit, change, and work with ideas.
- Computers make it easier to publish or share ideas.

For Wanderman, these three essential components of writing process; input, editing, and output; are all facilitated through the use of computers. They empower writers like him
because “the part of computing that hooked me was being able to explore my own ideas in a way that allowed me to know that my ideas were worth exploring, and being able to share them in a way so that others might think so too.”

I believe Wanderman is an excellent source for understanding the benefits of computers for writing because many of its positive characteristics may be taken for granted or not as visible to differently-abled writers like myself. As a writer who is differently-abled than Wanderman, I have the luxury of being confident when choosing between different mediums for writing, but like Wanderman, and many of my students, my first choice is my computer and a word processor. And, choice is the litmus test for agency.

In the title of our first year composition class at Ohio University, “Rhetoric and Writing,” I am concerned with how others envision the “writing” we are teaching. The term rhetoric may be just as problematic, with much of the public recognizing it in the context of political attacks on others’ assertions. I believe that the term writing is misleading in that it implies a prescriptive focus on the mechanical skills involved with print-text, at best considered translated between different types of writing technologies. Those of us involved in WAC work have often seen this evidence itself in faculty members’ perception in other disciplines of what we should be doing in our writing classes. I am concerned that if most people don’t consider the differences between different kinds of writing technologies, they tend to statically consider writing as a set of

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45 Again, it sounds like Wanderman is describing a writing to learn model of writing, rather than a more traditional writing to display knowledge model. It’s interesting that he’s describing word processors as safe spaces or psycho-social moratoriums in which writers can write without worrying before the printing happens and the words are made “concrete.”
skills that equally translate between mediums. In such a mindset, the differences between pen and pencils or Microsoft Word become hazy and a concept of a more general kind of literacy leads assumptions towards the job of writing classrooms. In such a case, “writing” technologies (word processors and CMS tools like Blackboard’s) may be disconnected from other functions of advanced technologies (multimedia) that relate to broader views of composition. The result is that it’s considered right and proper that computer labs for the English department be configured for some network sharing, Web surfing, and word processing. After all, what do visual environments like Second Life or chatroom-like text-based environments like the MOO have to do with a writing class?

Write and Wrong: Popular Conceptions of Writing Instruction

My degree is in Rhetoric and Composition but I teach Rhetoric and Writing. There is some conflict between the two. I argue that composition is a better word to describe what we should be doing and teaching rather than “writing.” Although writing can mean many things, it is most closely connected to print-based technology, paper and ink. It also relates more closely to a kind of composition and process based on such technology. But, most of my students at Ohio University “write” their papers on computers using a word processor and other computer applications. “Writing” does not adequately describe what they do, unless we understand it in an expanded way. New communicative spaces offered online via computers add the potential for multi-media and expand that definition further...in an electronic world students compose themselves and

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46 This relates to a conceptualization of writing as a set of skills closely aligned to personal talent. Many students come to my freshman composition classes a little bit anxious and with the preconception that they “just aren’t good writers” and that they “hate writing.” If writing is something you’re either good at or bad at, it is a static skill set tied to talent, not a contextual process closely aligned to rhetorical skill and different literacies related to different mediums.
their texts out of characteristics that are more than just those of the print-text alphabet.
For example, our students might compose themselves (their homepages on Facebook) as
snippets of text, pictures, clips of music, even widgets that they choose from and arrange
on the page.

To a lot of people outside the academy, (for example, my in-laws47) a writing
course focuses specifically on the production of writing. To them, that means the kinds of
writing and writing classes they are familiar with from their schooling. As the NWP
study shows these assumptions are often value-based. Their brand of instruction was
better than what goes on now. My in-laws will tell you, should you take the time to ask
them, of sentence diagramming, red pen feedback, and their experiences of practicing
(but never mastering) a technical skill. The common argument that literacy rates are
decreasing seems to bolster their belief that their concept of writing is the correct one. But,
as new ways of writing instruction have become more prevalent, the perspectives of other
stakeholders (faculty, administration, parents) still relate to outdated or limited
expectations of reading and writing. Every couple of months the national news carries
another story claiming that texting and IM’ing conventions are infiltrating student writing
to the detriment of literacy, and those with the mindset I’ve been describing here accept
them as another testament to their views regarding reading and writing.48

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47 Yes, I’m once again invoking the muse of my in-laws, Fran and Mary Ann Mangano. Living in suburban
Solon, OH, in an upper-middle-class neighborhood, they’re a touchstone for the sensibilities of my Ohio
University students’ parents. Likewise, the way they view writing, their perceptions of what is that I do,
and what I should be doing, are, I think, representative of the greater public who are concerned with the
product of higher education. I’m aware of the absurdity of using my in-laws as a catch all for suburban
sensibilities.

48 An interesting March 11th, 2005 article entitled “Teens ready to prove text-messaging skills can score
SAT points,” by Christina McCarroll, published in The Christian Science Monitor, offers a counter-
asked about the (presumably negative) effect of texting on students’ writing by a faculty member at a talk I gave on Second Life for OU faculty and administrators. I responded by mentioning that I heard stories about it and knew that our jobs in the writing class was to equip students with the type of language they will be expected to use to accomplish what they want, but that language is a fluid thing that changes over time. I suggested that at some point in the future, it really wouldn’t matter because our students’ practices such as texting would change our language and to some extent be integrated into it. Another faculty member misunderstood what I was saying and stared at me wide-eyed, his worst fears confirmed, “I don’t know why you think you should be teaching them that stuff. It’s bad enough that they’re doing it on they’re own time!” The venom in his voice was palpable. It was clear from his response that he felt I wasn’t doing my job as a writing instructor. In this case, the encroachment of technology on language was a personal, and perhaps, professional, affront for this faculty member. It may be helpful to imagine shades of this visceral response when considering resistance to using technologies like Second Life or MOO in composition classrooms.

One common critique of this chapter by my reading group is that (apart from the subjective nature of my claims about what people think about writing) they as instructors agree that incorporating modern technology relates to our job in writing classes. To them, the arguments seem commonplace and not really something all that sensational. At risk of sounding like I’m tooting my own horn, this is probably more a result of the impact that I’ve had on them as a colleague, rather than how they’ve been acculturated into the

argument, specifically that “there’s a genuine writing renaissance underway” in which such technologies do enrich users’ writing (Dr. Filreis, as qtd. in McCarroll).
writing program here in a programmatic way. From my work proselytizing for the MOO, SL, and other technologies, even within our field, I still see a lot of resistance. In addition, as I’ve noted, our facilities, at least at this school, aren’t up to the task of adequately responding to the breadth technology we should be integrating in our classes. Some of my colleagues agreeing with me that modern technologies obviously relate to our job in writing classrooms doesn’t change the fact that I’m not able to teach in a computer classroom next quarter and that even if I was I couldn’t use the computers to do much more than surf the Web and word process. Nor does it change the fact that fewer than 5 classes will be brought into the MOO per year, no one else has/will use Second Life in a composition class at OU, and only a minority of writing instructors implement (or know how to implement) wikis in their courses. I argue that my readers’ perspective cited above is an example of knowing one thing but doing another. Nor do their perspectives counter what I’m focusing on in the paragraph above this, outsiders’ views regarding the job of writing courses. My readers’ acceptance of my point is not a solution to the problem this dissertation explores, but symptomatic of it. Accepting the possibility of techno-critical pedagogy is nice in the same way that tolerance is a nice thing for differing social/ethnic groups that may mix. But, we should be striving for appreciation and integration rather than tolerance or acceptance.

And so I’ve argued that this common traditional concept of writing, also entailing a fear of or lack of will to experience technology, I’m operating against centers on print-text literacy. E.D. Hirsch does a good job of implying the kind of mindset that I’m trying to describe here. For Hirsch, in his essay “Cultural Literacy,” literacy rates can be
determined by students’ performance on the verbal section of the SATs. Hirsch argues that because scores have gone down, students are less proficient in a general kind of literacy (based on our reading and writing scores on the SAT) that, according to him, used to exist among educated classes based on common curriculum. Hirsch focuses more on a common curriculum in terms of content rather than skill-set. For Hirsch, so-called “pluralists” (teachers who believe they can teach reading and writing based on diverse subject matter, rather a core cannon) and educational formalists (educators who focus on skill-sets and structures rather than content) are the villains. While Hirsch doesn’t completely do away with the idea that students need to learn some skills related to reading and writing, he puts more emphasis on a common cultural curriculum, arguing that content-schemata is necessary for comprehension and that it also essentially affects how “literate” we are able to be concerning a particular message. For Hirsch, the assumptions of “educational formalism,” or “the now-dominant educational principle that holds that any suitable materials of instruction can be used to teach the skills of reading and writing” (285), “are incorrect” (288) as a result of theories regarding the importance of content-schemata. The end result of this argument is that we need to revisit the good ol’ days of the canon. One might assume that past practices would go hand in hand with past content via Hirsch’s fix to the educational system.49 In fact he mentions the possibility of developing a standardized lexicon of words that are important for our youths’ cultural literacy. We may be getting to a point where the content-schemata of students and wired professionals has shifted, without enough of our regard. In fact, a

49 To me, this sounds reminiscent of the kind of people I mentioned earlier regarding the NWP technology survey that felt that old-fashioned writing instruction was better and that new fangled technologies are devolving our writing.
standard lexicon exists; it just includes words like MP3, filesharing, and AOLspeak, rather than Gettysburg, elegy, or ascot. It may be just as, if not more, important that students know how to negotiate Wikipedia as a text, especially given its pitfalls, rather than Paradise Lost, if it really is an either or proposition, as Hirsch would make it seem. Thank god it’s not that simple and that students can easily access Milton’s masterpiece from their computer via Project Gutenberg on the Web and load it on to their Amazon Kindle.50

That concept of writing that focuses on writing as a technical skill, outside the realm of particular technologies,51 which I’ve been blaming on my in-laws, is the boogey man under my bed, the evil spirit on my shoulder that I toss a pinch of salt at, a preconception I’ve got about people who only take writing courses (because they are required) but don’t study their writing or relate to it in ways that compositionists typically do. Once again, this could explain composition-rhetoric specialists’ tendency to say, “but I know what you are talking about and I don’t think most people in our field would characterize writing in that way.” First, I am interested in how those outside our discipline perceive us, especially how this relates to support for and understanding of our use of technology. Second, I’ve argued that sometimes we shoot ourselves in the kneecaps in terms of our use of technology in composition classrooms and propensity to

50 It will be interesting to see how literature specialists integrate new theories regarding how reading canonic texts in new (mobile) platforms changes things in their classes. For example, does Moby Dick on the iPhone shed new light on the futility of Ahab’s obsession (or the futility of our obsession with the iPhone)?

51 It might be better characterized in terms of Orwellian “doublethink,” the ability to hold two conflicting concepts in mind at once. As noted via the results of the National Writing Project survey, people like my in-laws wouldn’t claim that computers have no place in the classroom. They would probably argue that they are an important part of writing, while at the same time claiming that people taught writing and wrote better back when they were students before the integration of computer technology.
make do with what’s available (pedagogically and/or practically).\textsuperscript{52} To some extent, this lack of access to a more meaningful relationship with writing may be due to a mystification of writing by academics participating in what Richard Ohmann, in \textit{English in America}, called the professionalization of our fields. By turning writing into a skill-set, academics could claim mastery over it and lord it over their students as they progressed through their own professionalization. WAC initiatives may be a legacy of our professionalization of writing, in this way. It’s not as if writing hasn’t been a part of other disciplines or taught through other disciplines in the past. But at some point, it became splintered and divested from other disciplines, necessitating writing across the curriculum programs to reintegrate it. It is all the more ironic that part of my project here is going to be recovering a focus on technical skills in terms of literacy and our jobs as writing instructors, but technical skills as they relate to new kinds of writing technology. Rather than the grammar, spelling, and construction that we might think about when we consider traditional conceptualizations of writing or literacy, I mean the technical skills it takes to navigate and operate in online environments, from the ability to code in html in order to get an image embedded on your blog, to being able to create a new account for \textit{Second Life}, to being capable of troubleshooting when your keyboard starts acting up in \textit{Word}.

How Literacy is Meaningless

Regardless of my “meaningless” subtitle, I want to say that literacy is of the utmost importance in terms of what we do in the composition classroom and how we ought to conceptualize our tasks as we develop a pedagogical stance. So, how can it be

\textsuperscript{52} As a Peace Corps Volunteer, I was accustomed to making do with what was available. Generally, a piece of chalk and a poorly constructed chalkboard. But, if I’m content here to make do with, say, an overhead projector, it’d be difficult to attend to the needs of my students at Ohio University.
meaningless? In George Orwell’s well-known essay, “The Politics of the English Language,” he argues that “meaningless words” are one characteristic that marks the “vagueness and sheer incompetence” of our modern language (369). For Orwell, a word is meaningless when it has no easily agreed on meaning, for example he writes:

The word *Fascism* has now no meaning except in so far as it signifies ‘something not desirable.’ The words *democracy, socialism, freedom, patriotic, realistic, justice*, have each of them several different meanings which cannot be reconciled with one another. In the case of a word like *democracy*, not only is there no agreed definition, but the attempt to make one is resisted from all sides. It is almost universally felt that when we call a country democratic we are praising it… (572)

Likewise, the word “literacy” is often just as vaguely a positive characteristic as is democracy. The public can easily get behind a good literacy initiative. The political power of the word is directly related, though, to its ambiguity. If we begin to ask questions about what exactly we mean by “Why can’t Johnny read (or write)” and the host of issues that surround poor Johnny, we may get into risky political territory.\(^5\) For example, we might have to take a look at how education is funded in our state. Or, we might have to turn a scrutinizing eye towards our system of evaluation based on standardized tests. Or, we might have to reevaluate how we’ve figured teachers into the equation, based on their professional development requirements and our expectations that they produce results based on such standardized tests. Or, we might have to look at

\(^5\) A reference originating at Rudolf Flesch’s 1955 *Why Johnny Can’t Read and What You Can Do about It*, though the phrase has often been similarly appropriated.
exactly what the President’s new educational plan is doing. It is better to simply know that Johnny can’t read, and the new plan for our national education policy is aimed at developing his literacy.

Defining literacy is difficult because it is contextual. UNESCO, for example, uses the motto “Literacy as Freedom,” suggesting that personal agency is tied to literacy. But, literacy is contextual and means more now than it used to. Hence, the name of their position paper, “The Plurality of Literacy and Its Implications for Policies and Programmes.” Just as I’ve suggested that there is a difference between what we may know about the role of technology in modern literacy and what we do in our classes or the resources we are given, UNESCO argues that “while references to the plural notion of literacy abounds in theoretical and academic studies and a number of international declarations support it, actual literacy work has failed to keep pace” (6). It’s obvious that this relates to what I’ve been saying about the difference between what we might know and what might actually transpire in our classes across the department. It’s vexing though, that even UNESCO, with its forward looking definitions mentions that “although the term ‘literacy’ is often used metaphorically to designate basic competencies in domains other than those immediately concerned with written texts, such skills as ‘computer literacy,’ ‘media literacy,’ […] and the like do not form part of the plural notion of literacy at issue here” (7). While seeking to distance themselves from these “metaphorical” designations for literacy, in other places in their document they include

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54 We might consider that “context” as informed by Derrida is even more complicated, as the danger of context is that it is often considered as fixed, when in reality it is informed by other texts. Just thinking about it makes my brain hurt.
55 For instance, I taught for a vocational English for speakers of other languages (VESL) program in New York City for adult immigrants.
recommendations for “cooperating and supporting the growth of industries that contribute to literate environments such as those in the private sector involved in publishing, the mass media and the information and communication technology industry” (emphasis mine, 19), “using information and communication technologies for fostering diverse modes of literacy and delivering non-formal education” (emphasis mine, 21). Elsewhere, in a list of the “diverse ways” we experience “written communication,” web sites and email are listed (18).

Although I think we’re getting somewhere with a critique of UNESCO’s position paper, because it both offers some useful distinctions and also some common assumptions regarding technology’s role or separation from literacy, perhaps I need to be more explicit. If literacy is contextual as I alleged above, then one size doesn’t fit all. The kind of literacy we’re working with in first-year English classes relates to a population that is already literate, regardless of any cynical jabs instructors may feel like leveling at their students. Technology is inextricably tied to literacy. Students are broadly expected to utilize a number of technologies more advanced than pen/cil and paper during the course of their university career. Further, as they graduate and matriculate into their adult lives they will continue to use many of the same kinds of technologies for work and play and be expected to learn new ones. This is the kind of literacy I mean when I speak of modern literacy.

At most universities, our students’ lives and aspirations are dependent on their use of advanced technologies used for communication. But, I’ve heard some instructors complain about technology, even a technology as diffuse at the university as the course
management system, Blackboard, because teaching students how to use it takes time away from the content area they should be learning about. Like it or not, it is part of my job as a writing instructor to teach students how to operate in Blackboard, because at Ohio University it is a technological container (I hesitate to say “medium,” although I believe it applies, because there are media imbedded in Blackboard that are more conventionally known as mediums, such as blogs, wikis, a discussion board, etc.) for written communication required of them. This might entail teaching them to write in/for the medium or merely understand how to navigate it or upload files. In light of the potential meaninglessness of literacy, it is important to reevaluate what literacy is here at the Academy, especially for those of us who are supposed to foster it in our classrooms. While I mention Blackboard, instructors at other universities are invited to consider how literacy is filtered through their institutions through other course management systems, for example Moodle or Sakai or in other basic ways such as email systems they are supposed to navigate, Web storage accounts they may be entitled to but not knowledgeable of, or even software they might be able to purchase at a discount through the school. While at a basic level such knowledge will empower our students, technocritical pedagogy stipulates that by learning how to negotiate these different technological environments students will be developing their technological chops, in general, as some elements of technological (or, as I like to call it, modern) literacy transfers from medium to new medium.

56 Narrowly, to ensure they are successful in my course. Slightly more broadly, because it’s a writing class and navigating and operating in these kinds of environments is a part of literacy. Their facility in these environments affects their ability to be rhetorical. And, more broadly, as an instructor at Ohio University we all have responsibilities to theorize/integrate writing (i.e. literacy) across the curriculum.
eLiteracy, Illiteracy, or “Modern Literacy”?

Richard Ohmann argues that discussions of “literacy” should be scrutinized given that the entire concept of literacy is inextricably tied to the socio-economic milieu of its birth, that of monopoly capitalism. In his essay, “Literacy, Technology, and Monopoly Capital,” Ohmann writes, “the term ‘literacy’ offered a handy way to conceptualize an attribute of [the lower classes], which might be manipulated in one direction or the other for the stability of the social order and the prosperity and security of the people who counted” (396). Far from actually being meaningless, Ohmann is concerned that this ambiguous word that is generally assumed to be positive may cloak advancements in computer technology that actually dumb-down our interfaces with the new media, much like capitalistic designs of production remove skill and independent thought from the manufacturing process. For example, Ohmann points to computer cash registers at fast food restaurants that have reduced input to pictures of various food items “so that the work could be done by someone who is both computer-illiterate and just plain illiterate” (402).\(^{57}\) For Ohmann, technology has no de facto potential for liberation of the masses (or, toned-down, let’s say potential for some sort of real individual agency), but was created, is developed, and currently operates among structures that integrate it as part of self-reinforcing stratified system of power. Ohmann is not a complete doomsayer, but conciliates that:

\(^{57}\) In fact, in 2006, the Associated Press published an article detailing Microsoft’s work in India focused on offering computer technology to the illiterate in India using pictures and symbols to communicate job postings. Push the picture with a broom on it and you get a cleaning job. The benefits of advanced technology seem to be in providing an illiterate and presumably cheap workforce rather than developing literacy skills in a population to further their agency proactively. (A copy of the story it available at: http://www.usatoday.com/tech/news/techinnovations/2006-03-01-illiteracy-microsoft_x.htm)
the technology is malleable; it does have liberatory potential. Especially in education, we have something to say about whether that potential is realized. But its fate is not a technological question: it is a political one.

(404)

Similarly, he writes “work for literacy is not in itself intrinsically liberating,” (406-407). While this may seem contrary to an interpretation of the word literacy that is “meaningless,” it establishes the stakes at risk in terms of our role in the writing classroom as developers of literacy. Ohmann’s concerns offer a start for an exploration of what we can determine about the limitations of the software and hardware at our disposal.

Ohmann’s article, published in 1985, is concerned with the role technology plays in terms of a modern literacy. I like that when Ohmann mentions computer literacy he places it in quotation marks. While there are many different kinds of literacy and the defining characteristics of literacy differ from group to group, I argue that what we talk about when we talk about computer literacy is really a part of that term modern literacy that I’ve been using, especially as it relates to the world of work and leisure that our students aspire to and find themselves in at the university.

As I make my case that “computer literacy” is really a part of the general kind of literacy of the students at OU, and many other institutions of higher education, I point to the fact that the vast majority of them write their papers on computers. In a class taught in a computer classroom, out of a class of twenty, I have never seen more than 2 or 3 (if that) do pre-writing (on class days devoted to in-class writing of papers) with pen and paper. No one has turned in a paper that has been handwritten or typewritten, except as
part of an assignment in which they were asked to do so.\textsuperscript{58} The majority of those students claimed they disliked that process.

As previously noted, critics like Sven Birkerts, in his short essay, “Objections Noted: Word Processing,” argue that this kind of composition entails a different sort of process than previous technologies (pen and paper, or even typewriters). For Birkerts and others, this process fails to compare to past processes and produces flawed texts that cannot live up to the good old ways of writing and revising. While it is tempting to expound on Birkerts and offer some interesting quotes (“When people ask me why I refuse to use a word processor, I tell them because it feels like a typewriter with a condom over it,” (12)), I merely want to use such critics’ arguments as evidence from a crowd hostile to my potentially techno-enthusiastic sensibilities that computers fundamentally alter the writing process. I argue that different mediums do potentially alter the process of composition, the message, and our rhetorical scope. The argument that one medium or another is the best, or better than others, in general is boring to me. Different contexts call for different mediums. We should be more interested in the potential that each medium offers and what we can learn about operating in those mediums and how that investigation might shed light on strategies we might employ in others.

If the majority of students in our classes at Ohio University write their papers on computers or at the very least load their words on to computers to organize them into the

\textsuperscript{58} The assignment I’m talking about in the above line was optional and considered quite a novelty. In way of offering anecdotal evidence to Henderson, Berry, and Birkerts claims regarding print-text writing, many of my students’ handwritten papers were excellent, in my opinion, due to the process pen and paper writing requires.
form in which they’ll be turned in, and that form (electronic before it is printed out) somehow changes the potentialities of the writing, isn’t it interesting that at Ohio University we have only two computer classrooms available for writing instruction? It is analogous to a writing class in which students aren’t taught or encouraged to use pen or pencil technology in the classroom but are expected to turn in handwritten work. I think this state of affairs relates to that conflict I’ve noted between past constructions of literacy (or at least what a writing class entails…think, my in-laws or the administrators who ordered the computers for our labs) and the realities of modern literacy. I’m not arguing that mixing two different modes for writing, pen and paper and computer-based, is detrimental, but that it should occur as a result of a pedagogical choice on the part of the instructor rather than a necessity because one mode is unavailable in the classroom. In addition, if questions of access are interesting to you, you might consider non-computerized classrooms in which some students are privileged enough to have, bring, and use laptops. Non-computerized classrooms in which instructors make allowances for students’ personal laptops are setup to privilege those who have over those who do not, if you believe that writing in an electronic medium for an assignment that will be produced in that medium can be advantageous.

While the next chapter will explicitly focus on border pedagogy and Pratt’s contact zones, I’ve already begun to model how I envision the two concepts fitting into a techno-critical pedagogy. Namely, it is the search for overlap and then an exploration of

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59 It should be added that there one additional lab that is available for instruction. Instructors must sign up to use the lab if someone else hasn’t beaten them to it. In addition, each classroom is equipped with a one computer and projector, in an instructor-centered approach. This presents the opportunity to discuss those differences in class to shed light on both mediums in hopes that students might advance their understandings of how they might operate more successfully in either.
how that can inform our understandings of the different sides of the binary at play. While we learn a lot about Second Life, that’s not why I bring my students there. In particular, I’m interested in how an exploration of rhetoric in that site can accentuate similar explorations of how rhetoric acts in our campus at Ohio University. In the process, students learn a lot about both sites. They also begin to analyze the politics of representation for an institution of higher education. But, it is no simple lesson, because in real life and SL, everything (and everyone) is a text. It’s easy to see that in SL as we analyze decisions we’ve made about our self-representation. The hybrid class as overlap between the face-to-face or real world and the online or virtual world encourages us to reflect back on self-representation in the real world. Students are quick to analyze the effect that my choice of black Chuck Taylor high tops has on my construction of ethos (laid back). From there, it’s easy enough to move the discussion to them and their construction of ethos or their choices in self representation, in terms of their clothing or even their writing. We’ll explore more of the nuts and bolts of techno-critical pedagogy in the next chapter, while the chapters that follow will then move to various focuses in practice.

Financial, Administrative, and Cultural Resistance to New Literacy

In considering the difficulties of integrating new technologies, lets start with an idea related to cultural analysis, analyzing, say, a videogame in first year writing. Consider how complex it would be to study a controversial game like Grand Theft Auto (GTA) in your freshman composition class from the standpoints of the technicalities and possibly the biases of other folks towards that particular media and title. Most people are
aware of the title given the negative publicity surrounding the game. Players simulate a member of a gang and gain points by committing crimes, murdering pedestrians, visiting prostitutes, and engaging in gang warfare. The game is a snarl of negativity in the form of violence, racism, classicism, misogyny, etc. Yes, it might be possible to learn about it, to bank information on it, but by study, I mean conduct primary research via networked play with your class. It’s not just a problem with the baggage that comes with *Grand Theft Auto’s* (*GTA*) title, but the issue of a lack of technical support. In terms of bias, I think *GTA* is a double whammy. The social content of the game is appalling to many, but the form, a videogame, is denigrated from a classicist point of view as comic books often were. In addition, the interactivity this new media, gaming, offers is suspicious to many people compared to more static media such as movies or comic books. Further, while it’s true, that technical support (having hardware capable of running videogames) comes with a price tag (i.e. it is expensive). Many other forms of media such as movies, magazine advertisements, even comic books, have become normalized for study in first year writing classes. Videogames remain either cultural outcasts or technically impossible to study, even if one wanted to, or both. While *GTA* may seem to be a strange focus for my argument in the above paragraph, it serves for me as a litmus test of possibilities by looking at a particularly vexing candidate for classroom study. While it may be obvious that one could study videogames in a writing class in terms of cultural

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60 There are easily enough of different kinds of written critiques and news articles chronicling different troubling aspects of the games (there are several *GTA* titles) to devote an entire semester to it, if one were interested.

61 For example, in *Literary Theory*, Terry Eagleton matter-of-factly notes “Superman comic [sic] and Mills and Boon novels are fictional but not generally regarded as literature, and certainly not as Literature” (2).

62 It is still routinely argued that certain videogames are the causes for some kinds of crimes, for example, school shootings.
critique, James Paul Gee offers an argument that the skills we develop in such games relate to literacy, in terms of new literacy, but also a literacy of engaged learning. But many of the issues surrounding the integration of something like GTA relate to other applications, such as Second Life, that may seem more vanilla and relevant to writing classes. In the case of Second Life, it’s still difficult to find the right machines in the right number in the right setting with the right support at Ohio University and many of the other institutions in the Ohio area that I’ve visited for conferences or as a part of job searches. What I’ve been finding in terms of technical support at other institutions is that what looks good on paper is not often indicative of the realities of facilities and services.

Let me briefly describe how literacy affects the challenges I face as a teacher and an Assistant Director. Over a year ago, I had planned on writing a dissertation about the pedagogical value of an online environment called Second Life. Such a study would entail teaching in the environment and gauging students reactions to it. A number of problems ensued, the most vexing of which had to do with SL’s technical requirements. As a 3D virtual environment, with the same technical requirements (and eye-candy) of videogames, SL requires computers equipped with a fair amount of RAM and a decent video card, an upgrade from a low-end configuration. Our three English Department computer labs were unable to provide computers that could handle SL in a reasonable way. Among other things, this became an exercise in futility as “Second Life Capable” meant vastly different things to me and to lab administrators. As an instructor, I am

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63 I want to make it extremely clear here that literacy as it relates to new media entails students being able to intelligently and first-handedly critique cultural phenomena such as videogames like GTA, but also have access to develop skills related to being literate in new media, from navigating games to navigating wikis or blogs.
aware that my students’ perceptions of the value of virtual environments will be
influenced by their experiences, which are impacted by technical requirements.\footnote{This means that a bad experience with a given online environment as a result of technical problems casts a dark light over a students’ perceptions of the value of that environment. Basically, this can be stated as, “if it doesn’t work, the whole thing seems like a waste of time.”} To that end, for me “Second Life Capable” meant that a machine was capable of giving a user a reasonably decent experience while using the environment. To lab administrators, it meant the machines were merely capable of booting up Second Life, something that some machines that aren’t even listed as fulfilling the minimal technical requirements on SL’s support page are capable of doing. As a result, I found myself querying other departments and administrative offices searching for a lab that supported SL for teaching purposes, to a reasonable degree, in which I could teach. One quarter, I found myself teaching writing part-time on the other side of the campus in the School of Engineering. Then, unfortunately, we disgruntled the engineering students by using their facilities, which they personally funded via their school’s technology fees and were tersely shuffled back to the English building.

Later, we were able to get SL up and running in the English Department, due to special support by the lab aides. The aides had to weekly upgrade each computer in the lab so that SL was functional, another requirement many labs on campus were not administratively equipped to deal with. This set up was still problematic. The coup-de-grace was when OU’s SL campus was locked down due to a “security issue”\footnote{Earlier that day, while I was meeting with someone from Kent State virtually in Second Life, we were “attacked” and “shot” by someone on the OU campus who had apparently shot a few others, as well. “Shooting” someone in SL entails the person shot being “pushed” or teleported fifty feet or so away from where the shooting occurred. That’s all. Local newspapers, though, described it in much the same language as a real school shooting. When it happened to us, it barely registered as anything but an annoying ten minutes. The press on the event, and the OU administrative response, seemed strangely disproportional to} and was
suddenly inaccessible, which came as a surprise to my class. Since it was Mom’s Day at OU, I had invited students’ mothers to class. They witnessed the failure with technology. There were many times that the updates weren’t made, the computers were sluggish, and the lesson had to be scrapped.

I bet you’re wondering, though, what does this have to do with literacy? It has something to do with how others’ perception of literacy relates to the resources we have at our disposal to teach in our writing classes. Put simply, new technologies like Second Life haven’t been conceptualized as part of literacy as it relates to the domain of writing classes as is evidenced by the capabilities of the machines we are offered for instruction and the support we have at our disposal. Those of us who do consider advanced technology to be part of our jobs are hamstrung by the tools we have at our disposal. We are also as “specialists” often limited to our own resources for training, which often fall outside the realm of the institution. While this may be reasonable for specialists related to esoteric content areas, it is not reasonable for critical pedagogues who believe modern literacy incorporates technological skills related to new media and that modern literacy developed in the writing class is a key component to student agency. I’m arguing that it is vital for critical pedagogues to consider the relevance of technology to literacy and the issues involved with integrating it into their curricula. I’m also arguing, as a critical 

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the reality of it all. I write more about this in Chapter Five. In Chapter Three, I write about Julian Dibbell’s seminal MOO article “A Rape in Cyberspace.” While Dibbell accentuates how virtual attacks can be viewed in terms of their real repercussions, I’m also interested in where that understanding breaks down. While the virtual rape that Dibbell chronicles definitely impacted the people that experienced it on an emotional and psychological level, the nature of the SL attack was very different, possibly because it was neither unique (it is a built in function) nor (psycho)sexual in nature.

66 Teaching in the MOO and SL has been lonely at this university.
pedagogue, that critical modern literacy should be part of writing instruction, in general, as I’ve argued in the introduction that writing instruction is inherently political.

These tech challenges result from views about who should be doing what on campus. The tools and technical support did not exist to use Second Life, or any relatively recent videogame, in an English class. The English Department’s computers were ostensibly equipped to do only a few things well, offer the use of word processors, surf the Web, and offer some network activity (peer critiquing via network access, emails, etc.). Of course, the Microsoft Office Suite offered a few additional uses for the courageous: Web authoring via Frontpage, presentations via Powerpoint, and spreadsheets via Excel. It’s taken a year of requesting and reminding, but it looks like change is coming. One new lab in the English department looked like it would offer a satisfactory SL experience and another offered by the Computer Services Center was specially equipped for SL, although the lab itself was not optimal for teaching. In this case, there was great support from those in charge of the lab, but administration that signed off on purchases had to sign off on the order. That is, there was that risk of higher administration deeming such purchases unfit. Since SL is a relatively new thing, it’s reasonable that it was never considered in the purview of a composition class. Lab administrators usually begin conversations about SL with the comment “Oh, so it takes a really advanced computer with the newest hardware.” While it is true that it requires

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67 The upgrade of the English lab was a huge success in terms of its ability to offer a capable SL experience. Recently, though, we lost our dedicated technical support, the IT guy located in the basement. Since, then, two years of work at getting SL capable machines in the English department have been for nothing. Without dedicated technical support there have been no updates installed and the program is now inoperable. Central IT, who allegedly are now supporting us, have ignored my two requests for updates. Even when we have the equipment and hardware necessary to study advanced technologies there are constraints that short circuit the endeavor.
some hardware upgrades, my three-year-old laptop can satisfactorily run it, because it was originally configured to do more than just browse the Web and serve as a word processor.

Reasonably, though, one can also argue that Second Life emerged out of the medium of computer videogames, a medium that has been around for decades and should be fair game for rhetorical or composition studies. At Ohio University, composition instructors routinely deconstruct advertisements in classrooms, analyze Web sites and texts, have access to DVD players and VCRs in every classroom for viewing TV shows, commercials, and movies, but have no access to computers (not to mention the software) capable of running videogames. As this medium is emerging as a huge force in popular culture and the lives of consumers while making billions of dollars a year, it seems like a very visible gap in our rhetorical analysis of cultural texts. In addition to the lack of technology, it is difficult to convince people that one can study videogames for scholarly purposes (even purposes other than critique) or that they are suited to a composition class. There may be some exceptions to this, some institutions where programs for this sort of study in a Rhetoric program flourish. In my experience, such initiatives have been led by individuals working behind the scenes, rather than being broadly institutionally supported. With Second Life, things are changing as more universities try to jump on the bandwagon because of rising interest in it.

Pedagogically, though, this is an environment we are still feeling out. While institutional support is one thing, public assumptions and expectations are another. What

68 Even during the process of writing this dissertation, we’ve gotten to a point where most people wouldn’t question the legitimacy of exploring Second Life in writing classes or in other disciplines. It has become a very hot topic among institutions of higher education.
I mean to say is, in a liberal arts program, resistance to new media, especially media related to videogames (i.e. Second Life), is obviously muted compared to that which might arise from the public. Just as instructors who integrate the study of comic books and graphic novels into their coursework, those who study videogames can probably expect to receive similar responses from parents outside the Academy.69 “You’re teaching what?!?” I get this often from my in-laws who view popular culture in general, as fluff.70 Further, all forms of popular culture are not equal in the public eye. The difference between studying comic books and videogames, though, lies in an instructor’s control of the required texts for the class. As a portable and relatively cheap commodity, an instructor can require comics, or barring that scan them and offer them via a CMS, such as Blackboard. An instructor wishing to require a text like Grand Theft Auto, though, can only do so if students have the hardware necessary in order to play it, as I’ve described earlier. Some of this resistance I’m perceiving (and that I’ve experienced) is no doubt a result of my liminal status as a graduate student and lower level administrator.

This leads to other problems. There is financial resistance71 to buying better technology

69 Increasingly a concern as universities move closer to business standards. Still, it’s a concern for me because I believe in the production of knowledge as a social endeavor. For example, I like assignments that rely on students doing research and incorporating people in their lives back home.

70 While I enjoy picking on my in-laws, it was my mother who gave me a graphic novel for Christmas. When I mentioned other people were teaching them at OU, she said she imagined they were great for engaging “kids who don’t like to read.” Her statement is, I believe, devaluing to both the medium and its readers. One can turn to the work of Scott McCloud for a discussion of the complexity of text and images interacting in comic books and graphic novels. The issue is not whether or not this medium is “dumbed down,” but whether or not we have the literacies necessary to critically think about it and analyze it.

71 There is also an issue with educational models for media dissemination in coursework. While I can offer a digital piece of copyrighted work and digital images under the fair use law, particularly with portable texts, for example, a one page picture, it is more difficult to provide access to a videogame. With videogames, you often must have a legitimate copy of the game for each computer. For twenty computers a thirty dollar game (an average new game costs between thirty to fifty dollars, often at the higher end of the scale) would run six hundred dollars. Many massive multi-player online role-playing games (MMORPGs)
for these kinds of activities and there is administrative and cultural resistance to installing games (even free so-called abandonware games) on departmental computers. While videogame study may be considered an extreme example of resistance to what we may reasonably do in a writing class, such conflicts shed light on resistance to other kinds of related technologies, for example *Second Life*. To sum up, one can view the current technologies available to writing classrooms (or made available to most of our writing classrooms in a particular department) as a means to determine how others (administration, IT, different competing strands in the English department itself, legislators, the public) envision writing instructors’ roles in the university. Views of literacy correspond with how others envision our roles and make reasonable allowances for our resources.

**From *Grand Theft Auto* to *Second Life***

While my description of the issues surrounding the integration of a game such as *GTA*, mentioned above, are hypothetical, my struggle to integrate *SL* runs along similar lines. As one of the few instructors experienced in *SL* at OU, I’ve been interviewed a number of times and have been solicited to consult for various universities and the U.S. Government. Invariably, the question arises, as I know it does among administrators and faculty at OU, why would anyone teaching a writing class utilize an environment like *Second Life*? Perhaps, this also relates to the assumptions administrators had when ordering the initial equipment for our labs.72

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72 Obviously, it becomes more vital to legitimize instructional support in the form of technology when it is expensive. It’s hard, though, to adequately relate the genuine incredulousness I’ve experienced from many
Fortunately, Sarah Robbins, an instructor at Ball State, has already articulated some of those reasons in her presentation “Don’t Come to Class Naked: Immersion, Engagement and Ethos for Freshman Composition Writers Using Second Life,” at the four C’s conference in 2007. Robbins argues that Second Life offers a “visual rhetorical environment,” a world in which all representations are constructed by a composer or “writer” somewhere. In this case, the artificial nature of the environment offers an easy standpoint for viewing its constructedness, and therefore paves the way for deconstructing the texts and analyzing the rhetorical work behind them, which I believe eases students into viewing similar constructs in the “real” world, which they may take for “natural” and analyzing and deconstructing them. You’ll notice here that my pedagogical framework is that of overlap. The hybrid classroom becomes a border between two mediums, which require similar kinds of critical thinking.

I continue to discuss the importance of overlap in the next chapter. This is especially important for writing instructors who employ a critical pedagogy, but even for those who don’t (or don’t think they do) it encourages students to consider the choices they make in communicating themselves to others, the choices others make as they communicate to us, and the effects of those choices. In short, we live in a rhetorical world and virtual environments like SL can highlight that. I’ll talk more about this strategy for deconstructing texts in a later chapter detailing how we might adapt Giroux’s border folks regarding the use of something like SL, or God forbid, a videogame, which might require pricy equipment. One of the problems may be the lack of technical experience by English faculty and our reliance on IT to come up with a shopping list of hardware when it comes time to purchase equipment. If we don’t know what to ask for, we’re pretty much stuck with what someone else decides is good enough for writing instruction. In terms of computer hardware and software, it’s the bare minimum of specifications.
pedagogy to fit a techno-critical pedagogy. In short, Giroux offers a focus on the grey space between areas that overlap in which we may explore agency and limitation in flux in order to apply such lessons when revisiting or inhabiting either area. So, basically, I’m arguing here that an exploration of discourse and rhetorical constructions in virtual worlds and the real world may inform our agency in either area. The techno-critical classroom, in this case, becomes the border between the two.

This chapter is arguing that computer literacy and (for lack of a better description) reading and writing are often constructed as binaries, either/or. We either teach writing in our classes OR we teach computer literacy. To further splinter the binary, those of us who attempt to teach with advanced technology in our departments are often a niche group, writing instructors who specialize in computers\textsuperscript{73} or digital rhetoric vs. classical rhetoric or other specializations. This chapter seeks the border in between, the grey area where writing and reading are inextricably connected to the mediums in which they occur. Often, those mediums are electronic.

In my own replies to queries regarding SL’s use in a composition class, though, I always begin by connecting the skills useful for communication and analysis of communication in an environment like Second Life to what I call a modern literacy, which equips us to operate in other similar environments that will surely be developed in the future. SL is still a unique thing, a (massively) Multi-User Virtual Environment (MUVE), that is not framed as game. It continues to be up and coming and in the national news as more institutions of higher learning and commercial entities migrate to it for

\textsuperscript{73} If computer specialists are the minority in our department, that, in part, explains our limited access to computer labs.
various purposes. Due to its popularity and increased news coverage, SL seems to be an important environment to learn about in terms of itself. But, even if something different comes along, SL represents a model that we can learn from, as a stepping-stone to the next thing. MUVE’s like SL, if not specifically SL, will continue to infiltrate and affect our lives in terms of work and play.

If technologies like SL or even older MOO technology are brought into a writing class because they fit our practices or relate to the course content, they also offer students practice and experience in negotiating different kinds of online communicative environments, many of which are new to them. That is, in navigating them we develop skills related to modern literacy. In these constructed worlds where participants are de facto composers, where they must literally compose themselves out of images or words, the faculty of rhetoric is vital for personal agency. Such uses of these environments are doubly rich, they not only offer students a framework to understand the real world as they operate, compose, and consume within it, but also a framework to understand the modern milieu of virtual environments we participate in, whether those environments are more cutting-edge, like SL, or more recognizable, like Facebook, MySpace, or even as innocuous as email.

Conclusion

I described this chapter at the opening as recursive. I definitely feel constrained by the linear nature of the dissertation. I feel like the ideas at work here would flourish in a hyperlinked environment. But, to some extent, I think it could be argued that just as I argue our classrooms are under the sway of traditional concepts of literacy, so to is the
institutional academic evaluation process. While the next chapter is the focal point of techno-critical pedagogy (I won’t say focal point of the whole dissertation, because I think the chapters that follow it that focus more on the nuts and bolts of practice are more interesting to the dissertation) I think that Chapter One is, perhaps, the most important of my project. This chapter may also be the most easily misunderstood or overlooked. For one thing, Chapter One highlights difference of opinion…between stakeholders, but also differences of opinion we may hold in our field in own minds simultaneously. We may know that computers are an important part of literacy, but we may not think it’s our job to integrate them. We may think writing is all about computers, but we may have restricted access to them in class or simply not have the training to do much with them. I’ve seen a cheesy bumper sticker around lately with a quote on it from Ghandi, “We must become the change we want to see in the world.” That sentiment often plays out for techno-critical pedagogues as they seek to uncover common ground between stakeholders or between perspectives that they might mobilize to create enabling connections. We will seek out the means for doing so in the next chapter. We’re at a point now where it isn’t simply enough to be a techno-critical pedagogue, but one must actively seek to facilitate others’ literacies, to create an academic space where it all clicks.
CHAPTER TWO: BORDERING TECHNO-CRITICAL PEDAGOGY

“Synthesis, or overlap, or borders, or whatever you’d like to call it, is a process vital to techno-critical pedagogy, both in terms of conceptualizing techno-critical pedagogy, describing it to others, and leveraging its power among literacies and different mediums.” – Page 110

In the last chapter, I focused on a discussion of literacy and argued that writing instruction must evolve with the technologies that inform literacy, at best, or more realistically catch up in order to remain relevant. I started with a focus on literacy because I thought it was the broadest concern that instructors of writing share. My work proselytizing TAs and faculty to integrate new technologies in their practice has taught me that overlap is important in convincing people of the relevance of new technologies to the domain of writing. For many people, for example, connections between MOO applications and writing practice are not intuitive, or may be even counterintuitive, when, as I’ve said, instructors may be tempted to just throw up their hands and argue that MOO’s are more closely aligned with computers and computer literacy and therefore “not part of our job.” Thus, by starting with literacy, I start with something we are more likely to agree on, and then make arguments about how new technologies may need to be incorporated into our understanding of literacy and therefore our writing pedagogies and

74 During the revision process of the dissertation a reader asked if this has always been the case...Is there an older technology that might serve as an example or is new technology fundamentally different? This is a very interesting question to me and I don’t know the answer. It may be outside the scope of the research on writing instruction that I have at my disposal and it’s certainly outside the scope of my experience within the field as a relative newbie. I don’t know how, for example, the technology of typewriters related to writing instruction or issues of access. My identity as a white middle class male also obfuscates my experience. I remember touch-typing and computer classes in early grade school in the eighties (the classes were taught by my mother who volunteered to do so). But, that was at a private school. I have a sense that the technological developments in the last twenty years, particularly in the last ten, have been so broad and deep that we will always be trying to swim to a shore that is ever receding.
practices. Synthesis, or overlap, or borders, or whatever you’d like to call it, is a process vital to techno-critical pedagogy, both in terms of conceptualizing techno-critical pedagogy, describing it to others, and leveraging its power among literacies and different mediums. In this chapter, “Bordering Techno-critical Pedagogy,” I’ll discuss hybridity and trace a path through some familiar critical theory to focus heavily on Henry Giroux’s border pedagogy and Pratt’s contact zones, which inform and ground techno-critical pedagogy in contemporary rhetorical theory.

What is a Hybrid Classroom?

One of the central cornerstones of my techno-critical pedagogy relates directly to my classroom setting. I teach in a “hybrid” classroom. In general usage among techno-pedagogues “hybridity” refers to a class that sometimes meets in online environments and other times face to face. The word hybrid is ambiguous, because it’s referent, technology, is unstated, but assumed to be understood. Just as I have to explain what rhetoric means when describing my degree to many people, I often have to explain hybridity in the context of the classroom as well. The notion of hybridity is especially important, though, as it relates to my theories on techno-critical pedagogy, because it offers a starting point for pushing past general introductions of critical terminology and literacy theory, as we’ve covered in the Introduction and first chapter, and moves towards other more specific theories that inform it.

The word hybrid implies the joining of two separate entities. A hybrid classroom is ostensibly something special, a place where two environments, two kinds of literacy, different mediums of writing, interact. The term “hybrid,” because it denotes a special

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75 At least “hybrid” sounds good, as if I’m conserving gas, am young and hip, and own a Mac.
kind of class, one that establishes the kind of perspectives that preach computer literacy as something separate and distinct from the traditional views of literacy, can hinder new writing technologies from being thoroughly integrated in our field. While I do believe that this split between the ostensibly two separate mediums is implied by the term “hybrid” that we use to describe such classrooms and I believe it exposes some of our assumptions about literacy and technology, I believe that hybrid classrooms more realistically portray how technology informs literacy in our modern lives, as I’ve made clear in Chapter One. Recently, at a dissertation defense, I heard a Ph.D. candidate refer to the definition of hybrid as being partially one thing and partially another, but being neither completely. By disrupting static categories, hybridity gains power in its mobility, easily moving from point to point on a continuum, rather than being stuck in a binary. The status of hybridity, then, can be used to outline a new space that is neither one category nor the other, but a juxtaposition, a new state established between old borders. I hope that this language, “juxtaposition,” “hybridity,” and “continuum” sounds familiar, given how I introduced this chapter as building towards Giroux’s “border” pedagogy.

Rather than the exception, as implied as a special term used to describe something different than the norm, I argue hybridity should be the rule, and thus the term “hybrid” should fall away since it is commonplace, already. It’s true, that writing classes at OU, even the ones that don’t meet in computer classrooms, can be considered hybrid in the way students interact with technology. Outside the class, students may be writing their papers via word processors, using Blackboard, sharing files with teachers, using email to

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76 Again, that literacies are so split that we need to “hybridize” them. The fact that we do speaks to the problem that techno-critical pedagogy is trying to remedy.
contact others in the class, and, possibly, doing homework that makes use of the Internet. Likewise, we could probably theorize ways in which completely online courses could be considered hybrid given each student’s interface with the offline world as she/he completes class activities/writings. But, usually, we don’t make allowances for such considerations in our descriptions or conceptualization of what we do (or even who we are); often, such classes are located at one end or the other of the technology spectrum, face-to-face or online. Recently, as I sat proctoring a composition exemption exam in which students were required to sit at desks and write an essay with pen, paper, and optionally, a dictionary, I thought that we were testing something different from what we expect of most of our students’ writing in our composition classes, where we rarely have them write formal pieces of writing which must be composed in an hour by hand without access to the library, Internet, or a word processor. While it may be true that those trying to exempt themselves from the university’s composition requirement should be held to higher levels, this kind of test also reinforces traditional views of writing as a non-high tech endeavor: all advanced writers should need is a pen and paper and nothing else.

The reality of writing today is very different from what one-shot exemption exams would suggest. The fact that members of our field may know this about similar exams begs the

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77 It should be remembered these students are attempting to exempt out of a quarter long four credit hour class. In this case some our focus on process that is accomplishable over the course of a quarter might be shifted to product or display of knowledge as evidenced in the polished draft a student is supposed to produce during the allotted time.

78 I’m ignoring the technical concerns, ease of delivery, avoiding plagiarism, and simply the problems associated with computer technologies, that may have shaped such developments. This chapter is focused on theory that guides practice. I feel like while the technical concerns may help us understand our current conditions, whether they relate to an exemption exam or, say, the lack of computers in a composition classroom, they do not justify those conditions. Perhaps I’m being a little unsympathetic here. But, as a techno-critical pedagogue, I’ve had to, time and again, find ways to integrate demanding technologies such as Second Life and even MOO, in the face of technical constraints that sought to derail my practice. This was particularly vexing for me as sometimes a graduate student administrator, sometimes a teaching assistant, sometimes adjunct faculty, but always with very little institutional power or authority.
question of why such exams continue to persist in stilted forms. As a newly appoint Interim Director of a program that institutes a two-hour-long written exemption exam, I realize that the path of least resistance is the easiest one to take. Like others, I’ve inherited the test from earlier models where its form might have been more applicable to its purpose. I don’t have all the answers about revising it, especially considering our limited access to computerized classrooms. Considering even small components of writing programs such as exemption exams is important because at institutions like Ohio University they offer us part of a broad view on how traditional conceptualizations and models of writing permeate our programs. This treatment of exemption exams offers us a view of a brick in the wall that techno-critical pedagogy seeks to dismantle, through theory first and then practice.

The term “hybrid class” operates under the assumption that “typical” or “traditional” writing classes don’t include a widespread integration of computers. Writing and technology are positioned in such ways that to mix them implies hybridity. Hybridity, and the assumptions swirling around it, can serve as a powerful metaphor which we might understand under the context of other critical theories, such as border pedagogy, contact zones, and even queer theory.

New Composition in the Closet: Queer Metaphors and the Techno-critical

Recently, a couple of my students in a freshman composition class were busy at creating personifications of the “traditional academic essay” and Vielstimmig’s “New Essay” via Facebook pages and trying to figure out ways to represent them via
Facebook’s interface, profiles, walls, status updates, etc. The first viable metaphor that they came up with, that made sense to them, was that the New Essay was queer (“a gay guy”), compared to traditional academic writing as Vielstimmig describes it. This “aha” moment was very interesting to observe. In some ways when I argue for techno-critical pedagogy, I want to queer the foundations of writing. For example, if traditional models of writing operate along binaries, where we teach face to face or online, or where we teach mechanics-based writing or expressivist writing, or where structures are five paragraph essayistic or fluid and cross-genre, this may parallel binaries related to other power structures such as male or female and straight or gay. My argument may seem far-fetched at first to some, but if we are evolving out of earlier educational models in which white middle-to-upper class males were constructing and defining the realities of writing, they certainly inscribed their mores in those models. To the two freshman I mention above, multimodal compositions, such as the new essay, transgressed older academic models of writing in ways similar to the queer movement’s effect and implications on the straight (and outdated) hegemony. The queer metaphor gives insight into the resistance posited by those invested in older, more traditional models of writing.

Theorists like Kate Bornstein inform my project of developing a techno-critical pedagogy in powerful ways. Bornstein and others argue that heteronormative mindsets are oppressive to all, rather than just those who fall into the Other category. This rhetorical move makes “what’s at stake” as a result of heteronormativity relevant to agents who may feel “naturally” at risk from a critique of heteronormativity. A

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79 This gave me the bizarre opportunity to create my own Facebook entry and become “friends” with the New Essay, and, against my better judgment, the traditional essay, as well.
heterosexual male, a more “privileged” agent in the sexual landscape, may constantly have to guard against Otherness among other heteronormative males, taking on the role of a gender policeman for himself and others, just as old guard current-traditionalists may denounce the affect of new technologies on students’ writing abilities. Bornstein’s approach offers heteronormative males a means for exploring how they are constrained by heteronormativity, without necessarily questioning their straightness, until they are ready to do so. This may be a simple observation, but it has far reaching effects in terms of implementation in our classrooms, especially those classrooms that may contain those of more privileged backgrounds. People are often more engaged in politics in which they feel they have some personal stake. In the introduction I described how Jennifer Trainor’s work, similarly, seeks to engage the more privileged agents in a classroom based on critical pedagogy.

In the same way, as I’ve argued in the last two chapters, communicative technologies are something we must all negotiate in the course of mediated “writing” or composition. If critical pedagogy is about “question[ing] forms of subordination that create inequities among different groups as they live out their lives,” as Giroux argues, then a techno-critical pedagogy relates to the subordination of us all, but perhaps in different ways. Widely, our access to computer literacy, in general, different media, and in particular, different software applications, can all be viewed as forms of subordination which create inequities among different people as they live out their lives.

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80 In “Border Pedagogy in the Age of Postmodernism,” which I will quote from at length twenty pages further in this chapter.
A queer metaphor is particularly useful for new media in other ways, as well. Jonathan Alexander has offered compelling readings of Cocteau’s art as queer as a result of it crossing genres and its multimodality and resistance to a single static reading. Likewise, new media offers the potential for multimodal compositions which transgress traditional forms of writing, such as the five-paragraph essay. Myka Vielstimmig’s “Petals on a Wet Black Bough” offers a road map for the so-called New Essay, an essay that works at “exposing and exploring the disconnects…and permission to dramatize those disconnects…in the concrete formatting choices [writers] make (e.g., multiple fonts, shifting margins, etc.)” (90). The New Essay is “a place where multiple ways of knowing are combined, collage-like: a site where alternatives are at least as valuable as single-voiced, hierarchically argued, master narratives” (90). Administrators, parents, other teachers of writing or instructors in other disciplines who are invested in traditional models of academic writing (i.e. mechanics-based, product-oriented, agonistic, etc.) may react to the infiltration of new multi-modal models of composition like the Cleavers would in the 1950s if a cross-dressing bisexual moved into the neighborhood. In the next section, I move from the ramifications of queer theory to consider the implications of other critical theory upon techno-critical pedagogy.

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81 I couldn’t resist using the Cleaver family as an example here. But, to be honest, the risk is obviously not as great for a new compositionist to be “outed” as a bisexual in the 1950s. A more honest comparison would be to make the location my in-law’s affluent suburb of Solon, OH., present day, where a cross-dressing bisexual neighbor would be tolerated to her/his face, but be ridiculed or denigrated in private. Remember that faculty member’s comment to me regarding new technologies and writing: “I don’t know why you think you should be teaching them that stuff. It’s bad enough that they’re doing it on they’re own time!”
Tracing the Techno-critical through other Pedagogies

I wish to start with Paolo Freire and his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* because as a student it established my initial framework for understanding the general politics of teaching composition. Freire also offers me a touchstone to explain what I find lacking in critical pedagogies. In particular, I’m interested in his often-excerpted second chapter of that work, “The Banking Method of Education.” In this chapter, Freire argues that education (as it has been traditionally administered) results in a reinforcement of systems of oppression. Freire calls that traditional kind of education “the banking method,” because it reifies knowledge into content to be memorized, or deposited by teachers into the minds of students. According to Freire, a binary is created between teachers and students in which power, agency, and knowledge are situated in the teachers\(^{82}\) and students are constructed as weak, controlled, and ignorant. Further, he argues that this kind of education prepares students for a society which aims to control them and rob them of agency and humanity as well. In addition to the binary described above, Freire is interested in how such an education affects what is being taught. As knowledge is reduced to “facts,” separated from social and political context, that can be memorized, reality can only be constructed of such facts. As a consequence, “educated” masses lack the ability to think critically.

Freire makes sense to my students in terms of his description of the banking method. They are quick to reference their own experiences with teachers who have enacted the kinds of binaries Freire describes that empower teachers and disadvantage

\(^{82}\) I’d argue that this brand of pedagogy relates to what Berlin calls current-traditional trends in rhetoric and composition.
students. These kinds of teachers do make students feel oppressed in the classroom. My students are not quick, though, to draw connections between their experience and behavior in the world outside school and lessons that have been engrained in them via the banking method. Perhaps, for them, as relatively privileged agents, there is too much at stake to rock the boat. I’ve heard some students describe their bachelor degrees as “pieces of paper”\(^83\) that they are basically just buying in order to get a good job. For privileged students who view education in that manner, it may be better to just go with the flow and not ask questions about the system that benefits them.

While Freire is a good place to start, he is not a good place to end, at least not for my students. For one thing, he is writing for a different audience, liberatory educators. Freire’s pedagogy makes good sense as it relates to his experience, educating the oppressed peasants of Brazil. His description of a structure of oppression is believable, given his persecution and jail time as a result of his radical pedagogy. My students, though, operate under different systems of power. While they might also be oppressed as well, that oppression does not figure in the same overt way that it did in terms of Freire’s situation. When referring to “oppression” in the context of my students, I’m referring to the consumer technologies students are surrounded by, how those technologies seek to make consumers dependant on solely on them, and the access students have to literacies modern technology demands. Even a privileged young lady may be put at a disadvantage

\(^83\) I heard this from a fellow student when I was an undergrad taking English courses. A young lady in the class who was a first generation college student had a very different take on the matter and was reduced to tears to hear higher education described as something that someone merely buys. The student who voiced the opinion was so embarrassed that he offended her and dropped the class (it appeared to me). Since, then, I’ve seen similar episodes from my own students, sans the reality check from a first generation college student.
in terms of her access to technology if gender roles discourage her from learning much about computers. Likewise, if advanced technology is socially constructed as nerdy, privileged young men may only have access to “approved” literacies, such as gaming or file sharing. Our student body at this university is a fairly homogenous group.\textsuperscript{84} While Friere seemed to be interested in students who were more viscerally challenged by oppressive force, techno-critical pedagogy focuses on how technology and literacy filtered through the social and economic forces that harness them affect us all. Obviously, then, while my students can start with Freire, we have to develop ideas that begin here and trace through other theorists to get at a working theory for us.

Freire offers an alternative to the banking method in what he calls problem-posing education. Problem-posing education offers more student agency, because students are asked to critically think through problems towards solutions, rather than merely rote-memorize “facts.” I want to put Freire’s call for revolution and the more overt political overtones of problem-posing education on hold while we trace Freire through other theorists who may be voicing some of his concerns in different ways that do not expose the politics at stake. Trace may paint too pretty pictures of the connections I am going to make. Consider, instead, a Jacob’s ladder, the kind often included in the backdrop of Frankenstein movies, replete with zigzagging discharges of electricity reaching up, closing the circuit, bridging a gap, and rising up into the ether. A more appropriate metaphor for connections made in a techno-critical pedagogy.

While Freire calls for problem-posing practices, John Dewey’s earlier \textit{Experience and Education} calls for education to employ a theory based on meaningful experience.

\textsuperscript{84} See Chapter One, page twenty-nine for the statistics describing this.
Dewey writes against traditional modes of education, the kind that Freire refers to as the banking method. For example, he writes “the experiences which were had [in traditional education\textsuperscript{85}], by pupils and teachers alike, were largely of a wrong kind” (26). He asks:

How many students, for example, were rendered callous to ideas, and how many lost the impetus to learn because of the way in which learning was experienced by them? How many acquired special skills by means of automatic drill so that their power of judgment and capacity to act intelligently in new situations was limited? How many came to associate the learning process with ennui and boredom? How many found what they did learn so foreign to the situations of life outside the school as to give them no power or control over the latter? (27)

Specifically the last line of questioning in the quote above moves towards what Dewey sees as inherently wrong in traditional education, the lack of practical or meaningful experience in classroom practice. It also signals the split between the “real world,” as students refer to it, and the presumably virtual world of Academics. This emphasis on meaningful experience (action) related to the construction of meaningful knowledge aligns him with the theory of pragmatism.

By the time of the late eighties, you can find education and game-theorists who make similar arguments regarding the importance of experience in education, that is, simulation as experience. This is interesting to me, that educational theory that argues for the use of computer applications for simulations and environments (role-play) relies on

\textsuperscript{85} Dewey himself uses the term “traditional education” to refer to mainstream educational methods and pedagogies.
motivations so closely connected to Freire’s conceptualization of good and bad kinds of education, but avoids any claims of overtly political liberatory potential, as does Dewey’s. Dewey’s argument focuses mostly on pragmatism in education in order for effective practice. There is a split, I believe, between theorists who focus on the politics of writing instruction (critical pedagogy) in general and those who call for the integration of technology in education (experiential/hands on/role play methodologies) as effective practice. It is important to note and respond to that split between pedagogy and practice because it’s one contributing factor alienating general faculty from learning about and integrating new technology in their classes, especially when they may be prone to fear it based on their own technological literacy or lack thereof. After all, there are many different practices we might employ in our classes that are effective practices. What such faculty lack, though, is a means to tie the pedagogical value to an effective practice so that it is not only useful, but also meaningful and critical. I have seen the split between an understanding of pedagogy and of practice play out many times in terms of technological practice. For example, MOO has been a hard sell to faculty when I focused on what it offers as a practice probably because the learning curve can appear to be as steep as the practice is useful for what MOO offers. I’ve had better luck, though, embedding it as a practice in the backdrop of arguments related to how modern literacy entails facility with all kinds of electronic writing spaces and how MOO might be used as a tool to explore how communication (and by extension rhetoric) shifts in MOO versus face to face or other mediums. In another example, adopters of Second Life can get caught up in the glitz of such visual spaces and forget to articulate the pedagogical value of them. When that
happens, other educators may view such spaces as devoid of pedagogical merit but entirely new bells and whistles for the students.

Regardless, the integration of computers in a writing classroom brings us closer to a realization of Deweyian experience, given the fact that much of our writing outside the classroom revolves around new technologies. If much of the writing we do occurs in electronic sites, then writing with computers in class is pragmatic. Explaining how and why Deweyian experience relates to the integration of advanced technologies in a writing class is part of the project of techno-critical pedagogy and part of changing the status quo of our field and those traditional models of writing that inform our programs.

Political Motivations vs. Practical Engagement

In *What Videogames Have to Teach Us about Learning and Literacy*, James Paul Gee argues that most current educational practices fail because students are being taught in ways similar to the banking method. Traditional education teaches students about a particular subject.\(^\text{86}\) Gee offers a contextual view of literacy, or, actually, literacies through the concept of semiotic domains. Gee writes:

> There are many different ways of reading and writing. We don’t read or write newspapers, legal tracts, essays in literary criticism, poetry, rap songs, and on through a nearly endless list in the same way. Each of these domains has its own rules and requirements. Each is a culturally and historically separate way of reading and writing, and, in that sense, a different literacy. Furthermore, in each case, if we want to ‘break the

\(^{86}\text{Again, this is reminiscent of current traditional pedagogy, which is often more concerned with product rather than process.}\)
rules’ and read against the grain of the text—for the purpose of critique, for instance—we have to do so in different ways, usually with some relatively deep knowledge of how to read such texts ‘according to the rules.’ (14)

In the description above, Gee delineates the domains as separate literacies, and establishes the need for fluent agents to be able to simultaneously “know the rules” of the domain, while “breaking the rules.” Similarly, when I discuss different technological practices related to techno-critical pedagogy, I argue that studying specific technologies is not just important for constructing knowledge within a particular semiotic domain, for instance the MOO domain, but because studying diverse writing technologies informs our readings of other domains, especially when we attempt to “read against the grain of the texts” or mediums. This point of view, that an emphasis is put on the value of studying the medium not for the medium’s sake but for the sake of what it informs us of operating according to or contrary to the rules in other mediums, is not very intuitive, but it is important because it highlights a perspective that is necessary for explaining the relevance of practice focused on advanced technologies to instructors new to the technologies or those who may consider such technologies to be just a flash in the pan. For example, as an instructor who has used Second Life as a practice, I’m aware that a fair number of other instructors are suspicious of its pedagogical value. Often, this skepticism comes from assumptions about the medium rather than experience within it. SL adopters may get caught up in the flash of SL and offer a demonstration of flying or a fly by of a virtual campus. Such a demonstration may be engaging for students (or other
instructors) in terms of basic visual appeal, but it does little to explain how the practice relates to the pedagogical concerns of writing class. For techno-critical pedagogy, Gee’s explanation of the connection between literacy in a site and the ability to read against grain suggests a connection between literacy and rhetorical ability. Rhetorical power to read across the grain might be found from Isocrates’s novel defense in *Ecomium of Helen* to a student’s innovative use of a *Facebook* profile to illustrate the characteristics of Myka Vielstimmig’s New Essay.

Given a semiotic domain, like chemistry, for example, a student must learn to enact the role of a member within that domain. Enacting the role of a member entails reading (understanding) knowledge within that domain and being able to write (communicate) like a member of that domain, as well. When teachers neglect to give students an approach that is similar to Freire’s problem-posing education, students never really gain any kind of functional literacy in the semiotic domain they are learning about, but are merely able to memorize facts that have little meaning to them, disenfranchised as they are from the role of chemist. So, what Freire calls problem-posing education, I see Gee figure as a sort of serious role-play.87 For Gee, it is not enough to learn facts about chemistry with which we can ace a test, it is more important to understand how to think like a chemist, act like a chemist, and encounter the world like a chemist. The “facts,” then, will be understood in a more meaningful way and be more successfully retained and made use of in the future. This idea that I’ve described as “serious role-play” is important because it integrates the idea of play and work, in the context of an argument for the remediation of education through Gee’s exploration of the semiotic domain, of all things,

87 By serious, I’m referring to the pedagogical move behind the role-play…but role-play itself can be fun.
of videogames. Part of Gee’s project is to argue that educators can learn from how videogames engage players and how such players learn. The role-play plays in a techno-critical pedagogy integrating MOO will become more evident as we cover MOO research.

Albert Rouzie, in his *At Play in the Fields of Writing: A Serio-Ludic Rhetoric*, details the split between work and play in the Academy and theorizes a rhetoric in which they offer an interesting and effective union. Rouzie’s work is particularly useful here as he explores how technology, specifically online synchronous chat, offers unique opportunities for this union. Gee’s discussion of advanced literacy through role-play related to semiotic domains hinges on the ability of participants to envision themselves as agents within the domain. It will become more apparent in Chapter Five that courses that interweave advanced technologies, that encourage students to consider the different mediums thoughtfully, and participate and compose in them, offer students the kind of development that Gee describes.

It’s true that Gee places much less emphasis on the political ramifications (other than the political implications of a failed education) of different styles of education, which places him in line with most of my students and their take on the matter. Given more space, we could probably trace a more direct line between Freire and Gee which details the decline of an overtly political (liberatory) focus on the outcome of education. A main objective of this dissertation is to expose/reappropriate/redevelop that political

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88 Play plays an important role in our role-play of a participant in the semiotic domain of discourse. Playfulness aside, play is more than just about student engagement. It’s the nature of engagement that’s important, engagement in the participation of semiotic domain of writing. It’s about students becoming engaged as writers after years of writing instruction that have made them feel excluded from that domain.
dimension as part of our techno-practices aimed at better teaching. By better teaching, I mean taking into account better kinds of learning, learning that integrates students into communities of discourse, semiotic domains, as agents. In a techno-critical class, this pans out not just by using wikis, blogs, etc. as practices, but in the form of constructing students as wiki authors, blog authors, gamers, texters, composers, writers. Freire, Dewey, Gee, and a multitude of other scholars make the argument that experiential or role-based education offers opportunities for better learning, although they do so out of different motivations. I am of the mind that although their arguments that interactive education is more effective are welcome, they are also irrelevant because technology has become such an important aspect of modern literacy that that legitimates a claim for technology’s (thoughtful) integration with education.

Although the concept of literacy might seem innocuous, Richard Ohmann reminds us that it is inescapably political.89 In his essay “Literacy, Technology, and Monopoly Capital,” Ohmann notes that literacy as a concept arose during the rise of monopoly capitalism as a new kind of measurement that might be used to manipulate the masses for a purpose. Ohmann argues that the social, political, and economic contexts of the development of such a concept, or any other social artifact, cannot be ignored. Ohmann writes:

I claim that exhortations about the need for “computer literacy” have much in common with longer-standing debates about literacy itself; that both kinds of discussions usually rest on a serious misconception of

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89 Ohmann is not alone. In “Technology and Literacy: A Story about the Perils of Not Paying Attention,” Cynthia L. Selfe details a call to arms, similar to that I’ve articulated earlier, regarding the importance of integrating technology in education as a vital part of literacy.
technology and its roles in history; and that we can best understand the
issues that trouble us by situating them within the evolution of our present
economic and social system—a very recent historical process, going back
little more than a hundred years. (395)
Ohmann’s exploration of the history of the concept of literacy as a social imperative tied
to capitalist economic developments is especially relevant to a discussion of technology
because he points out that technologies, though often viewed in neutral terms, are
constructs of a particular time by a particular power. Thus, TV, for example, for Ohmann,
is not just some neutral technology that just “happened,” resulting in a bunch of
consequences, but a kind of technology that had been developed over a period of time
towards a particular end result, one way mass communication, all within a social context.
This view of technology demands careful scrutiny in terms of the supposed benefits
different kinds of technology have to offer and their potential impacts, as well. In terms
of utopian views regarding computer literacy movements, he asks what computer literacy
means in terms of real world experience. Often, computers and software are developed,
he argues, not to encourage critical skills in their users, but to dumb down tasks, much as
the industrial revolution called for the deskilling and dehumanizing of labor. This line of
argument is reminiscent of Crowley’s view of how a reliance on the mechanics of writing
can overshadow the political concerns of writing instruction.

Because of its pervasiveness in our lives, though, we may be accustomed to
taking technology for granted, not thinking about its social and political contexts. In “The
Politics of the Interface: Power and Its Exercise in Electronic Contact Zones,” Cynthia L.
and Richard J. Selfe, Jr., analyze how something as seemingly innocuous as a computer interface, for example a computer’s operating system desktop, can be viewed as middle-class-centric. What I like about this essay is that the Selfe’s analyze how structures can be based in political assumptions. Further, Henry Giroux, and his border pedagogy, informs their analysis. The Selfe’s describe that after hearing a story about an Indian-born colleague experiencing difficulty upon reentering the U.S. they started to consider how structures in computerized spaces relate to political power structures at work in the world. They explain, “we began to see how teachers of English who use computers are often involved in establishing and maintaining borders themselves—whether or not they acknowledge or support such a project—and, thus, in contributing to a larger cultural system of differential power that has resulted in the systematic domination and marginalization of certain groups of students, including among them: women, non-whites, and individuals who speak languages other than English” (481). I think visiting the Selfe’s piece is important because it was the first to make the link between Giroux’s theory and electronic spaces. The tact that the Selfe’s take is different than that which I take in this project. In drawing on the story of their colleague whose border problems were a result of his perceived ethnic background, related to the color of his skin, the Selfe’s channel what I would call a more traditional and direct connection with critical

90 Critical analysis is an important tool. I am even more concerned with using border pedagogy to encourage the reconceptualization of strategies, options, and opportunities available to us in our daily lives. Once the Selfes have unpacked the assumptions that construct OS desktops, what’s next? In class we might compare differences between desktops on various Windows and Linux versions and Mac. We might develop an assignment in which students construct their own more democratic desktop themes based on the analysis the Selfes provide. On an interesting side note, one reader of this dissertation pointed out the save icon in Microsoft Word is an “old fashioned” floppy disk. He writes, “My 18 year old students don’t really know what that save icon is referring to – It is becoming something like an obscure Shakespeare reference.”
pedagogical concerns. Perhaps, the difference I’m feeling is that of an emphasis on critique versus action. Techno-critical pedagogy is just as “critically” motivated, but the emphasis is on establishing a framework for instruction that prepares students to address problems of literacy related to technology because of the political implications modern literacy has for their success. And, yet, the Selfe’s do offer some suggestions for action. For example, they describe an assignment in which students are encouraged to consider the results of the critique and envision a new kind of operating system (OS) user interface (UI) that avoids the class privileging of current OS UIs, which are often represented as “desk tops” which make references to white collar metaphors. It will be clear that a border pedagogical focus on structures as they relate to discourse will be central to my project.

The Good, the Bad, and the Techno

If we consider the “good” kind of education we’ve been talking about in terms of Freire, Gee, and others, it entails our students developing as agents in different contexts. Part of our job as composition instructors is developing our students’ understanding of agency as it relates to their ability to write or compose. I feel that Ohmann is right in voicing a warning regarding how we contextualize and interface with technology in our classes. If we don’t consider social, political, and economic contexts regarding the technology we teach with, we risk a banking method of education in which we merely teach about particular topics regarding technology. For example, we may teach students about wikis, including some basic uses of wikis, or we might try entering the semiotic domain of wikis with them, in which we try and understand how and why these mediums
developed and the potential they offer compared to other mediums, and of course, the
pitfalls. We may study the genre or the form but not compose in it. Many writing
instructors, me included, include critical interpretations of films and advertisements in
writing classrooms, but don’t offer students a chance to compose in them. This positions
our students as consumers, critical consumers, but consumers of popular culture,
nonetheless. Gee’s call for embodied learning would suggest that composition, not just
consumption, is an important component of the semiotic domain, with the understanding
that composing in media gives us a fuller experience and knowledge-base for
understanding and analyzing the media. The idea of a “writing” classroom focused on
“composition” would also seem to suggest that composition should be an integral part of
our experiences in such classes. Memorizing the facts related to wikis doesn’t really
account for much, but crawling into the head of a wiki-adept and picturing things from
their point of view might offer something more. Further, envisioning and inhabiting those
adepts of various semiotic domains as ourselves might offer something much more such
as confidence and the experience to determine in what contexts wikis can work for us. In
short, while we can “learn about” wikis without really “learning” them, gaining facility
with them, joining the semiotic domain of wikis is agency building.\footnote{Upon writing this, I’m reminded of the student in a tech-rich class who mentioned in a final reflection that he was putting “wikis” under his skill section on his resume. He argued that “it could be a big deal” in some cases with particular employers looking for candidates with computer skills.}

You may be noticing that boundaries are at work in the different modes of
education being discussed here. In the mode that I’ve coded bad (although that
representation is based on arguments made by Freire, Gee, and others), the banking
method, traditional education, or whatever you want to call it, borders exist between
learner and subject and their borders remain even after education has occurred. For example, in algebra class in high school, I learned about mathematics but was never encouraged to meaningfully take on the role of mathematician. And, partly, as a result, I’m estranged from mathematics. While I experienced other classes which successfully inculcated the mindset and role of a doer in those professions, we might consider institutionalized systems, such as tracking, that have beaten into students that they could never really be anything other than a factory worker, because “college just isn’t for them.” In the other mode, I’ve been calling good (again based on Freire, Gee, and others’ representations), problem-posing, semiotic domain integrating, or critical, borders between learner and subject are crossed and new terrains are mapped. I’ve spoken a great deal about borders without directly addressing Giroux and his border pedagogy. I turn to that now.

On the Borders of Critical Pedagogy

In “Border Pedagogy in the Age of Postmodernism,” Giroux outlines that

At its best critical pedagogy is developed as a cultural practice that enables teachers and others to view education as a political, social, and cultural enterprise. That is, as a form of engaged practice, critical pedagogy calls into question forms of subordination that create inequities among different groups as they live out their lives. This is a notion of critical pedagogy that equates learning with the creation of critical rather than merely good

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92 Amy Tan, in her essay “Mother Tongue,” analyzes the difficulties she faced as an Asian American who was encouraged in mathematics and science but discouraged to pursue a profession related to English or writing. Her essay suggests that we think of how certain types of “guidance” can be detrimental to student talents and personal development and growth.
citizens. This is a pedagogy which links schooling to the imperatives of democracy, views teachers as engaged and transformative intellectuals, and makes the notion of democratic difference central to the organization of curriculum and the development of classroom practice (165).

In terms of my project, Giroux offers an excellent description of how critical pedagogy operates. In particular, in the first part of his quote he specifically mentions the “forms” of subordination that create inequities among different groups. A focus on form or structure in terms of subordination is nothing new in the wide domain of critical pedagogy. From feminist critiques of our language (an overreliance on male pronouns) to studies of how laws and legal language reify individuals (domestic partnership status as opposed to marriage for single-sex couples), form and structure have been a component of critical theory. After all, it’s difficult to discuss power structures and not pay attention to structure. At the same time, in our critical classrooms we balance a focus on the people involved and the structures that affect them. Sometimes a critical analysis of such structures is more difficult for those of us acculturated in a socio-economic and cultural apparatus that has trained us to see reality in specific ways that might not leave leeway for difference. For example, in Ohio, when a so-called “defense of marriage” law was being passed, one fear some had was that such a law in upholding tradition and defining marriage in a certain way might put unmarried women currently protected by domestic abuse laws under common-law marriage status at risk.93 Legislators had a clear idea in their mind of the groups involved when considering “traditional marriage,” but little

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93 To say nothing of putting individuals in committed single-sex relationships at risk in terms of possible abuse from their partners with no laws to protect them.
vision of how legal structures are interrelated, because they were blinded by assumptions regarding “normal” or traditional views of relationships. In reality, many traditional representations may be unrealistic when applied to real world entities. Likewise, as we focus on different disenfranchised groups we might neglect apparati that shape our agency, by our, I mean all of us, in oppressive ways. While it is important to know that technological literacy is unevenly distributed in our educational system and that that uneven distribution is related to race, gender, and class, it is also important for us, for example those of us here at OU who may share classrooms with students more privileged than others, to explore how our own interface with advanced literacy is at risk from corporate forces that seek to limit it through our dependence on their particular product. For example, I may have mentioned Word’s move to a new document format, .docx, as part of its Word 2008 incarnation. While this may have increased sales of Word, as home users, businesses, administrators, and the like, upgraded to remain current, it also wreaked havoc on average users who may not be familiar with file extensions. I still find faculty, administrators, and students that have trouble because they don’t know how to open a .docx file on older versions of Word (such as 2003). That confusion can limit our ability to communicate if we do not understand the ramifications of a particular file extension, especially as it relates to our audience and our perception of their understanding of file extensions, i.e. what they are most likely to be able to figure out how to open. Some users may, in fact, understand the difficulty with extensions, but not know how easy it is to alter the default extension the program saves to through the Preferences menu. Users may feel like their only option is to upgrade to the newest
version of Word in order to be able to work with .docx files. The example above shows that the economic aspect, that companies seek to profit off our limited technological literacy, is only the first layer techno-critical pedagogy might explore. The fallout of those corporate technological designs is a second layer. What I mean to say is, when considering software “upgrades” such as *Office 2008* or *Windows Vista* or 7, the economic motivation of the company to produce something that “requires” or coerces an upgrade is often our first conclusion. The second layer is determining how changes affect users and techno-critical pedagogy is particularly interested in how those effects are related to our levels of technological or modern literacy. In doing so, techno-critical pedagogy hopes to make technological commercial patterns that may previously been opaque transparent and develop the skills in users to be able to function in different technological platforms as independent from oppressive technological commercial forces as possible.

Border Patrol: Re-envisioning “Critical Pedagogy in the Classroom”

I am particularly interested in the second section of Giroux’s *Pedagogy and the Politics of Hope*, in which the last block quote I cited above was included. In this section Giroux develops his theory of border pedagogy and promulgates his practice of “border writing” in three chapters, “Radical Pedagogy and the Politics of Student Voice,” “Border Pedagogy in the Age of Postmodernism,” and “Disturbing the Peace: Writing in the Cultural Studies Classroom.” I am going to rely heavily on his words in those chapters, although I will use them as a sounding board for a discussion of techno-critical pedagogy. Giroux’s work is important because for me it offers an approach and a motivation for
techno-critical pedagogy. As I mentioned before, Cynthia and Dickie Selfe were the first ones to publish on the link between Giroux’s border pedagogy and technological spaces. I’m building on that tradition to move towards a systematic framework in order to employ it, rather than offering an example of it through the analysis of a particular text or texts, as the Selfe’s do. In terms of the dissertation as an artifact, this is as close to a close reading as you’re likely to get. So, while I offer various lit reviews in other places, the following work offers depth in a series of chapters from one important theorist.

In “Radical Pedagogy and the Politics of Student Voice,” Giroux begins by noting that no one is happy with the current state of schools in America.94 Conservatives, he argues, feel that school is not training students to operate in and develop our economic systems, as is evidenced by our decline as an economic power. Liberals, on the other hand, influenced by Freire, charge the school system with reinforcing the status quo and the powers that be. Giroux seeks to redefine power in the hopes of constructing schools (our contact with our students) as sites of conflict, rather than a lost battle to begin with. He writes, “power, in this sense, includes but goes beyond the call for institutional change or for the distribution of political and economic resources; it also signifies a level of conflict and struggle that plays itself out around the exchange of discourse and the lived experiences that such discourse produces, mediates, and legitimates” (121). As I attempt to describe what I’m referring to as the consumer technologies we are surrounded by and the literacies modern technology demands of us, I am also delineating a struggle between an older concept of writing based in arguably low tech technologies and a new

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94 This book was published in 1997. It’s fair to say that neither side of the binary (conservative vs. liberal) is happy with American schools, both sides believing that students become the products of acculturation by the other end of the political spectrum, more or less.
kind of writing based in, but not contained by, more advanced electronic technologies. Particularly, I think the argument I make\(^5\) regarding some Academics’ total disregard for sources like Wikipedia relates to this idea of conflict between “the exchange of discourse and the lived experiences that such discourse produces, mediates, and legitimates” (121). In the case of our students, lived experience may relate to their common use of Wikipedia, the Google search engine, or other popular electronic ways of knowing. In writing classrooms, English departments and in other Academic disciplines, students will surely be acculturated into whatever the conventions of knowing are in those specific contexts. But if constructions of knowledge become a binary with one way being the only way and another way, say Wikipedia as a source, being an unacceptable way, we risk taking an elitist position that disenfranchises and disengages our students, much in the same way we might shut them down by privileging a so-called “standard” English over dialects related to their identities and communities. I’m arguing that the power wielded by writing instructors related to how we legitimate, mediate, and produce discourse in our classes, filters into how technology is treated and integrated into our classes. Arguments about how our pedagogy and practice relate to greater power structures is nothing new to critical pedagogy, but filtered through techno-critical pedagogy, we might need to look a bit closer at our practices and reactions to different technologies, such as the use of Wikipedia, which we might not be inclined to intuitively consider a site of conflict for critical investigation. Further, I’m saying it’s important for us to consider the political implications of such conflicts rather than defuse the import of critical investigation by

\(^5\) On pages 15-17 of Chapter One.
focusing on the psychological aspects related to the “we used to do things better in my day” traditionalist mentality.

Giroux argues that “if language is inseparable from lived experience and from how people create a distinctive voice, it is also connected to an intense struggle among different groups over what will count as meaningful and whose cultural capital will prevail in legitimating particular ways of life” (121). While Giroux probably is referring more literally to struggles related to language, identity, and legitimatization (for example debates over “English only” in primary and secondary schools), I can’t help but read that sentence and think of how technologies such as IM and texting are changing students’ language and how some teachers, parents, and administrators are reacting to those changes. Many voices in our field (and out of our field) have already taken for granted that discourse is changed by the technological mediums in which it’s issued. Often, traditionalists will argue that new technologies are dumbing down our kids.96 I think it is easy to make a mistake between judging differences in discourse as a result of emerging technologies as reflecting on the intellect of the person, rather than an essential nature of the new medium. We’ve had these debates before in our field in terms of other kinds of English that have been devalued, not as different, but as a lesser version of “proper” English, for example the conflicts that have arisen over so-called Ebonics, or African American Vernacular English. Similarly, in the case of newer technologies, more often than not, those who hold the keys to the kingdom grew up and were schooled in a world

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96 Stylistically this plays out in my writing as I shift in and out of contractions, which when used signal a more conversational style which some readers may feel is out of place in an Academic text. While I am aware of this, I also prefer to have that rhetorical strategy at my disposal as I shift style and voice for different purposes. I think the use of contractions in some instances is one way that electronic writing spaces have been influenced by writing.
with a kind of writing shaped by mediums other than IM, Facebook, or Twitter. While critical pedagogues would surely understand the link between identities related to a connection between language and ethnicity\(^97\) or geographic (and sometimes, as a result, economic class) location,\(^98\) it might be time to consider how the identities of our students are linked to writing technologies that affect them, in some ways, across racial or economic lines.

Giroux, influenced by the work of earlier critical pedagogues such as Freire, explains that “the importance of the relationship between power and discourse for a radical pedagogy is that it provides theoretical grounding for interrogating the issue of how ideology is inscribed in those forms of educational discourse through which school experiences and practices are ordered and constituted” (121). I’ve been working at just such an interrogation in my exploration of the integration of writing technologies in classroom and professional experiences in the last couple of chapters. Obviously, it’s something that I will proceed with, as well. But, it’s important to mention because critical pedagogy both informs classroom content and how we understand the classroom functioning. While it’s true that I try to empower my students through the development of a modern literacy that incorporates technological competency, part of techno-critical pedagogy is conceptualizing the classroom in the context of administrative and institutional limits that affect what we can fruitfully accomplish. For example, techno-critical pedagogy might give me the conceptual framework for effectively utilizing

\(^{97}\) In many of my writing classes we’ve studied the connections between language and identity via the work of Gloria Anzaldu’a’s “How to Tame a Wild Tongue” and Amy Tan’s “Mother Tongue.”

\(^{98}\) Here, I’m thinking of the issues that our rural Appalachian students face at the university based, in part, on their kinds of English.
Second Life as a meaningful and critical practice, but the hardware limitations of the computers at our disposal (hypothetically imagining that we even have computers at our disposal) relate to larger institutional forces, a result of programmatic expectations and assumptions regarding writing that I’ve outlined in the first chapter.

For Giroux, the groundwork in this chapter is important for the development of border pedagogy in the next chapter because it salvages the potential of the classroom from the earlier description of merely replicating the status quo. He argues that in this case “power and discourse are now investigated not merely as the single echo of the logic of capital, but as a polyphony of voices mediated within different layers of reality shaped through an interaction of dominant and subordinate forms of power” (122). Dominant and subordinate forms of power are in flux in different contexts, as new media literacies can be powerful skills in some life and workplaces and devalued or even discouraged and denigrated in others. I think that Giroux’s point relates to current state of contradictory feelings that people voice regarding the usefulness or detriment of technology, especially as those views play out in public surveys such as the one conducted by the National Writing Project (NWP), covered in the first chapter, in which people believed computers made students better writers but also that computers make children worse spellers and that IM’ing hurts their writing. The positive mindset becomes a sentiment that people express when it is convenient to do so, the negative mindset regarding the negative impact of computers becomes a sentiment expressed conveniently as a part of the “interaction of dominant and subordinate forms of power,” or when a speaker (perhaps, an older speaker) seeks to establish their dominance over a subordinate student.
Giroux proceeds with this chapter by delineating “Conservative Discourse and Educational Practice.” When Giroux offers that “Conservative educational discourse often presents a view of culture and knowledge in which both are treated as part of a storehouse of artifacts constituted as canon,” he, again, implies a Freirian take on traditional models of education (122). Similarly, I’ve been arguing that traditional views of writing and writing instruction are more often revered by practitioners of them, while new literacies/ mediums/ kinds of writing are constructed as threats to the “proper way.” I was getting at that in the last paragraph when I responded to the NWP survey. Giroux explains the fallout from the new perspectives that critical pedagogy offers: “I would argue that the concept of difference in this approach becomes the negative apparition of the “other” (122). Aside from positivist conservative models of school, Giroux, interestingly, focuses on another model, that of “integrative pluralism” (127). This model embraces diversity in order to create harmony between groups, while at risk of ignoring difference and its important social and political consequences. Giroux takes issue with models that seek tolerance because “[they are] not merely a discourse of harmony; [they are] also a set of interests that [refuse] to posit the relations between culture and power as a moral question demanding emancipatory political action” (126). Perhaps, this gets at a difference with techno-critical pedagogy, although not necessarily. If “emancipatory political action” is aligned with power structures that contain social groups composed of people with particular identities normally designated by critical pedagogical theory as worthy of emancipation, techno-critical pedagogy is first interested in “emancipatory

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99 This supports, I think, the use of other critical theories, such as queer theory, to inform our understanding of the binaries at work.
political action” as it relates to discourse and power as a result of technological mediums and modern literacy. Techno-critical pedagogy first cuts across social groups constructed by sex, race, economic class, sexual preference, etc. That is not to say that all those with such identities are equally empowered or disempowered in terms of their access to modern literacy or their facility with electronic discourse. Similarly, in her *Gender Workbook*, Kate Bornstein is just as interested (if not more interested) in “emancipating” heterosexuals from heteronormativity. I think her strength is that she is able to build a theoretical model and a critique that is integrative without denying differences and disempowering a marginalized group.

One of my readers asked at this point in my chapter, “How is the use of technology emancipatory, if access is limited to those who can afford it? Is it more likely, then, to reify the status quo?” By mobilizing Bornstein, I am drawing a parallel with the way she sees a continuum of oppression, where an agent’s location on the continuum reveals their placement amidst the affects of power structures that confine us all, but in different ways or to different degrees. I think my reader’s question above suggests that he assumes that technological literacy and its implications for personal agency equate with a have or have not scenario. While I, personally, am comfortable utilizing what I would refer to as a more traditional mode of critical pedagogy, which explores how technology excludes others (in many cases, for my students, Others), I’m hesitant to let it star center stage in an exploration of techno-critical pedagogy as part of the dissertation project. I want to focus on how techno-critical pedagogy relates to those within the class, first. And, certainly, the majority, if not all, students attending classes at
institutions like Ohio University have access to technology. Yet, that doesn’t mean that access alone “emancipates” them. While a student at Ohio University from a rural Appalachian background, perhaps from a poorly funded school, might have a different kind of “access” (based on her/his literacy) to technology compared to a student from an affluent suburb of Cincinnati, there aren’t many easy assumptions we can make due to the way all kinds of identities might encourage or discourage our literacies with or physical access to technologies. As I’ve argued throughout the dissertation, even for those from affluent backgrounds, those who may have grown up with their own personal computers, there are always forces (corporate, in the form of computer and software developers, or social, in the form of gender roles) that seek to confine them. For example, while the economic stability of the middle class might suggest access to technology, a young woman growing up in a “privileged” community may find that gender roles dissuade her from advancing her computer literacy (or, more likely, it may happen without her noticing at all). While a student from an impoverished community might not have access at home to technology or the Internet, she/he might have learned about video editing and open source software at school as part a class or club activity. I have seen this to be the case in Southeastern Ohio in my experience with the Upward Bound program serving prospective first-generation college students. Maybe “emancipatory” is just the wrong word to employ in this discussion since our emancipations are contextual, small victories in a battle for literacy and the development of rhetorical skills related to writing technologies that is never won, but continually waged. But, the reason I am bringing up the different skill-sets, proficiencies, and literacies our students come equipped with and
how our assumptions based on particular aspects of their identities aren’t always accurate
is because I want to make it clear that techno-critical pedagogy applies to them all and is
not preferential in focusing on the oppressed or oppressors among the population of the
class.

I can think about the question I started the last paragraph with, “How is the use of
technology emancipatory, if access is limited to those who can afford it? Is it more
likely, then, to reify the status quo?” and understand the conceptual framework my reader
was using (and even agree with him). But, there is another way to look at it where “the
status quo” refers to the erosion of our technological literacy, in general, as consumer
models shift to user interfaces that limit our capabilities and maximize our dependency
on specific software titles and in the process limit our options or rhetorical strategies that
we have at our disposal. On page 23, in this chapter, I use the .docx phenomenon of the
new Office as an example, in which users may be coerced to adopt a new software
package due to ignorance about file extensions, how to anticipate the needs of their
audience, and how to change file extensions to fit those needs. If we look at “the status
quo” more broadly related to this commercial technological trend, then what we do in a
techno-critical classroom applies to all our students and seeks to encourage their agency
in face of a status quo that seeks to divest them of their agency (and money).

In his treatment of liberal models for education, Giroux focuses on several subsets
which he argues seem to cater towards more student-centered approaches (“Liberal
Theory as the Ideology of Deprivation,” “Liberal Theory as the Pedagogy of Cordial
Relations,” “Liberal Theory and the Pedagogy of Child Centeredness,” and “Dominant
Educational Discourse”). For Giroux, these approaches fail because they focus either on classroom practice in order to create social control or fail to acknowledge connections between culture and power, positing otherness in separate instances, rather than delineating the border between cultures and exposing the power struggles, as well. To lay the final groundwork for his theory of border pedagogy, at the end of this chapter, Giroux, then, develops the idea of “radical pedagogy as a form of cultural politics” (132). In order to do that, he turns our scrutiny to education itself citing “the work of Freire and Bakhtin [which] points to the need to inquire into how human experiences are produced, contested, and legitimated within everyday classroom life” (133). Modern writing technologies and literacy are, then, an obvious place to begin. Giroux’s argument here is compelling to me because he seeks sites where culture and politics overlap and then uses the overlap, or border between the two competing interests, to explore the nature of each and, perhaps, develop new concepts or consider new strategies for operating in either. When we split literacies in the writing classroom, as described in the previous chapter, we participate in that “dominant educational discourse” that views different groups or cultures as subjects in themselves, separate from other issues and ignoring the politics and power at work. Giroux argues for a “critically affirmative language that allows us to understand how subjectivities are produced; [because] such a pedagogy makes problematic how teachers and students sustain, or resist, or accommodate those languages, ideologies, social processes, and myths that position them within existing relations of power and dependency” (134). Again, it’s hard to imagine the above in a

100 I mean by claiming that teaching computer literacy is not our job or viewing those who do integrate it as mere specialists.
modern writing classroom without thinking of technology and modern literacy. We might begin to interrogate subjectivities by considering some technologies, say Wikipedia, how students use them, and how instructors have been prone to react to them. While exploring Wikipedia with students won’t necessarily make it an appropriate source for a paper written for another instructor a student might have, such an exploration will offer students a better understanding of different audiences and their expectations. Understanding the rules and expectations in different semiotic domains, according to Gee, is a first step in developing literacy which may enable us to read (or write) against the grain in those domains. The product of such and exploration of Wikipedia might consist of a graduate student who uses Wikipedia as a source in the introduction of his dissertation.

Giroux argues that in order to develop a critical pedagogy of cultural politics the discourse of production in the classroom is important to explore. The discourse of production has “focused on the ways in which the structural forces outside the immediacy of school life construct the objective conditions within which schools function” (135). Basically, the discourse of production can be understood as exposing the ways that outside power structures affect and construct what is legitimate in the classroom, thereby reinforcing a particular reality outside the classroom. When we consider the discourse of production in writing classes, we might consider how I’ve characterized “traditional” expectations of the product of a writing class and how they have curtailed the systematic inclusion of advanced writing technologies. A broader critical project might investigate how traditional models of writing relate to our various canons. I argue that a particular kind of writing and writing instruction can be related to power structures that privileged
white, upper class, males, with advanced educations, and that that writing tradition originated before writing became electronically technologized. It’s no wonder that new media, which challenge the structure of traditional (even Academic) writing, have been problematic to systematically integrate in our writing classrooms. Giroux identifies a target audience for the discourse of production as teachers:

A fundamental task of the discourse of production is to alert teachers to the primacy of identifying practices and interests that legitimate specific public representations and ways of life. To attempt to understand the process of schooling without taking into consideration how these wider forms of production are constructed, manifested, and contested both in and out of schools is inconceivable within this discourse. This becomes obvious, for instance, if we wish to analyze the ways in which state policy embodies and promotes particular practices that legitimate and render privileged some forms of knowledge over others, or some groups over others. (136)

But, part of techno-critical pedagogy is studying the discourse of production with students, so that they can become equipped to analyze the discourse of production in other classes and other settings. Considering the binary I’ve discussed between traditional modes of writing and new characteristics of electronic writing, we might begin to explicate the discourse of production by thinking about who is privileged by traditional constructs of writing. Particularly, we might consider how collaboration and disruptions in ownership are often two characteristics of new composition that are problematic to
traditional academic standards, as well as problematic to industries who own intellectual rights to various kinds of texts. If it’s fair to say that traditional constructs of writing (in the Western world) portray an individual writer who constructs a product (or a number of individuals, each easily identified and part-owner), then it is easy to see how conflicts arise from new writing technologies like wikis or blogs, where who wrote what can be difficult to discover. As academics themselves are invested in traditional constructs of writing, it’s no wonder that, after the novelty of investigating a buzzword such as blog or wiki, a default position of instructors in writing classes is to feel more comfortable teaching old school writing.

Finally, another “discourse” that Giroux explains is vital for a pedagogy of cultural politics is that of the “discourse of lived cultures [which] demands an understanding of how teachers and students give meaning to their lives through the complex historical, cultural, and political forms that they both embody and produce” (140). An investigation of the discourse of production leads to a discussion on the discourse of lived cultures as we begin to apply what we see supported by institutions of education and how those products relate to our own production or not. Giroux claims a first step is “to acknowledge the subjective forms of political will and struggle that give meaning to the lives of students” (140). Part of a techno-critical pedagogy’s job is to surface some of the political will and struggle to students who may not be familiar with

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101 This dissertation is written by Paul Shovlin and I take credit for it. My name is on it. I may thank my advisor and writing group in the acknowledgements, but its mine, regardless of how many hours my colleagues have helped me write this. And, each of them is writing their own dissertation. Our professional obligations in terms of publishing and research mirror the entertainment industries. If the entertainment industry is threatened by the erosion of copyright, traditional bastions of academic writing are threatened by the erosion of the single author and privileged distribution in the form of expensive or difficult to obtain hard copy journals.
the ways technology and industry shape their lives, literacy, and agency. But, as agents of the institution, we should be open to ways our students are able to articulate how some of our assumptions or expectations might be consciously or unconsciously influenced by power structures we work to investigate. Giroux’s second point is that “as a mode of critique, the discourse of lived cultures should interrogate the ways in which people create stories, memories, and narratives that posit a sense of determination and agency” (140). For a modern generation, then, it is vital to practice critically analyzing online representations, particularly in sites like MySpace and Facebook, where students construct their stories, memories and narratives. Further, these sites are not independent from the professional domain, when employers and school administrators are judging students based on their public (private) representations of themselves.

A Brief Interlude

I’d like to write a little about a difference in assumptions between Giroux’s theory and my project here. When Giroux writes about critical pedagogy based on cultural politics, he’s referring to “cultural” groups with different access to agency and power based on identifiers that would be pretty obvious to most critical pedagogues. For example, an analysis of clashes between Hispanic and Anglo cultures in San Antonio, particularly in terms of what it means for bilingual education in public schools is a good example of what might constitute a focus in a class based on a critical pedagogy of cultural politics. When we discuss techno-critical pedagogy the “cultural” aspect may be a little harder to get at, because it’s not quite as concrete as the previous example. In some cases, online communities have cultures that are just as obvious. But, given my
arguments about consumer issues at work with technology, in tandem with modern literacy, I feel there are some structures at work that may require us to rethink what constitutes “barriers.” While we might envision a “culture of Facebook” or a “culture of IM-speak” in classroom analysis as we uncover the borders between traditional expectations of academic writing and modern literacies based on new technologies, it’s important to keep in mind that larger cultural subsets exists between old (traditional, Academic) and new constructs of writing. It’s true that in the case of Hispanic students negotiating the limits of acceptance of their literacies in Anglo classrooms that they are not only Hispanic, but that they come from varied backgrounds and of identities composed of conflicting roles. Often, we collapse those varied identities into particular ones we wish to emphasize in order to study, for example “Hispanic” over poor or middle classed or queer. I fear that if we do this in a techno-critical classroom, that is if we collapse the nuances of identity to focus on the most polarized versions, we risk relegating particular identities, for example “Facebooker” to niche categories which may not be particularly relevant to our own constructions of self as instructors and this will surely filter into the perspectives of our students. For example, unless MOO culture and technology is approached very carefully, in my experience, it’s very hard to build up students’ facility with it, because they view it as some strange technology outside the realms of their particular experience. For them, MOO may just be a weird tool that nerds use, and only relevant to that Other category linked to the technology. For TAs that I’m trying to teach MOO, it may just be some confusing tool that other people use. Keeping in mind the larger issues of techno-critical pedagogy builds connections between
different identities and makes explorations of different technological and literacy borders relevant to us all. Even if we don’t tweet on *Twitter*.

James Paul Gee argues that in order to really learn something, we have to be able to enter the semiotic domain and take on the role of a practitioner in that field. In the first two chapters, I’ve argued that rhetoric is related to the scope of our skill-sets, the choices we have at our disposal, and that further our scope is related to our agency. Opening up our identities to the Facebooker or MOO user inside us can widen our skill-sets, diversify our rhetoric, and, thus, offer us the potential for developing agency. From personal experience I can assert that my own forays into *Facebook* have made it easier to understand my students’ interface with the social networking site. This definitely translates into my ethos as it evolves through conversations I have with them in class, or via comments left on their *Facebook* walls. Students who have used the MOO have been encouraged to consider what MOO discourse has to teach us about power structures as they exist in the real life classroom, ala Freire and hooks, specifically in terms of how we engage in dialogue in face-to-face Academic settings. Other students who have composed MOO space have observed that it offers a challenging opportunity for considering the three-dimensionality of print-text spaces in MOO. Explorations of self-representation in *Facebook* and MOO can offer students views on how those representations differ from medium to medium and how important it is to monitor our representations and constructions of ethos in online environments. It is imperative to approach technology and technological culture(s) in a way that respects the multiplicity of identities that overlap in any given context in order to allow for connections between agents in the
classroom and prospective semiotic domains that could enrich their literacy, rhetorical strategy, and, ultimately, personal agency.

“Border Pedagogy in the Age of Postmodernism”

In “Border Pedagogy in the Age of Postmodernism,” the second chapter of the second part of Giroux’s *Pedagogy and the Politics of Hope*, he explains more fully the idea of border pedagogy. The aim for border pedagogy is “for students to engage the multiple references that constitute different cultural codes, experiences, and languages” (147). Because new media often consists of different sites students access in their own lives, where they participate in their own cultural codes, experiences, and, even, languages, of a sort, border pedagogy is a compelling model for developing techno-critical pedagogy. Borders in border pedagogy are “not only physical borders, they are cultural borders historically constructed and socially organized within maps of rules and regulations that limit and enable particular identities, individual capacities, and social forms” (147). I’ve outlined some of these rules and regulations as they relate to Academic doxa102 at work in writing classrooms where at worst new writing technologies and epistemological devices (for example, *Wikipedia*) are demonized and at best considered the domain of someone else (“it’s not my job to teach computers, but it’s okay if a specialist does it in her/his class”).

Giroux argues that border pedagogy is a pedagogy of hope because it shifts “the emphasis of the knowledge/power relationship away from the limited emphasis on the mapping of domination to the politically strategic issue of engaging the ways in which

102 My colleague, Don Dudding, describes doxa as being the set of unspoken rules or assumptions that people in a culture accept almost unconsciously. Since I’ve mobilized queer theory in this dissertation, heteronormativity is often a good example of doxa at work in mainstream culture.
knowledge can be remapped, reterritorialized, and decentered in the wider interests of rewriting the borders and coordinates of an oppositional cultural politics” (147). An analysis of colleges’ and universities’ representations of themselves in an online environment such as Second Life offers the opportunity to map domination, in Giroux’s words, to explore how such representations relate to the institutions constructions’ of themselves and how that relates to power, agency, and authority. But extending the lesson of rhetorical analysis so that students consider their own online representations and how those representations play out in the real world offers students a means for connecting the two, the power (in this case, an institution of higher education) and the individual (the student). This sort of exploration, in an online environment where everything is obviously artificial, offers a similar perspective that may be applied to the real world, which previously may have been taken at face value or “reality.” For one thing, after visiting Second Life and reading and analyzing institutions of higher education in Ohio as rhetorical texts, they begin to see the physical institution as a rhetorical text as well, one that is being offered to prospective students and their parents via guided tours. That is, the idea of self-representation, as it relates to constructions of power, is more transparent after such explorations.  

For example, students often compare their representation through discourse in the MOO to that of face-to-face discussion and as a result surface  

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103 Giroux says “the sensibility which informs this view of knowledge emphasizes a pedagogy in which students need to develop a relationship of non-identity with respect to their own subject positions and the multiple cultural, political, and social codes which constitute established boundaries of power, dependency, and possibility” (150). I think the potential for non-identity is important, as it relates to the development of reflexivity. One might also say, though, in a techno-critical class we are interested in seeking out students’ identities related to technological literacies or semiotic domains that may have been subsumed by systems of power (institutional, commercial, etc.).
constructions of power that control and manage student voices. This is one way I see border pedagogy playing out amidst techno-critical pedagogy.

Giroux links border pedagogy to postmodernity because of its “emphasis on criticizing official texts and using alternative modes of representation (mixing video, photography, and print),” but argues that “it also incorporates popular culture as a serious object of politics and analysis and makes central to its project the recovery of those forms of knowledge and history that characterize alternative and oppositional Others (Said, 1983)” (148). Multi-modal texts, then, are integral components of border pedagogy, making the computer classroom a rich site for the practice of border pedagogy. Further, though, it’s appropriate to mine the rich vein of popular culture as it relates to new media because it informs writing instruction that develops students critical analysis of the culture students (and instructors) are awash in. Pop culture and new media also serve as platforms for technological advancement as it relates to new kinds of compositions, for example machinima (pronounced muh-shin-nih-ma), or the creation of movies or video clips by using videogame engines. In addition, as Clive Thompson explored in a recent article on Slate magazine (August, 2009), Andrea Lunsford has found that “young people today write far more than any generation before them,” due mostly to their online socializing, which usually involves text. Popular social sites, that often use new media,

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104 For an example, go to YouTube.com and do a search for red vs. blue and click on “why are we here.” Red vs. Blue was one of the first popular machinima features, which made us of the game Halo. It eventually became so popular that they made it into a TV show. To make a machinima piece, multiple users will log into a multiplayer videogame and have one user be the camera, or record what transpires, the other users function as actors and afterwards they record audio over the video so it appears to be a semi-professional movie.
are already a part of their lives and it makes sense in a writing class that seeks to develop their agency via critical thinking to study the kinds of composing that go on in such sites.

In the second section of this chapter, Giroux covers “Border Pedagogy as Counter-Memory” arguing that educators need to “fashion a critical politics of difference not outside but within a tradition of radical democracy” (152). This can be understood as recovering, re-envisioning, or rewriting the past. The revision of the literary canon is one example of “counter-memory.” It’s not that women, all of a sudden, began writing literary texts and were “allowed” inclusion in the canon. But, marginalized people have been participating in the production of literature all along. A newly envisioned canon can be considered a counter-memory to the chilling and reifying effect of the traditional one. While I consider this a digression, it can’t help but make me think of the counter-memory that techno-critical pedagogues work at uncovering. For example, in my classes we’ve looked at strategies in modern movies, such as *The Blair Witch Project* in which low budget and hand held techniques emulate authenticity. *The Blair Witch Project* was interesting because it supplemented that effect with clever promotions, including a fake documentary, which were released to make the film look real. It’s easy to make connections, though, with canonic texts, like *Dracula*, which integrate epistolary forms, including transcripts of diary entries and even new technologies such as transcriptions of Dr. Seward’s recordings. Counter-memory might also be considered in terms of work like Ong’s *Orality and Literacy*, in which he makes connections between new technologies and oral culture.
Finally, Giroux considers “Border Pedagogy and the Politics of Difference” as the final part of this section. Giroux describes that the point of border pedagogy is that “knowledge and power come together not merely to reaffirm difference but also to interrogate it, to open up broader theoretical considerations, to tease out its limitations, and to engage a vision of community in which student voices define themselves in terms of their distinct social formations and their broader collective hopes” (160). Investigating the limits of difference maps the area between previously divided terrains. In a technocritical class, teasing out the limitations of difference might relate to establishing the differences between MOO discourse and face-to-face discussion and then figuring out ways those differences might inform the two different mediums. For example, we might discuss how face-to-face conventions might translate to MOO, either to the benefit or detriment of the MOO environment. Or, we might use samples of MOO discourse to interrogate Freirian power structures at work in face-to-face classrooms, and further consider how the MOO discourse circumvents or reifies those power structures and what that might mean in terms of our options for face-to-face discourse in the future.

“Disturbing the Peace: Writing in the Cultural Studies Classroom”

In his third chapter in the second section, Giroux narrows the focus even more to classroom practice, especially writing, in order “to develop […] a form of cultural production forged among the shifting borderlands of a politics of representation, identity, and struggle” (164). Giroux outlines Cultural Studies and argues that for a number of reasons pedagogy has been neglected in this field. Particularly, Giroux argues that pedagogy itself often goes unquestioned and that Cultural Studies “is still too rigidly tied
Another issue with Cultural Studies, one can surmise, is that it focuses more on the analysis (consumption) of texts. Seitz, a reader will remember, mentioned one critique of Cultural Studies in that it may just reflect shrewd consumerism. Giroux offers “border writing,” in my opinion, as a means of production (he calls it a discourse of production), which feeds into his pedagogy of hope, because it offers the potential for change. Giroux considers personal agency as being concerned with “learn[ing] how to take risks, […] understand[ing] how power works differently as both a productive and dominating force, [being able] to “read” the world from a variety of perspectives, and [being] willing to think beyond the commonsense assumptions that govern everyday existence” (169). To some extent, I feel like this plays out in different mediums students write with outside of the classroom. As a border between traditional literacies and a new literacies, the techno-critical classroom explores and makes transparent those differences (differences in rhetoric, in the production of power, the creation of knowledge). Lest I sound one-sided, I believe that both sides of the coin, traditional expectations regarding writing and new characteristics of writing technologies offer opportunities and pitfalls for mobilization in their respective cases. What I mean to say is that when we learn about writing, power, and how the construction of knowledge works in a medium like Facebook, we might learn some things that translate to other kinds of writing, other mediums. And, likewise, as we consider the traditional characteristics of Academic writing, we might learn some things that translate to production in other forms. I will write more about this in Chapter Four in which I describe a technology-rich class and how techno-critical pedagogy is reflected in it.
As Giroux begins his discussion of “Writing as Pedagogical Practice,” he claims that he uses writing “as a pedagogical practice to transgress certain dominant assumptions about the meaning of schooling, the discourse of authority, the relationship between language and experience, and the role of social responsibility within the politics of my location as a university teacher” (170). I feel like the “dominant assumptions about the meaning of schooling” as it relates to writing, “the discourse of authority,” “the relationship between language and experience” (for both us and our students, in, perhaps, differing ways), and my “role of social responsibility within the politics of my location as a university teacher” have been what I’ve been writing about in the last two chapters as I’ve described a clash between traditional expectations of writing and issues related to the new technologies students are awash in. Further, I’ve been arguing that it is our responsibility to consider how these issues play out in our writing classrooms. Giroux goes on to list a number of issues that get in the way of doing the above. He mentions that students are intimidated by Academic and theoretical language, believe their voices don’t matter, and are often silenced by other students/instructors with more privileged identities (i.e. white, male). While I will mention how writing technologies such as MOOs ameliorate some of these concerns in my next chapter, I don’t want to leave the reader with the impression that using technology represents merely good practice in terms of critical pedagogical concerns. While that is true, the different mediums and perceptions of writing, old and new, are a border that is vital to explore from the standpoint of a critical pedagogy rooted in Giroux’s framework, but also from the standpoint of a writing class.
Much of Giroux’s implementation of writing assignments sounds like they are described from the perspective of subject, what students write about. For example, Giroux suggests that his writing assignments were “closely linked to getting students to theorize their own experiences rather than articulate the meaning of other peoples’ theories” (172). His assignments were designed “to give students the opportunity to acknowledge their own emotional and affective investments in issues regarding race, colonialism, and the politics of representation” (172). What is missing, for me, is a description of how form and academic expectations regarding writing factor into the development of the assignments. The power of Giroux’s use of writing practice was that it “was used not merely as an ideological marker for locating specific biographical interests and forms of identification; it was also viewed as a rupturing practice, as an oppositional pedagogy in which one pushes against the grain of traditional history, disciplinary structures, dominant readings, and existing relationships of power” (172).

I’m having a hard time figuring out how that is possible without rethinking and shaking up the form the product of student writing comes in. Take this dissertation, for example. I can do the best I can at articulating an argument that I believe is oppositional to traditional constructs of writing instruction, but that argument is contained by a very traditional form of writing, the dissertation, that I have no adequate means to thwart or even poke at in terms of form. (Perhaps, I should embed some video in here.)

To be fair to Giroux, he does mention that media was allowable in his courses’ writing work,

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105 This document will be submitted electronically to the ProQuest database (as required by Ohio University). In order to make it freely available for download, I’ll have to pay an extra hundred dollars, on top of the fee for submitting it. ProQuest does allow for electronic files to be included, but it seems they are more of an afterthought. That is, most dissertations are still mostly text-based documents uploaded, rather than written in a form made available because an electronic nature, for example a Web text.
but it is not a major focus, nor is there much exploration of form and medium relate to the pedagogical project. For Giroux, the focus was more on decentering authority in the classroom and deconstructing the production of knowledge, in that “all of these writing assignments positioned students as cultural producers and enabled them to rewrite their own experiences and perceptions through an engagement with various texts, ideological positions, and theories” (176). Further, he claimed to leverage collaborative learning in order “to decenter the power in the classroom, to challenge disciplinary borders, to create a borderland where new hybridized identities might emerge, to take up in a problematic way the relationship between language and experience, and to appropriate knowledge as part of a broader effort at self-definition and ethical responsibility” (176). It occurs to me that we live in a world where our language and experience are affected by different writing mediums and environments. New borders exist in the classroom between writing in other technologies and writing in the classroom. Giroux concludes that border writing can be “a type of hybridized, border literacy, a form of cultural production and pedagogical practice where otherness becomes comprehensible, collective memory rewrites the narratives of insurgent social movements, and students travel between diverse theoretical and cultural zones of difference, and, in doing so generate a space where new intersections between identity and culture emerge” (176). Teachers have as much to learn in a techno-critical writing classroom as the students.

Zoning in on Borders: Pratt and Contact Zones

In some ways, Mary Louise Pratt’s genesis of contact zone theory runs parallel with Giroux’s border pedagogy. Pratt describes contact zones as “social spaces where
cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power” (4). Techno-critical pedagogy might refigure that to describe the techno-critical classroom as “[an electronic and/or face to face] space where [literacies] meet, clash, and grapple with each other.” One difference is that Pratt theorizes the place of specialized studies for social groups within her paradigm. She argues:

multicultural curricula should not seek to replace ethnic or women’s studies, for example. Where there are legacies of subordination, groups need places for healing and mutual recognition, safe houses in which to construct shared understandings, knowledges, claims on the world that they can then bring into the contact zone. (17)

I’m arguing that specializations that relate to the various focuses covered in a techno-critical classroom dissolve. What I am really developing here, when I talk about techno-critical pedagogy, is merely a critical pedagogy related to writing instruction. But, given the conventions of writing instruction as it currently stands, I have to offer my pedagogy as a distinctly different animal, a techno-critical animal. In Chapter One, I argue that literacy has changed and that “modern literacy” represents a different kind of interface with writing than we’ve had in the past. Sometimes, in this dissertation, I’ve been able to use the term modern literacy. But, I continually find myself coming back to terms like “technological literacy” which I am opposed to because they separate that technological component of modern literacy as if it can be disconnected. So, I’m arguing here that Pratt’s notion of safe houses, which in traditional critical pedagogy might relate to
specific marginalized groups’ foci, for example a Feminist Studies department, doesn’t apply to techno-critical pedagogy unless “writing” and writing classes, in general, become a safe house for these concerns. That said, the focus of techno-critical pedagogy is to make transparent the contexts of asymmetrical literacies or rhetorics or environments related to writing technologies in order to seek how differing literacies or rhetorics or environments might inform each other in hopes of developing the rhetorical strategies we have at our disposal in rhetorical situations we are faced by.106

Techno-critical Pedagogy

I think it might not be an intuitive leap for educators to read Giroux’s piece and consider the more amorphous and hard to define implications of modern communication and power structures in the way that a techno-critical pedagogue might. Critical pedagogy might more commonly make educators think of feminists, Marxists, African-American and Women’s studies programs, or queer theory, with an emphasis first on the social groups involved and a secondary focus on the structures that contain them. I don’t wish this to be an attack on any of those schools of critical thought, as they all have informed my own pedagogy. But, I wish to expand our views of critical pedagogy by focusing on structures related to technology and literacy first, and focus on particular social inequalities second.107 The “how’s” of how we communicate as much as the

106 This is not a new idea in the dissertation, just a reminder. Earlier in the chapter I used Gee’s argument that facility in semiotic domains can lead to the ability to be subversive within them. I extend that by arguing that facility in one domain can be transferable to facility and/or the ability to be subversive in another domain.

107 I do think this is different from most critical pedagogues who (at least) claim to put writing and/or rhetoric before the political and social critiques, particularly in degree related to “structures” or “mechanics.” A focus on grammar and punctuation are more closely related to the “structures of technology” I’m talking about, for example navigating the creation of a new account on Twitter, to figuring out how to embed video in a blog post to class, to turning on the “change tracker” function of Word. While
“what’s” and “why’s.” This perspective may also entail re-envisioning what constitutes being an “engaged and transformative intellectual,” and what “the notion of democratic difference” entails. Rhetorically, I think this is an important component of a techno-critical pedagogy because it resists pigeonholing. A techno-critical pedagogy can’t be dismissed as only relevant to disenfranchised groups, since it relates to the disenfranchisement of us all as related to our accessibility to modern literacy connected to advanced and (often consumer) technologies.

If it’s not clear from the above paragraph, I’m not arguing that we are all affected equally in terms of our access to, say, computer literacy. The differences between our access can lead to important discussions in the classroom, and, of course, larger concerns in terms of educational funding, technological development initiatives, and literacy (especially electronic literacy, if we continue to hold it arm’s length from a general kind of literacy) initiatives around the world. While we are not all equally affected, we are all contained by these structures for communication. I fear that we are more prone to miss the basics, which are more transparent to us, than the more visible and complex interworkings of social groups. Race, sex, and even class are often more visible (although it would be idiotic to not realize that they are not always so) than literacy, especially when you’re talking about college students who are already assumed to be literate, at least “traditionally” literate.

writing and rhetoric are completely acceptable and often expected foci in “writing” classrooms, facility with structures related to technology may not be. I’ve argued this in Chapter One.

108 In particular, I mean it can be understood by students from different political and religious backgrounds as important and relevant to them and their belief systems.
An important component of this pedagogy and my class is hybridity, which is no surprise since we’re talking about borders. As I explained in the opening of the chapter, by hybridity, I mean that I teach a hybrid class, one which explores and meets in online environments (like the MOO), for part of the time and f2f for the rest of the time. I intend to develop border pedagogy to fit a technological classroom that focuses more on the structures we operate within, particularly in terms of how we communicate in academic settings (and in the “real world”). Structures can be understood in many ways. Certainly, various mediums in a computer classroom offer different structures that shape our discourse. The classroom itself shapes our discourse as a result of institutionalized classroom control through classroom layout, traditional management, and ritualized behavior. Freire has argued that the banking method affects student agency by teaching that “the more meekly the receptacles permit themselves to be filled, the better students they are” (72). Some classroom restructuring, for example moving seats into circles, seeks to transform power structures and discourse (to an extent). Border pedagogy “is intent on challenging existing boundaries of knowledge and creating new ones [via student engagement in] the multiple references that constitute different cultural codes, experiences and languages” (Giroux, 120). Giroux, in *Border Crossings: Cultural Workers and the Politics of Education*, describes a pedagogy that seeks borders as spaces in between binaries where students might shift their codes based on their point of view from the blurred overlap. Giroux is particularly interested in how such a pedagogy can offer students critical agency by remapping the constructs that generally govern their actions and assumptions. For example, a study of how bilingual education works in
schools in Houston, TX might offer us a start for remapping some of our assumptions about national language policies (far from the border, as it were) in Ohio. While I’m only making claims about academic discourse here, Freire has already laid the groundwork for an argument that academic spaces are places that reinforce behaviors suited to maintaining the status quo. Thus, a pedagogy that seeks to offer critical tools for remapping academic discourse also seeks to remap discourse that govern their discourse in academic setting and consider remapping them. This pedagogical framework offers potential for students to understand and think critically about the codes suited for life outside the Academy. This may further play out in the classroom as we explore the gray area between borders of academic constructs of writing and the implications of technologies and media we compose with.

Establishing and Deconstructing Borders: MapQuesting the Techno-critical Pedagogy

By considering border pedagogy in light of the hybrid classroom, opportunities arise to explore some of the disconnects that have informed our institutions’ expectations towards writing:

- Traditional modes of communication and meeting vs. electronic environments.

Elsewhere I discuss, for example, the difference teachers and students often encounter in MOO environments regarding an amelioration of traditional academic power structures and teacher authority. Also, discourse often changes as well. These changes will be discussed further in when I look at MOO scholarship.
• Traditional structures/forms of academic writing vs. those made affordable by new genres and media.

Critics such as Vielstimmig offer arguments for new kinds of writing, which they call the “new essay,” informed by the potential of characteristics of new media, such as hyperlinks and multi-modal composition. The border between expectations regarding traditional academic writing and that done in new media is always there when writing classes employ new media for composition. For example, whether or not a teacher offers a handout regarding etiquette and expectations regarding student work in a class blog or students ask questions about such expectations or don’t, relying on their own assumptions based on past experience in writing classes…the elephant in the room is the prior construction of what constitutes academic writing.

• “Real life” and the virtual world.

This division is perhaps the most far-reaching of the binaries I’m currently working with and some ways the most vexing because of how it spirals out and relates to more than might be intuitive given the simple nature of its statement. Obviously, at a basic level I am referring to real life communication vs. virtual communication. In larger sense we might extend the binary to include students’ lives outside the academy. As mentioned earlier, to some extent the entire Academy represents a virtual world to students when they compare it to what they will experience in the
future in the “real world.” Likewise, the kind of writing we teach in a college writing class can sometimes feel “virtual” to students, especially if they consider it something they will only have to do in the Academy. Students may falsely characterize the worth of experience offered from a genre-based approach if they are not likely to write a research paper outside of college. Recently, our Center for Writing Excellence entitled a well-received seminar “Blogs, and Wikis, and Meeting Students Where They Write,” capitalizing on faculty members’ acceptance that new genres and media may be more engaging for student writing because they are more obviously applicable to their current and future professional lives.

- “Self” and representation of self via electronic means.

The computer classroom offers a window into this border as students construct their ethoi via various electronic applications, whether through Word, in terms of a standard writing assignment or through the creation of Web text that utilizes streaming video shot by the student, music, and images in tandem. Issues of representation online have broad implications for students’ lives as they work and play. These are vital concerns for student agency in electronic environments and in terms of their integration with technology because it marks the difference between interpellation versus self-development. For example, it marks the difference between are students composing their Facebook pages and Facebook composing our students.
It’s arguable that even in non-hybrid classes, such borders exist conceptually and must be dealt with in some way, or ignored at the risk of perpetuating the status quo. Further, in addition to the skill-based and structural binaries that I’ve been delineating, obviously, borders between different socio-economic groups exist, as well.

I intend to develop border pedagogy to fit a technological classroom that focuses more on the structures we operate within, particularly in terms of how we communicate in academic settings (and in the “real world”). Structures can be understood in many ways. Certainly, various mediums in a computer classroom offer different structures that shape our discourse. The classroom itself shapes our discourse as a result of institutionalized classroom control through classroom layout, traditional management, and ritualized behavior. Freire has argued that the banking method affects student agency by teaching that “the more meekly the receptacles permit themselves to be filled, the better students they are” (72). Border pedagogy has often been used to critically understand, unpack, and remap racial boundaries, particularly in places in which real world borders (geographic) exist along with socially constructed ones (race and ethnicity). Romo’s “Border Pedagogy From the Inside Out: An Autoethnographic Study,” from the Journal of Latinos and Education exploring Latino experience in the U.S. and Aveling’s “Student Teachers’ Resistance to Exploring Racism: reflections on ‘doing’ border pedagogy,” in the Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education focusing on teaching a critical class on Aboriginal and Multicultural Education in Australia are a couple of examples of how border pedagogy is commonly used. How this relates to my classroom at Ohio University is questionable. There is no denying that plenty of geographical (for
example, between cities and rural areas) and socially constructed borders (for example, straight vs. homosexual, “townie” vs. student, white vs. other) exist for us to study. It is true that many of these borders come up in the course of our studies in my classes, but none in particular is the focus for our particular class. The kinds of borders that we study are more specifically related to a *composition* class that occurs in a computer classroom. Giroux’s concerns grow out of a postmodern view which takes into account the fragmented identities that inform us. Some of those concerns relate to online environments that inform our students’ identities, such as *Facebook*, *My Space*, and others, but I am arguing that border pedagogy in a computer classroom also relates to how technologies’ structures affect our representation and how that can inform our self-representation in other structures, for example, how an exploration of MOO discourse might empower students to speak up more in f2f classrooms.

There are many things that affect student discourse in our classrooms. Teachers certainly exert control over discourse. So does the presence of our physical bodies. Some students may speak less due to shyness. Others may be afraid to say something wrong in front of their peers. Some may not feel engaged with the discussion. Class expectations and educational acculturation may also affect student discourse in the classroom. bell hooks argues that classroom discourse is affected, much in the way Freire describes, as a result of class-based expectations regarding appropriate academic behavior. In “Confronting Class in the Classroom,” from her book *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*, hooks details her early experiences with higher education, when, from of family of the working poor, she entered Stanford University on
scholarship, she realized that “class was more than just a question of money, that it shaped values, attitudes, social relations, and the biases that informed the way knowledge would be given and received” (178). Particularly, the final part of that quote relates to ways in which discourse is often shaped in f2f educational settings via a quieting effect. hooks argues that “as silence and obedience to authority were most rewarded, students learned that this was the appropriate demeanor in the classroom” (178). Even when teachers strive to create environments that encourage democratic participation from their students, they are always working against years of educational acculturation and institutionalized behavior on the part of their students and may be even working against their own acculturation and tendencies of their own economic class.

I am not arguing that this kind of acculturation or behavior is an entirely negative thing that we should get rid of (assuming it would be possible to get rid of it...we will never be rid of it). After all, it is nice that our students are sitting in seats when we enter our classrooms and not jumping on the tables, or lying under their desks.109 There are often classes, for example, in which I cannot get students to stop raising their hands when they want to say something or ask a question. Often, in person, emails, and in their papers, they include the title of Mr., Dr., or Professor (only the first of which I currently am) when referring to me by my last name, even though I introduce myself to them as Paul. While some of this behavior can be explained by my nonverbal cues, I suppose, and other assumptions related to gender, much of it can be explained by their acculturation into a mode of behavior that affects how they operate in the classroom. It also affects

109 I want to make it clear that I am discussing “our” experiences at a university like Ohio University. I am sure some of my readers can think of disparate examples where they entered a classroom to students crawling up the walls. It often happened to me in the Peace Corps teaching in Moldova, Eastern Europe.
their discourse. This is partly, probably, related to our f2f\textsuperscript{110} bodies. It is difficult to understand what someone in particular is saying if three people are talking at once. It is often easier to put more stock in these more “obvious” reasons that discourse might be affected when considering a classroom, for the most part, made up of students coming from similar economic and ethnic backgrounds (as detailed in earlier statistics). In order to disrupt class-based discourse patterns\textsuperscript{111}, we need to encounter a border, which necessitates interactions with another class. In lieu of that, MOO offers a structure for communication that doesn’t immediately\textsuperscript{112} allow for traditional educational patterns of discourse to arise.

Users new to the MOO are often surprised by the cacophony of voices they experience during discussion. In fact, a gut reaction is often one of confusion. For teachers, who may feel they have more at stake in their classroom experiences, it may be a feeling of panic, a loss of control. For many, they are crossing a border into uncharted territory, and often their assumptions or expectations are guided by those formed in the f2f classroom. The disconnect offers a place to start for isolating and analyzing those expectations and assumptions which may be hard to see in the original f2f environment, since they are often things we’ve been taught to take for granted, for example even our tendency to raise hands to speak which leads to a more teacher-controlled discussion. In terms of discourse, then, the MOO offers an environment within which to remap

\textsuperscript{110} In tech research, we’d say our “meat” bodies in differentiating them from our virtual representations. Evident in that terminology is a similar disdain for the other side of the binary, just as real life has for the “virtual.”

\textsuperscript{111} Such as those described by bell hooks in her chapter “Confronting Class in the Class Room” in \textit{Teaching to Transgress}.

\textsuperscript{112} While it might be possible with a lot of work to impose the same kinds of control, which we impose consciously or merely encounter, we may be accustomed to in f2f classrooms, this is not the default experience on the MOO.
discursive structures that occur in the f2f setting and, as part of a hybrid class, it offers the platform for considering and remapping those structures, or at least our participation in them, in the f2f classroom. Simply by discussing our virtual experiences in a f2f setting we expose those invisible systems of discourse, a first step in reacting to them. Tari Fanderclai, in her “MUDs in Education: New Environments, New Pedagogies” mentions some of the MOO characteristics that affect discourse in the way I’ve described. Traditional forms of control, each student raises her/his hand, in which the teacher controls discourse literally in a hands on way, don’t spontaneously come into play. Fanderclai points out that on a MOO a teacher cannot “stand in front of the room and lecture and direct,” since MOO space doesn’t offer an easy means of situating oneself so. In addition, Fanderclai and other note that students’ engagement with their virtual representations offers a location for a different kind of discourse. Students who may be inclined to be silent in class often are more willing to respond in MOO environments. Fanderclai goes on to argue that in spite of the potential MOOs offer, pedagogues often merely replicate the kinds of control they employ in face to face (f2f) classrooms. The point of her small article is to call for new kinds of critical pedagogy that make use of these differences that MOOs offer, rather than shape or adapt MOO environments to replicate their real world counterparts. Her call seems to have gone unanswered; recently she’s asked the question of digital rhetors “has MOO died?” In my opinion, MOO is only dead if we compartmentalize it and view our experiences there as only relevant to that space. At that point, we risk applying similar reductions to the

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113 A MUD (or Multi-User Domain) is an environment very similar to a MOO. MOO’s developed from MUD.
relevancies of other structures we are familiar with, which may harden them and insure confinement. If MOO has indeed died we theoretically lay the groundwork for the demise of the f2f classroom itself. Again, this already plays out in terms of students’ views regarding the Academic world, especially as it relates to an emphasis on the liberal arts, versus the “real” world. Writing instructors at this institution face this disposition when students view their required writing class as a waste of time because (in many students’ minds) it doesn’t apply to their professional trajectory. If students are likely to think that a freshman and junior level writing class are a waste of time and not relevant to their future jobs, I can only imagine how such students view the classes they have to take to satisfy their humanities credits.

The relation between f2f and MOO environments and the implications they hold for each other have been part of my last five years of experience. The kinds of expectations that hooks cites are part of the reason that new instructors and students react so strongly to MOO environments. Such feelings can be further compounded if they don’t get the important experience of building community, learning to interact, and having some stake in the formation of structures of discourse in MOO environments. Gee describes this kind of development as he outlines what participation in a semiotic domain entails. An important component of a techno-critical pedagogy that integrates MOO, is a consistent use and exploration of the environment.

To sum up, the issues central to my project are the following. First, the careful integration of technology is relevant and important to critical pedagogy, in part, as a result of modern expectations for literacy. While some important critical pedagogues
completely ignore technology, some techno-enthusiast educational theorists tout its effectiveness for teaching, without considering its political implications. Researchers who do locate the politics of technology often do so in contextualized ways; their research is relegated to niche specialties in our field. I articulate a techno-critical pedagogy that represents a more balanced and developed union between technology and pedagogy.

In the next two chapters, I will explore how the pedagogy I’ve articulated here has filtered into classroom practices, first in terms of the implementation of a writing-enriched MOO and then in terms of other technologies (blogs, wikis, Second Life, for example) that I’ve integrated into my courses.
CHAPTER THREE: A MOO’VING TALE: ONE TECHNOLOGY THROUGH THE LENS OF TECHNO-CRITICAL PEDAGOGY

“The technical literacy necessitated in the case of the MOO, should not be separated from a sense of complex sorts of literacy that are required in our professional and personal lives, which include literacies related to all sorts of different media and technologies.”

In the previous chapter, we circled critical pedagogy to arrive at an intersection between border pedagogy and technology by envisioning the hybrid classroom as a contact zone between the borders of the virtual and the real. Border pedagogy informs techno-critical pedagogy, entailing not just a focus on the boundaries but the political implications of those boundaries, as well. If we note the political implications between conflicts of power for mainstream and marginalized groups when mobilizing border pedagogy for social purposes, from a techno-critical pedagogical standpoint we note differences in access and power related to different technological communicative mediums. Let me explain what I am referring to in the last sentence as “access” and “power.” Access, in the previous sentence, can refer to differing levels of education regarding particular mediums as well as general availability of technology and how those relate to identity (sex, race, class, age, etc.). For example, students in better funded schools might have a greater facility with, say, advanced design software like Adobe Photoshop, than students from lower economic backgrounds. But students from lower economic backgrounds might114 have advanced literacy in terms of other technologies,

114 The “might” in this article is telling of the changing nature of access to technology and literacy. Ten years ago “less access” most likely referred to those with no access. Increasingly, at least in this country, as most schools, many libraries and public spaces become wired or wireless, “less access” changes to less access at home or in my neighborhood, when I was growing up, or because it wasn’t considered cool for me to be into technology. Recently while interviewing for a job at a regional campus for University of
such as file sharing or IM’ing or texting. Further, while lower income students might have less access to embodied instruction\textsuperscript{115} the playing field is somewhat leveled through subversive trends in contemporary computing, such as torrent sites which make virtually any media or software applications available for free (albeit illegal) download. Older people might have less access to social networking technologies given their social contexts and day-to-day needs. Power, in the statement above, is constructed by and held by those who shape expectations in political and rhetorical situations important to the communicator.\textsuperscript{116} While students might be skillful and even thoughtful in their use of

Pittsburgh (Bradford), a faculty member described the Bradford student population as first generation college students who were technologically savvy. He may have been comparing the students to himself, and/or the faculty of the department, or his generation. Or, he may have been referring to certain applications, such as Facebook. His characterization may be a surprise to readers who might think that first generation college students in an Appalachian county have no access to technology. I am arguing that their access may be limited in some technological aspects and it may be more focused in others. When considering questions of access we may be biased about the inclusion of some semiotic domains or technologies under the term of literacy. For example, I agree with James Paul Gee when he argues that videogames offer a semiotic domain in which players develop literacy. Further, I argue that disenfranchised technological literacy bases, such as videogames, are valuable in how they can be used to develop our literacies in other sites (for example, transferring videogame literacy to a site such as Second Life). While many young people, regardless of socio-economic backgrounds have access to videogames (whether of their own, their friends, or via arcades), the skill sets they employ in those technologies might be locked within them. A techno-critical pedagogical perspective informed by border pedagogy is important in leveraging literacy in particular semiotic domains or technologies in order to investigate how skills transfer (or don’t) to literacy in other technologies or semiotic domains.

\textsuperscript{115} I say “embodied” because the Internet is awash with instructional material. Though, in my opinion, little of it rivals face-to-face instruction on learning new complex software applications.

\textsuperscript{116} Obviously, the term power also refers to forces that surround a communicator and relate to their identities, as well. While I make allowances for that in the page above, in which I cite how our identities might relate to our access to literacy in various technological applications, my emphasis is on how the structures relate to each other, first, with more traditional concerns of critical pedagogy, how our identities relate to our access to those structures, second. This emphasis on structures first may be intuitive move on my part related to my work with newbies, whether they be in the form of a Chair of an English department who I was teaching how to use wikis or a freshman student who I taught MOO. In both cases, it’s true that the learners’ identities related to their access to the technologies we worked with. But, that belief, my identity is directly tied to my facility with a given technology, can initially be a stumbling block. The Chair that I’m referring to “knew” that he was confused by technology, that he didn’t get it” and probably that he was “too old” for that kind of stuff. By modeling a classroom where these “realizations” don’t come into play until after we’ve eased our selves into learning the technologies we overcome what we “know” about our selves. The issues revolving around identity and access to technology come into play later, when we’ve developed some personal agency and are ready to confront those issues in ways that are conducive to our further development.
Internet sources, older teachers may discredit such sources out of hand (invoking their academic authority, institutional power, etc.) positing complete faith in traditional academic sources. This will be slow to change as long as institutionally provided resources, the equipment we have at our disposal in classes, the training we have at our disposal in order to use it, and if our acculturation into the field of composition includes a positioning of writing based on more traditional models. A techno-critical perspective offers the potential for exploring the nature of both sides of the borderline between mediums/literacies and the opportunity to explore how a knowledge of either side might inform action in the other or in further domains through the development of advanced literacies. While techno-critical students might discuss the limits of their preferred electronic sources in the face of those they wish to communicate with (employers, teachers, and so forth), they might also consider situations where they might mobilize those sources for effects they might not realize with traditional Academic means. While most of the time an iMovie might not be an appropriate form for an Academic assignment, cover letter for a job, or personal statement for medical school, sometimes it can not only be acceptable, but quite successful in such capacities. Unless students are discussing and testing borders related to communicative technologies in the safer places of the classroom, the potential and limits of those technologies and relations to power structures in which we communicate, that iMovie won’t be a part of those students’ rhetorical bag of tricks. Let me be clear that I am talking about “testing borders”

117 I mean that a techno-critical classroom in which investigations regarding the limits and potential of various technological mediums is part of our purpose is “safer” than doing such experiments with media for the first time on the job market or in classroom with a teacher (audience) that the student may be unfamiliar with.
in terms of what we might do in a techno-critical class. Being successful through an innovative use of technology is more likely at the higher end of literacy. But, we can begin developing our rhetorical and technological chops in the basic site of the writing classroom, if we give students the leeway and the conceptual environment to do so.

One way to get at techno-critical pedagogy is through a deep focus on one particular technology, one that I have used off and on for the last 5 years, professionally, and the last 20 years personally. In this chapter, I mix narrative, a mini-review of MOO scholarship, and revisit two studies conducted with students who MOO’ed. I billed this dissertation as the articulation of techno-critical pedagogy. As I review my knowledge base of and experiences with MOO, including the research I conducted, it’s important to note that I hadn’t developed techno-critical pedagogy during most of the time I chronicle, although it may have been in a nascent state in the back of my mind. What I’m doing here, then, is looking back at the extensive experience I’ve had with a particular technology through the lens of techno-critical pedagogy. Further, MOO is probably the most important technology in terms of my own development as a techno-critical pedagogue, and a good place to start. It’s the one that as a result of my administrative position I was obligated to wrestle with it in my own practice, but especially to promote it and train others. Working against the forces that conspired to trip up that promotion and training was quite vexing, but it is because of my experiences with MOO that I am the techno-critical pedagogue I am today. I’ll begin with a narrative driven history of the

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118 I was recently rereading texts from my undergraduate cultural anthropology coursework. In the respected ethnography *Navajo Kinship and Marriage*, Gary Witherspoon makes an argument for the relevance and importance of field experience versus field work. Just as Witherspoon relates his prior experiences with the Navajo people through the lens of cultural anthropological theory, in this chapter I view my past experience through the lens of techno-critical pedagogy.
MOO, describe my administrative work with OU’s MOO, then move on to discuss MOO practices in the classroom, especially as they relate to a study focusing on student and instructor perceptions of MOO practice.

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A Short History of the Development of MOOs

“You are standing at the end of a road before a small brick building. Around you is a forest. A small stream flows out of the building and down a gully. In the distance there is a tall gleaming white tower.” – *Adventure*

It was 1983 and I was ten years old. One day, I found myself standing at the end of a road before a small brick building, or so the words on the screen suggested. Little did I know how far that road would take me and how it would guide me, both professionally and personally. I was just excited at the prospect of playing a computer game.

The subject of this chapter is Multi-User Domains/Object Oriented (MOOs). To put it simply, a MOO is an online environment that is completely text-based and supports more than one user at the same time. An exploration of the history of MOOs and their use in the field of composition is an exploration of my professional development and my progression through work and play. It is also the story of how play has been appropriated by the academy for educational purposes. And finally, it is an exploration of how online environments radically change learning opportunities and outcomes. There are quite a few places in which we could begin. It seems that as soon as I’ve chosen one, I find myself going back even further. So let’s just start with the *Adventure* quote above and go from there, though we may take a few detours as we leave the road and enter the forest.
The game from which the above quote comes, aptly titled *Adventure*, was written by Will Crowther. Crowther’s interest in caving, computers, and role-playing games (RPGs) intersected in the 1970s in the form of *Adventure* (Adams). *Adventure* is considered a seminal text among computer games. Steven Levy, author of *Hackers: Heroes in the Computer Revolution* puts it this way, “Playing adventure games without tackling this one is like being an English major who’s never glanced at Shakespeare” (as qtd. in Adams). *Adventure* would pave the way for later text-based computer games. It’s arguable that even massive multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGs), such as *World of Warcraft*, harken back to this classic. Delineating these trends, the movement from text to graphics, is important because they parallel educational developments in online spaces, as well.

Text-based games consist entirely of words. In the room description we started with, I might, for example, type “exits” to get a list of places to go. Forests are interesting, but I’d like to see what’s in that building. I might notice that the building lies to the north. By typing “north” the computer would move me to the next room description. In addition to navigating the text-based world, a player can manipulate items that she/he comes in contact with.

In a room description like this:

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119 The means by which we describe his composition, “writing,” both relates to his use of computer “language” and the print-text basis of the game, which I’ll describe further in this section. The use of the term “writing” to describe computer compositions is interesting to me because it can encapsulate a broader notion of what “writing” means.

120 The most well-known company that produced these games was Infocom. Their most well-known title is their *Zork* Trilogy.

121 There have been a few different panels focused on MMORPG’s at the past few 4 C’s conferences. Researchers in our field are interested in MMORPGs because of their high level of engagement for users and as cultural phenomena because they are raking in hundreds of millions of dollars a year, in spite of the recent economic downturn.
The room you are standing in is quite cold. The walls glow a cool blue. On
the ground you see a bundle of twigs and a match.

I’d probably figure out that I’m supposed to build a fire. Why else would there be a
match and a bundle of sticks on the ground? I would have to type “get match” and then
probably, “light match” and then “light bundle.” What transpires is narrative problem
solving.

Two characteristics of the above scenario immediately point out why such a game
could be used for educational purposes, specifically writing instruction. First, in my
experience, such games encourage problem solving and critical thinking, two skills that
strengthen writing. Second, at the time, one could scarcely think of a better environment
suited to writing instruction than one entirely based of words. In a traditional composition
class, often more time is spent talking. On a MOO, the nature of the discourse is print-
textual. We might re-envision the task above, building a fire, to students composing
MOO spaces themselves, perhaps based on Jack London’s “To Build a Fire.” Students
might build/write a room based on part of the short story complete with a snow-covered
bough poised at smothering a fire built below. Such compositions offer students new
means for disseminating the potential of canonic texts, constructing representations of
such texts in new mediums, and exploring interaction with such texts that offline reading
and writing just don’t offer. One is obligated to write more than the original story to fit
the different medium of MOO. This is perhaps the most simple, quintessential, and
radical element of MOOs; they are text-based. From a simple basis, springs complex
implications.
While a text-based environment may not seem revolutionary, in terms of computer/videogames in the late 1970s, basing a game in text was a new approach, as opposed to other games of the time like *Pong* or *Breakout*. Games like *Pong* and *Breakout* would drive graphics development and relied on controls that were not intuitive, at least on PCs. For example, to move my ping pong racket in *Pong*, a very simple electronic version of table-tennis, I might hit a letter on the keyboard totally disconnected from the action represented on the screen. For example, movement of the racket might be triggered by the keys a (left), d (right), w (up), and s (down). One doesn’t naturally make the connection between the letters and the motions. In a text-based game the command “north” to move north makes sense in a real world sort of way. I am, of course, ignoring the development of platform games. It’s true that our old original version of *Pong* that came as a game platform, hooked up to a television, used a paddle with a knob for rudimentary control. Turning it right or left would move your block on the screen. In terms of the text-based approach that he forged, Crowther writes,

> My idea was that it would be a computer game that would not be intimidating to non-computer people [...] I made it so that the player directs the game with natural language input, instead of more standardized commands. (Adams)

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122 Console games are a different matter. I suppose one could argue that the electronic table tennis game that Atari came out with the paddle/controllers corresponded with movement we are accustomed to through driving with steering wheels.

123 I suppose someone could make an argument that in a rudimentary way the letters of awsd correspond contextually with left, right, up, and down. “Normal” people, i.e. non-gamers don’t intuitively make such connections, though, as is evidenced by the time it takes new users to get accustomed to navigating in game and game-like environments such as *Second Life* which makes use of awsd movement. But, this kind of discussion, of the nuances between interface and game and reality is the kind of discussion many gamers would relish. Gamers familiarity with conventions such as awsd movement is an example of how literacy in one domain (gaming) can be useful in another (*Second Life*).
This tendency of text-based systems to be user-friendly is one of MOO’s drawing points for use by universities. This early motivation for design based on intuitive “natural language input” is interesting given the full circle we’ve come. Nowadays, natural language input in MOOs seems to be anything but intuitive to newbies, who are often more used to the stripped down interfaces of instant messengers, again, a case of users making use of prior literacies, although in this case with negative repercussions. It’s interesting to note that what we see here are assumptions based on one communicative environment limiting people in another, much like some English teachers complain of texting and IM’ing negatively affecting writing. Our experiences in a communicative medium can affect more than our language, but also our ability to function in new environments.

A MOOve Towards Education

A number of other characteristics of the text-based nature of these games would make them a likely candidate for use by universities in the 90s. MOOs are employed in education because they are cheap (to produce, maintain, and use), they are convenient (since they are online one can log onto a MOO from a distance and across time zones), they are synchronous\textsuperscript{124} (communication is real time…like a chat room or a conversation, not like a message board), they are low tech, and they are user-friendly. By “low tech” I mean in terms of system requirements. The programming, although relatively simple, is complicated to the average user. Indeed, it has been shown that in online writing instruction (not necessarily just with MOOs) students wrote more, a feeling of being a

\textsuperscript{124} The distinction between asynchronous and synchronous mediums for writing will become more apparent as I discuss how MOO discourse dramatically differs from face to face discussions in most classrooms.
part of a community was developed more than in other distance venues, there was more participation, and increased clarity in writing completed (Mulligan and Geary).

Those not familiar with text-based games should first consider the time in which the games were produced. *Adventure*, the game that would set the standard for text-based games, came out in 1981. The last 20 years have been astounding in terms of the development of computer hardware. At the time *Adventure* came out, the Color Graphics Adapter (CGA) was still being developed.\(^{125}\) I played *Adventure*, like many others, on a simple monochrome monitor that could only display the symbols available on the keyboard (ASCII characters\(^{126}\)). While I sometimes feel sentimental remembering the soft, green, ethereal glow of the monochrome display, computer graphics have come a long way since then. Technological limitations were an influence in the development of text-based games. As we continue to discuss the educational appropriation of MOOs, it will be evident that such limitations continue to privilege this sort of gaming/programming.\(^{127}\) The text-based nature of MOOs made programming the games

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\(^{125}\) In 1983, I was playing on a top of line computer, IBM’s PC. Our upgraded system came with 64k RAM, an 86 hertz processor, and cost 2,000$. Currently, for about 800$, you can get a system with 4 Gigs of RAM and 3.2 Gigs of dual core processor speed. This difference is mind-boggling, as is the fact that I continually need to update this footnote between drafts to keep the pricing/tech specs current.

\(^{126}\) One interesting adaptation to ASCII characters are so-called ASCII-based games. Very difficult to explain without photos, ascii-based, or “rogue-like” games, straddle the divide between text-based and graphics games because the graphics is composed of text characters. So, for example a “w” on the screen might represent a wolf attacking your character.

\(^{127}\) I’m referring to the lag between new hardware and a consumer’s opportunity to purchase that new hardware. For one thing, many users wait for their equipment to become non-functional before purchasing a new computer system. Others may play a waiting game for prices of hardware to go down before upgrading their equipment. For years, educational institutions on the cutting edge have developed some of their computer labs to utilize hardware intensive applications such as *Second Life*. But, even within institutions that are *Second Life* capable, *SL* capabilities are often the exception, rather than the rule and have not made it into mainstream curricula. MOO applications, at the bottom of the barrel in terms of hardware necessity, are fairly safe bets for classroom practice, because nearly all computers are capable of running it.
to work over the Internet easier and the games faster. The simplicity that resulted made it possible for players with very limited hardware to still play MUDs or MOOs.

The popular role-playing game (RPG) *Dungeons and Dragons (D&D)* influenced the origin of *Adventure*. *D&D*, whether by way of computer text-based games like *Adventure* or merely by its popularity among the younger crowd of programmers in the 1970s, obviously had a big influence on the development of Multi-User Domains (MUDs). MUDs have since led to MOOs and it is important to recognize the tangential link between MUDs and MOOs and *D&D*, even though the pedagogical MOO may not resemble a D&D based MUD, the role-playing and elements of gaming still remain.

Role-playing, simply put, is theatrical, it is putting on a different role. It’s simply unavoidable in a MOO, because by default one substitutes oneself for one’s online construct/character/avatar. We play the role of our electronic self. Regardless of how closely to reality we design our online representation, they are still online and therefore we control it via keystrokes, like a marionette. We take the role of an electronic representation of ourselves on the MOO and in other virtual environments such as *Second Life*, a 3D environment I’ll be talking about more in the next chapter. Some aspects of self-representation differ from medium to medium but other aspects are transferable. For one thing, a focus on self-representation in different mediums offers students the tools they need to critically analyze such representations. This can be useful in controlling our rhetoric, our construction of ethos in such sites, whether it be MOO or *MySpace*, where there may be more at stake in terms of our representations.
In the 80s, amateur programmers began writing MUDs that would allow more than one user, via the new evolving Internet, to connect to a virtual text-based game. In essence, the game would be like Adventure described above, but incorporate multiple players. At first, the themes were invariably fantasy related, based on D&D. Later, other theme-based MUDs would appear that were not so violent. A quick survey of popular MUDs and MOOs on mudconnector.com suggests that the majority still have some connections to fantasy realms, for example based on the writings of Tolkien, J.K. Rowling, or H.P. Lovecraft. It’s impressive how fans/players in these various MUDs have translated their favorite authors’ texts to the MUD or MOO medium.

MUDS are not very user-friendly in terms of programming. User-friendly programming would be essential for the educational use of online text-based environments, leading to the adoptions of MOOs for Academic uses. After all, Academics in our field, are not, for the most part, technological gurus. Often, though, MUDs had open source code (a source code is the central part of the program), meaning that any programmer could tinker with the original program and try and make it better. It also meant that the software was being developed outside the realm of a commercial environment, which in computer lore traditionally reflects the democratic development of technology. For example, open source projects have resulted in free software suites such

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128 Remember, a Multi-User Domain (MUD) is different than a Multi-User Domain Object-Oriented (MOO). These differences relate to programming. Although I’m no expert on MUD vs. MOO coding, I believe MOO programming is more compartmentalized, due to the way every “thing” in a MOO is considered an object. Programming consists, then, in managing how objects interact.

129 Open source programming is similar to new writing technologies like the wiki, a collaborative environment in which individual ownership of written texts is somewhat, but not completely, ameliorated, which raises other issues, like that of copyright and ownership which translate to writing classes using such technologies.
as Open Office, which offers the same functionality of Microsoft Office, may have even fewer limitations, and is totally free.

Like the history of other topics and composition, the study of the history of MOO and composition revolves around people and texts. The following people that I cover in the dissertation are the most important in the field related to MOO writing pedagogy and practice and are still active in the development of MOOs. Most important here, however, are not the scholarly research texts, but the MOOs themselves. Even though the MOOs are listed rather innocuously after the figures that created them, these MOOs are all different and represent different developments in the genre and the pedagogy of online environments.

In 1990, the first and most important step would be made towards shifting the focus in MOOs to pedagogical rather than recreational purposes. Pavel Curtis, a computer program language-design researcher, modified a particular MOO. Curtis was drawn to the MOO, in particular, because it promised a user-friendlier interface in terms of programming (Curtis). Curtis produced the open source code for what would he would call LambdaMOO. He made the LambdaMOO core (the core is the same thing as the source code, which as previously mentioned is the heart of the program) available for download on the Internet. This was an essential step in the pedagogical development of the MOO. First, the software was free, so universities wouldn’t have to spend a lot of time and money developing their own software. Second, they could tailor the software to fit their pedagogical aims.

130 Other MOOs and MUDs can be visited through http://www.mudconnector.com. In general, a quick Google search will also lead one to any of the extant MOOs.
In 1992, Amy Bruckman, a grad student at MIT who had visited Curtis’s LambdaMOO, began MediaMOO as an experiment. MediaMOO was one of the first appropriations of a MOO program aimed at a professional rather than recreational purpose. Bruckman conceived of her MOO as a place for professionals in media studies to congregate, socialize, and share; henceforth, MOO would be used in similar ways for other professional ends. MediaMOO is still alive and well on the Net.

In the mid 90s, writing instructors began to realize the rich potential of a text-based learning environment. Technical magazines began to note that, “MUDS are authentic reading and writing environments that emphasize learning, building, communicating, cooperating, experimenting, and interacting socially…and offer a unique means of instruction that captivates learners” (Dyrli, 20).

Cynthia Haynes and Jan Holmevik co-founded LinguaMOO in 1995. This MOO is important as a representation of MOO being used for pedagogical aims. In their introduction to the best resource available for those interested in the educational use of MOOs, Highwired: On the Design, Use and Theory of Educational MOOs, they introduce new terms to explain the nature of the MOO. They use the word cypher/TEXT to describe the discourse in MOOs. By juxtaposing the terms cyber (online), hyper (multiplicity of meaning and communications) and text, the word represents the MOO user being drawn directly into the discourse. As I stated earlier, the nature of the MOO is textual. They write, “what makes this genre of discourse architextural (and generative) is that discussants engage in real time, by writing text in a space that is itself textually assembled, or constructed, and performed by personae that are themselves textually
constructed in descriptive and narrative forms, and who assume identities that may be equally constructed (11). We will track down some of the relevance this has for pedagogy later. Incidentally, the simple fact that these texts that I reference, these MOOs, are still around after ten years, an eternity in the realm of technology, speaks for their meaningfulness to the MOO community.

While all this was going on (in the early 90s), I was starting school at Ohio University, without a single thought of MOO in my mind. Soon after, I was introduced to MUDing by a friend who later quit because of the addictive quality of the gaming aspect of MUDs and MOOs. The virtual communities that establish themselves, especially in game and game-like online environments, can be quite compelling. This vitality of the online communities would also prove to be a drawing point to the educational use of MOOs. I played MUD as a gamer religiously for a year or two, working my way up to wizard status and even began doing some simple programming. I continued to be unaware of the trend of MOOs being used for educational purposes. After graduating in 1996, I began teaching English as a foreign language in Eastern Europe in the Peace Corps. When I returned to graduate school in America, I found, to my surprise, that MOOs were a hot topic in the Comp/Rhet field. In the hallway between classes, I had several heated discussions with my colleagues concerning community building in online environments. I met graduate students at conventions that were hired to develop

131 Techno-enthusiasts may have the tendency to view such communities as vital, lively, and meaningful. It’s fair to say, though, that some community-oriented games, such as the MMORPG World of Warcraft have the potential for very real addiction that has terrible consequences for people’s lives. While I, in my techno-enthusiasm, forgot to mention this in a footnote, until my advisor pointed it out, my students in techno-critical classes have identified the potential for videogame addiction, read about it, and discussed it via posts that they developed for our course blog. So, it was a topic of discussion in our coursework, although it was related to online environments like MMORPGs which are more visual in nature than the MOO.
university MOOs. I could not believe people were being paid to develop MOOs for Academic purposes. When I heard Dr. Sherrie Gradin was a developing a MOO for the Center of Writing Excellence/Writing across the Curriculum, I was excited to take part for myself. I was brought on board to develop the online writing tutoring, the WID room, and the writing classroom on the MOO. I tutored on the MOO for the first time, and began teaching on it as well. My professional self was crystallizing and MOO, gaming, text-based environments, and other things I’d been involved with for fun were becoming a part of that professional self.

**Detailed History? Or, Nostalgic Reminiscing?**

As I was organizing this chapter, I realized that the kind of detailed history I offer, tracing text-based environments like MOO back to their origins in the game *Adventure*, I risk the perception of being a self-absorbed techno-enthusiast. And to some extent, that’s true. But, techno-critical pedagogy is about surfacing technologies in ways that we are not accustomed to. For example, it’s not enough to know a technology or practice well, but we need to understand how that technology or practice relates to technological trends or how that practice or technology fits into the development of various technologies in general. Taking time to examine and learn about the bigger picture is a good approach because it broadens our understanding of how a particular technology relates to other seemingly disconnected technologies. Techno-critical pedagogy relies on

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132 Partially, because I include my own history, but also because techno-enthusiasts tend to talk about technology in such a way that they fetishize it. To be fair, enthusiasts of any topic tend to get overly sentimental about the tiniest aspects of their focus. For example, a baseball fan may know the batting average of every member of a team in 1962, just like I remember, and feel about, the “boss key” for the PC games suite by *Friendlyware*. If one pressed the “boss key” while playing a game, it paused the game and put a graphic of a random chart on the screen, to make it look like you were doing work if your boss came into the room.
advancing our literacies. The history of MOO is inextricably intertwined with the characteristics that appeal to pedagogues, it’s relative simplicity, its text-based nature, the virtual novelty of the avatar, etc. It is also a part of the knowledge base of the advanced user (i.e. nerd), something that informs their experiences with it. Most compositionists wouldn’t dream of a rhetoric and composition program without some kind of course based on the history of the field. Likewise, if a technology is important enough for us to integrate into our class, it is a good idea to try to understand it in, perhaps, broader terms, than we might generally be accustomed to in our private lives in the course of our private or recreational uses of applications.

I want to unpack my last argument in the sentence above. I’m arguing that we often use technologies with a limited knowledge base connected to the context of our needs. If, for example, my mother-in-law uses Facebook in order to snoop on my cousin-in-law, who recently had a baby, she only needs to know how to log in, how to add her niece as a friend, and how to navigate among the sub-items that are parts of my niece’s page. If my mother-in-law was a composition instructor planning to integrate a lesson on Facebook into her writing class, she might need to know more. She might need to know some of the issues surrounding Facebook as a writing environment. She might need to know some of the issues surrounding Facebook as a social platform, in which online representations can have very real impacts on our success. It might be helpful for her to understand how this social networking site developed and the context in which it developed. She might need to consider how her audience uses that site, and their assumptions about it. While I’m picking on my mother-in-law here, it is natural to
understand and use technologies based on our needs. But, for techno-critical pedagogues, our knowledge bases should be broader, and closer to those of enthusiasts among given technologies or online environments. The end is not independent of the means. And, as we will explore later in this chapter, a broader knowledge of and experience with a given technology translates to students’ perceptions of the usefulness of such technologies in the classroom. In telling my story and detailing my knowledge base, I’m offering a more complete picture of the MOO technology we’re exploring here in depth, as well as portraying the intricacies of technological history, development, and adaptation for education. You might call it a nerd’s eye view of MOO.

Voices from the Herd: A Thumbnail Sketch of MOO Research

MOO research has attempted to do two things. First, it seeks to understand the nature of this new kind of discourse. Second, it seeks to discover and develop the pedagogical aspects of this new kind of discourse. The following topics have emerged in the literature.

Beth Kolko has identified the construction of the MOO body as a center for the study of the politicization of the online classroom. Kolko, in “Bodies in Place: Real Politics, Real Pedagogy, and Virtual Space,” argues that “by using the MOO to examine the reified relations of identity and power in real space, precisely by viewing the slippage of such relations in virtual space, that the educational use of MOO as an object lesson in politics becomes most articulated” (260). In order to understand what Kolko means by slippage, we might consider how “the processes of self-representation on a MOO must contend with a variety of layers of social constructionism” (262). At its simplest level,

133 More complete than the average new user of MOOs might have access to.
MOO, or other online sources, offer slippage in regards to the choices we are able to and do make regarding our online representation versus those we are able to make regarding our real life representations. While both kinds of representations are socially constructed, both are limited in different ways. If I am a young man using a wheelchair to be mobile, I may be at a disadvantage in a society where able-body-ness is privileged. On a MOO, I might not be obligated to represent myself (virtually) as using a wheelchair. On the other hand, I might choose to do so to make a political statement. In any cases, the slippage is the unrepresentable that exists between representations. Negotiating the said slippage offers an opportunity for critical pedagogical moments. MOOs are useful for explorations of slippage from a number of perspectives.

If we focus on Kolko’s use of the word slippage we can talk about the differences students notice between the online realm and that in the traditional classroom. Discourse is one obvious characteristic that students tend to notice as different. For one thing, some students who tend to be quiet in the traditional classroom may find themselves prone to speaking up a bit more online. Students may notice a change in the discourse of their teacher. In order to understand this, we may need to consider “discourse” in terms of nonverbal cues. For example, the mere fact that a teacher is standing while all students sit may affect discourse in a way most students are attuned to and comfortable with. Or, in terms of verbal discourse, a teacher may feel inclined to write/type language in a way than is different from how she/he might speak. Some teachers hold themselves to higher levels of “proper” English when writing/typing. Others (like some students) get caught up in the similarities between MOO chats and IM’ing, which mobilizes less formal
conventions. Also, the nature of the fast-paced short communication that MOOs wind up
producing necessitates a different approach in terms of classroom communication. A
class can discuss what these differences signal about greater changes that may be taking
place in communications as a result of the rise of the Internet. Why these differences
come about is a rich area for discussion in terms of agency and the identification of the
power structures that govern the way we communicate in the real world, but particularly
in our classrooms. The power of online spaces to ameliorate or at least make transparent
the power structures that seek to affect us in classrooms is, perhaps, the most interesting
characteristic of online pedagogy for me. While Freire offers us a framework for an
exploration of power structures in classrooms, Tari Fanderclai, whom I detail later in this
chapter, makes this the focus of her MOO research.

Also, the constructed identities of the cyberworld can offer themselves up for
discussion in comparison to our constructed identities in the real world and the rhetoric
and political pressures that encourage us to construct our identities as we do. In some
ways construction of the online persona can mirror real world pressures, in other ways it
can challenge them, but it opens the door for noticing such constructions. In the real
world, students may be so accustomed to who they are or how they act in given situations
that they take such constructions for granted. In the MOO, the constructions, for example
how gender can shape us, are more obvious. They are textual and undeniable. They are
right in front of our faces. They can be printed out and studied. Students are confronted
with these choices on the MOO from the beginning. One of the first lessons in my class is
to configure our personal settings. Students are encouraged to describe themselves any
way they’d like to, within reason, change their passwords, and configure other settings. Without prompting, they are often interested in the setting which requires the user to input gender preferences, because it offers more than the two options they are familiar with, male and female. On the MOO, one can choose among: female, male, either, Spivak, splat, plural, egotistical, royal, and 2\textsuperscript{nd}. Each choice refers to different ways the MOO will configure pronouns for your character. Since the MOO deals with a textual environment, everything and all actions are described in prose form. For example, for a male gendered avatar the MOO may write “he enters the room, but can’t seem to get his bearing.” For a Spivak gendered avatar (utilizing Michael Spivak’s conventions), the MOO might write “e enters the room, but can’t seem to get eirs bearing.” Because the MOO is a textual environment it is forced to use pronouns to describe who is doing what, and this forces users to confront the gendered nature of language. It may seem like a little thing, but the idea of a configurable gender on the MOO opens up the door for discussions about how our real world selves are gendered in various ways, that while those gendered characteristics may seem essential to our nature or natural, they are just as constructed and/or configurable as those on the MOO. We may begin to explore how our real life representations are affected by social construction for good and bad and what insight we may begin to see about others related to issues of gender constructions. The MOO experience is useful because it offers students first-hand, albeit virtual, experience negotiating what may be a touchy subject with them or a topic which seems not relevant to their past experience. The MOO experience operates as a border between past
knowledge and new experience, a "safe" standpoint from which to practice reflexivity as we explore the other side of the border, perhaps previously uncharted territory.

Kolko is also interested in the potential for MOO to serve as a "contact zone," a zone in which different agents with different identities can interact (262). This is especially relevant to MOOs that are open to the public (most MOOs). They are (potentially) international and present the opportunity for students to interact with other cultures. However, the "contact zone" idea is also just as relevant to routine class discussions that take place on the MOO. Kolko argues that student’s identities and their communications (and the narratives that form) are complex creations that adapt according to complex interactions on the MOO. As a result of the dialogic and synchronous nature of the MOO, students are constantly negotiating the narratives that are created. Kolko writes, "part of the educational role of the MOO is to allow students to see how the grounding of their bodies plays out in virtual space; part of the real pedagogy is to examine the interaction of the self with geographical (dis) placement, and to see how language is used to manipulate a constructed self" (258). Kolko encourages educators to contextualize such narratives within political contexts. In techno-critical pedagogy the nature of the term "contact zone" expands. While intuitively "contact zone" might refer to common space between two cultures or two conflicting social groups (based on class, race, sex, gender, etc.), techno-critical pedagogy might recast it to include a liminal environment in which individuals figure themselves in ways which conflict with their real

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134 I’m arguing that the MOO offers the potential to ameliorate some of the barriers that keep us from considering alternatives, either in terms of rhetorical strategies for various types of discourse or in terms of our political beliefs and how they are voiced in civil interaction in the class. I wouldn’t claim it’s a safe house in the sense of Pratt or a psychosocial moratorium. All one needs to do is read “A Rape in Cyberspace” to put those ideas to rest.
world representations. In MOO environments our own actions can become a point for study in order to elucidate differences in the “real” world. After reading Freire, and then having a routine discussion on the MOO, I can point to the log of discussion and events and question why students tackled me, or threw virtual snowballs at me, or pulled out burritos from their virtual pockets and consumed them in MOO space versus how they compose themselves in our face to face classes. While discussing burrito eating may be interesting, and certainly engaging, it may not be of pedagogical or critical political importance. On the other hand, when we look at the enthusiastic participation and blossoming of student voice in MOO discussion compared to relatively silent composure in the face-to-face classroom, we can identify the personal limitations of our voices and/or some of the negative characteristics of institutionalized education. For example, discourse in f2f class may be dominated by a teacher, or one or two vocal students, offering little space for a diversity of voices and opinions. Or, students may identify topics that make them feel uncomfortable to talk about out loud in a f2f setting, which they may feel more comfortable discussing in an online space. While using the MOO to encourage heteronormatized students to meaningfully discuss an essay about queer theory is useful for dealing with course content, commenting on the resulting discussion and comparing it to what might have occurred in a face to face classroom offers students the opportunity to critically reflect on their own tendencies for vocality as they relate to critical political issues and reconsider how they might act on what they’ve learned. Investigations of MOO discourse prod students to think about the times they are likely to
remain quiet in the classroom and envision their experience in the MOO and the light it sheds on the real world may encourage them to speak up.

Lynn Cherny is also interested in constructions of the body online. Cherny in her “Objectifying the Body in the Discourse of an Object Oriented MUD” explores ways in which the social construct of the body becomes hyperreal (in the Baudrillardian sense) via elements characteristic of the MOO. Cherny’s research may seem a bit more esoteric to those not familiar with MOOs, but it is interesting because it attempts to explore the nuances of communicative acts on the MOO. Basically, she is detailing the things we do on MOO that we cannot do in real life. An example of this is that a MOO player can be “hanging around” on the MOO while the actual person is doing something else. They can then return and scroll through the message log to see what transpired while they were away from the keyboard (afk), but still present in the virtual world. This play between time passing in a virtual environment where things can happen (a robot can enter the room and begin cleaning) versus time passing in the “real” world where things are also happening (you might be doing your laundry), relates, I think, to her appropriation of Baudrillard’s “hyperreality.” For Baudrillard, hyperreal is the term he uses to describe something that never really existed in the real world but becomes the default reality for someone. For example, Disney’s Pirates of the Caribbean has unquestionably configured the concept of pirates for many Americans. Few of us, unless we are talking about the kinds of pirates operating off the coast of Somalia, are able to untangle the effect of popular culture, be it in the form of Disney or Stevenson, and its representation of pirates. While these popular cultural representations have no “real” basis, they constitute “reality”
for many people, which Baudrillard refers to as hyperreality. While the MOO environment doesn’t necessarily confuse our impressions of the face-to-face world, our experiences in it can be so compelling that MOO environment seems to be a parallel reality. Arguably, when we hold class in an online environment, MOO can trump the real world in terms of what we should be paying attention to. As virtual environments become even more compelling and increasingly visual, massive-multiplayer online role playing games have become addictive. Some find them so addictive, such a better reality, that their real world lives suffer, they refuse to work, lose their families, and their health suffers. Recently, the first videogame addiction clinic opened in the U.S. to treat such people.

Julian Dibbell makes the connection from body to community in his “A Rape in Cyber-Space.” Dibbell writes a very accessible article about the evolution of a community on LambdaMOO. After a number of users are virtually raped and otherwise abused by another player, the Lambda-ites begin to realize that they must be careful about how they punish the perpetrator or risk destroying the best elements of their virtual community, its democracy. As one of the forerunners of other social MOOs, LambdaMOO had a standing rule, the head wizard (MOO administrator and coder), Pavel Curtis, had decided to remain apolitical. The MOO had become a social experiment in which the community had, up until the rise of Mr. Bungles, the antagonist, monitored itself. Many felt, though, that Mr. Bungles’s sexual predation necessitated an administrative punishment. The community had very little power to do anything but textually condemn his actions. Finally, a lesser MOO administrator heeded the calls for
Mr. Bungles’s virtual head and terminated his account, basically erasing Bungles’s MOO existence. The idea of a cyber-rape helps solidify the idea that our cyber-identities are more than just extensions or prostheses of ourselves, because Dibbell makes a compelling argument for the psychological and emotional affect that Mr. Bungles inflicted on the virtual victims. Dibbell raises a larger question in his essay that relates to the nature of harassment and sexual assault, the psychic damage it can inflict even when physical bodies aren’t present. It also signals a move past the gaming past of MOOs, where now there are repercussions for actions and those repercussions are decided by the community. MOO and MUD communities still struggle with the enactment of real world (draconian) punishments versus their longings for virtual spaces to be somehow utopian in nature with strong communities. For those with developed gaming literacies, Dibbell’s article foregrounds important differences between community building and social censure in educational spaces compared to gaming spaces. While Dibbell’s essay relates to what might happen to us in cyberspace (and what we might do to others), it offers new perspectives on what’s at stake in terms of our representations. While in an online setting, like Second Life, students might trick out their self-representations with all kinds of ridiculous elements (for example, walk around in a Kool-Aid man outfit carrying a fire axe), the implications of virtual representations having real effects can quickly rein in their representations, or at least make students more thoughtful about them. We, then, might draw parallels between our experiences discussing the implications of the issues Dibbell raises in comparison to our self-representations in the context of social networking sites, where poorly construed representations could mean the difference
between getting a job or not, if a prospective employer found something disconcerting about a student online.

Universities are using MOOs for online writing centers in addition to venues to teach writing classes. The reasons are indicative of the benefits that writing classrooms are interested in too. Eric Crump in “Writing Centers Learn to Wallow” argues that this venue is good for writing tutoring because it is dialogic, can be recorded, and promotes a community of writers.

Crump is especially interested in MOOs because the communication is synchronous, happening real-time. Obviously, a strength of face-to-face writing tutoring (f2f) is that the tutor and tutee can establish a dialogue. For a writing classroom, this is beneficial compared to other forms of distance learning where teacher and student may not get the chance for real conversation or discussion, and therefore be unable to deal with conflicts that arise that must be worked out via dialogue or even get to feel like they know each other. In online teaching we might consider the benefits of real time interactions vs. asynchronous practices, such as using the Blackboard “Discussion Board” function for out of class activities.

Crump also points out that logs are helpful. While f2f tutoring also is dialogic, the communication is done orally and therefore it is ephemeral. One tool of the MOO is the message log which “records” a list of everything that happens and is said during one’s session on the MOO. A tutor (or teacher) can save such a log and email it to the students as well. This has obvious benefits for those of us that practice peer critiques. Not only can a student get a marked up copy of their paper, but also a word for word log of what was
said and any work accomplished during a peer critique session. Such logs can serve as points of study in class, for example to talk about what worked and what didn’t work in a peer critique.

Crump also foregrounds the ability of MOOs to produce community. This is perhaps one of the most exciting aspects of teaching on the MOO. As a Residence Learning Community instructor, I’ve been working with the university to develop a new kind of university atmosphere in which a community of learning is fostered. As students learn to negotiate the MOO they learn to take responsibility for the management of their new environment. We start this process after our first session when we decompress and discuss our experiences online. I ask students what they noticed in the session, what was good about and what was bad about it. As they catalogue characteristics of MOO discourse, I ask them to consider strategies we might use to address those problems. As they make decisions regarding the management of their community they begin to take responsibility for that community and for their own learning. Students might decide that we should institute a convention in which we use the name of the person we are replying to in order to understand each other in the multi-threaded conversations that can occur during discussion. They might initially call for a teacher to differentiate their discourse with bold typeface, but change their minds after a discussion about how teachers’ voices function in traditional classrooms and how teachers’ voices can silence. In this case, they begin to consider alternate learning environments and alternate modes of communication, or how the medium can affect the message.
Tari Fanderclai in her “MUDs in Education: New Environments New Pedagogies” sketches out the greatest decisions a teacher will have to make in terms of teaching on a MOO. Her article outlines the conflict between the establishment of traditional classroom management and the exciting possibilities that MOOs offer in terms of community building. Fanderclai urges teachers to utilize the potential of the MOO to be a tool to question tradition and create a democratic community of learning. MOOs can be very powerful tools of motivation because they are fun, and part of that fun comes from engaging in community building.

Though short, Fanderclai’s article hits a pedagogical vein. In general, people fear change, and teachers are no exception. Teaching on a MOO is frightening at first. The host of skills that we develop to control students, that is, to get what we want accomplished in the classroom, become shaky on the MOO. Teachers may scramble to cook up new methods of classroom management that create the same kind of control they have in the traditional classroom. For example, they may ask students to raise their hands on the MOO before speaking, trying to mirror face-to-face discourse in the online setting. Or, they may respond to students’ virtual behavior as disruptive, rather than a starting for discussion, either to allow students the opportunity to come up with non-disruptive rules or merely begin a discussion that highlights differences between the MOO environment and face-to-face classroom in order to explore issues of institutionalized classroom control. While that may make the MOO environment comfortable for the teacher, and initially comfortable for students, it denies the opportunity to the students to develop communal responsibility. In essence, in posits control in the teacher, and is not
democratic. While it is questionable just how democratic a classroom should be, students can achieve some self-government on the MOO that is harder to achieve in the real classroom, because the MOO is a new environment. I can remember that scary moment when I first let things “get out of control” on the MOO. While it initially felt like Golding’s *Lord of the Flies*, and afterwards, we had a very useful discussion about how the communication fell apart and good ideas about how we as a class could foster a kind of communication that privileged everyone. Instructors and students need to acknowledge that new communicational, technological environments constitute new rhetorical environments; they may allow us to see old relationships in a new light, but they may require us to develop new relationships and new strategies for effectively communicating.

One of the more recent forays into MOO research was conducted by Susan Antlitz in 2005 in the form of her dissertation entitled *Building Textual Spaces: MOO Writing in the First Year Composition Classroom*. Antlitz studied three main foci for her research questions: 1. “How do students negotiate (or resist negotiating) the task of presenting a paper topic as a constructed MOO space that uses “rooms” and “objects” within the MOO? What textual features characterize the texts students write in the MOO?” 2. “What are the subjective responses students have to this type of technology use, and what might account for their responses?” 3. “What might account for difficulties

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135 I’m arguing here that it’s easier to negotiate power structures and rules of behavior in a different, but related, environment, such as the MOO turned to Academic purposes, rather than the traditional classroom, which students have been acculturated to for 13 or more years of their life prior to our meeting. We can do some things in the real classroom, such as arrange chairs in a circle, ask students to speak without raising their hands, have them call us by our first name, which doesn’t always work. I’d argue that often these changes in the real world are easier to make after students have tackled them virtually.
students encountered as they attempted to write in the MOO, and what strategies or methods might writing instructors use to resolve these?” (124).

In response to her first focus, regarding the textual spaces of the MOO, Antlitz found that students blended “spatial and conventional elements in terms of content and structure” (133). The way this played out is that in the course of constructing their MOO spaces students incorporated research and argument, much like they would in a standard expository essay. For example, some students, indeed, used the spatial environment of the MOO merely as a different means of structure, where one may transition from room to room rather than paragraph to paragraph. In the conventional model, an introductory paragraph might be the first MOO room player enters. The introduction room might have only two entrances, one back to wherever the entrance was and one that leads on to the first paragraph in the “body” of the paper, and so forth. Others, built information and argument into scenes they constructed which mirrored real life settings. For example, “one student writing about abortion designed her MOO space as a hospital and included a brochure as an object which contained statistical information” (129). For this section of research, Antlitz finds that students, for the most part, blended such uses of the MOO and that “their encounters with these choices in their writing can be a valuable experience” (133).

In response to her second set of research questions, Antlitz finds that students were, for the most part, positive in their responses to the MOO. Students seemed predisposed to read into the medium based on their own contexts as writers. Some, for instance, found the MOO liberating because it didn’t offer a structure as traditional or
stuck in our psyche as a traditional research paper. The traditional research paper can feel boring and confining in the five-paragraph-like structure that students have often encountered it. MOO writing can be more interesting because it forces us to think in a way we are not accustomed to, textually and spatially, in our other Academic writing. Antlitz’s more conventionally-minded students found it easy to write in the environment because they read the spatial characteristics as a sort of structure in itself; that is, one MOO room leads to another, just as one idea might lead to another. They were able to take a conventional structure, such as the five-paragraph essay and adapt it to the new spatial medium of the MOO. But, MOO architecture doesn’t have to be linear, so while a five-paragraph essay transposed in a MOO might look like a shotgun shack, linear, the ability to write transitions to other ideas in any direction might lead to a MOO composition that isn’t linear, but blooms out in way more akin to hypertext. What’s interesting to me as a MOO researcher, in terms of Antlitz’s data here, is the way students found completely differing perspectives of the MOO positive in light of their own needs. Antlitz notes an initial resistance to the MOO which dissipated after students became more familiar with the technicalities. Antlitz herself finds the MOO compelling for use in a composition class because it offers unique experiences in terms of spatial-textual construction. She argues that the choices students have in this medium stretches their rhetorical muscles and gets them thinking a little harder about the opportunities and limitations of written/typed text. She also mentions some of the skills related to textual production in the MOO (such as composing in smaller components) that relate to composition in other electronic spaces such as Web sites. Antlitz’s last two points
directly relate to techno-critical pedagogy as it seeks borders between communicative environments in order to develop literacy and rhetorical strategies in both informed by each other. This border hopping and informing is what I’ve referred to previously as literacy transference.

The third set of research questions focused on what strategies might be important in terms of implementing the MOO successfully in writing classes. Antliz starts this section by discussing what it took to get herself up and running in the environment and discusses the initial student resistance to the environment. As they practiced more in the environment, the usefulness of the environment became more apparent to them. I’ve seen this transpire myself, both in terms of the study we conducted at Ohio University, responses I’ve seen from TAs during MOO training, and my own experiences with students in MOO and other semi-related environments such as Second Life. Antlitz argues that successful composition in the MOO requires a more wholistic implementation of MOO practice in the class as a whole. I’ve already noted how this transpires in terms of training faculty in one-session sittings. Without the routine use of an environment like the MOO, through multiple visits, users tend to transfer their initial feelings of confusion and discomfort to the medium in general. This is akin to a kindergartener trying to learn the alphabet in an hour session, being confused, deciding that the alphabet is just too difficult to ever learn and giving up. To extend the narrative on our poor kindergartener, if her/his teacher only introduced the alphabet one time for an hour session, saw how confusing it was to the students, and pulled it from the curriculum, parents would be horrified. It’s only through routine practices with systems that we grow accustomed to
them, learn them, and internalize them and develop the facility to deconstruct them and synthesize. Antlitz also mentions that one problem she encountered was the students’ lack of access to the MOO outside of her classroom. While that hasn’t applied to our MOO at Ohio University (except in rare cases where students’ or campus computers were poorly configured), it brings up an important point. To become literate in these environments, in class access is not enough. Imagine teaching a writing class where writing could only be done in the classroom, not at home. How effective would such a class be in developing students writing skills, if they were not able to practice those skills outside of the classroom? How effective would such a class be in developing their personal agency as related to writing skills? In developing advanced literacy? Students need access to the technologies they are studying in class outside of class, for one thing because it helps them conceptualize it as relevant to the real world outside the Academy, thus learning that crosses a border. What I mean to say is that by experiencing what we are studying in contexts outside the realm of the classroom we reduce the risk of considering what happens in the classroom relevant only there. This argument is the inverse of the one I’ve made earlier regarding the importance of accessing technology, specifically computers, inside the writing classroom. Both arguments are valid. The MOO, in particular, given its strangeness to many casual users is more at risk to be considered irrelevant out of hand, because it does not intuitively relate to what many people think of when they think of composition coursework. The routine use of MOO technology and practice in MOO composing is a good start towards building a knowledge

136 I’m aware that this is not a hypothetical situation, but has been put in practice many times in the past and currently is probably the case in many schools in America.
base, but outside access allows the conceptual space to view MOO experience as something different from just a strange practice a composition instructor cooked up. In my opinion this is an important step in escaping the technology as niche specialty mentality. One of the most interesting suggestions Antlitz makes, in light of my own inclination to contextualize the MOO, and, frankly, my fear that some of this chapter will be disregarded by my readers as self-indulgent, is when she says “I think it would have been more effective to have introduced the MOO, not just as a media and forum, but as a complete context—with its own history, mindset, audience needs and expectations, etc.” (150). I would argue, this quote relates to other technological practices as well.

Working on the MOO

An overview of The Bobkatz’ Writing Pad MOO will provide a sense of how MOOs are being used today for education and will also offer a glance at the future of MOOs, as the enCore consortium continues to develop their graphical user interface (GUI). As noted before, OU’s MOO is currently being used for three main purposes: a repository for WID resources, a space for online writing tutoring, and an environment to teach in. Teaching, tutoring, and environments for professional development and collaboration are, after all, how most institutions use MOO.
First, the MOO has a Writing in the Disciplines (WID) room in which teachers interested in incorporating writing in classes from different disciplines can congregate, share ideas, and ask questions. It is also a repository of resources for teaching writing and teaching on the MOO. We hope to foster a sense of community among teachers, as well as students. Over the last several years, one of the most successful uses of the MOO has related to graduate student writing groups that meet in the WID room. These groups have consisted of students from different disciplines who are working on their dissertations. The MOO has been particularly successful for groups composed of people who live in places where they cannot easily come to the main campus and meet face to face. The MOO, then, serves as a convenient location for peer critiquing and community building. I can attest to the disconnect a graduate student can feel on completion of formal
coursework. I can also attest to the benefit the MOO serves for such groups (as I participated in one) especially in terms of constructing a feeling of community.

Second, the MOO includes a Writing Center. Students can go to the Writing Center and sign up for a session with a tutor. Tutoring will take place online. Tutors are trained to work on the MOO and have previous experience in f2f tutoring. The Writing Center also serves as a repository for writing resources, some of which are specific to MOOs. For example, we have a “bot” in the Writing Center (a primitive version of a robot) who can answer a limited number of questions about writing. For example, in the entrance to the Student Writing Center, a user might ask Party-Dog, the bot, about making an appointment. Party-Dog would then respond “If you’d like to make an appointment for a session with a writing tutor, then click on the appointment book in the picture to the right.” MOO tutoring has been limping along behind the other services, but has picked up as of late. Online tutoring is not only about convenience and preference, but our obligations to students who may not be able to make it to campus or may experience disabilities that keep them from accessing face-to-face services that are available to other students.

And finally, the MOO includes a section of writing classrooms. I’ve been teaching (off and on) in the MOO since its inception. Several other instructors have used it as a teaching tool in their courses. Although it has usually been used for writing classes, I’ve seen literature classes and others meeting on the MOO. Invariably, the first thing people ask when they are introduced to MOO is what does it stand for. As I’ve noted elsewhere, it stands for Multi-user Domain Object-Oriented. Multi-user Domain refers to

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137 Only in the last few years has the university granted us dedicated physical space for our Writing Center.
MUDs (earlier incarnations of MOOs…also known as Multi-user Dungeons as result of their connection to gaming). The object-oriented part is a reference to the way the MOO program/computer language understands components of the environments. The MOO code views every “thing” in a MOO as an object with varied behaviors, characteristics, capable of various actions depending on what the “thing” is. For example, a MOO user is considered an object, a MOO user of a various type (wizard/administrator, generic user, etc.). In BobkatzMOO students do very basic programming with the help of the interface when they create virtual drafts of their papers. While a MOO user doesn’t need to know any of the background I’m describing here, it helps them in a couple of ways. First, this kind of background gives them the language to discuss the environment and our actions in it in a meta-cognitive way. While this is not the end all, be all of MOO pedagogy, it is another opening for students to approach advanced literacy that incorporates different experiences and advanced knowledge in different technical environments which then translate to literacy that makes them more adept in new environments where some characteristics of the prior literacies relate. For example, the compartmentalized way MOO deals with various objects might inform students in environments like Facebook that incorporate the use of widgets, or blog environments like that of Blogger that compartmentalize various subsections of a blog setup and encourages new layouts via dragging and dropping. I’m basically arguing here that while through a limited lens an instructor might consider the more esoteric or advanced knowledge related to MOO practice as superfluous (or to be more honest, nerdy and unrelated to practical applications related to the practice), through the lens of techno-critical pedagogy that
advanced literacy related to one particular technology is relevant to the generation of advanced literacy, in general.\textsuperscript{138} If we are interested in student agency, in offering our students the literacy they need in a modern world, as well as an increased bag of rhetorical strategies, then it behooves us to reconsider what we’ve previously considered too advanced, too nerdy, or too niche-oriented and how we present technologies to our students in the class.\textsuperscript{139} An explanation of the acronym, MOO, might seem gratuitous, an excuse to nerd out, but a further discussion of the implications of the acronym, how it relates to MOO programming, and how that is relevant to modern literacy is actually a techno-critical pedagogical move. We have to seek out these places in order to map the structures that overlap in terms of literacy and politics, in order, to become more facile and capable in different technological domains.

Bobkatz MOO’s user interface (enCore Xpress) is available in the following screenshot. You’ll see that there are a row of buttons across the top for easy navigation, a graphic component on the right which visually displays images of the room, objects in the room in the form of icons with clickable links, and exits. On the left hand side of the screen is the chat area. In the old days (pre-enCore), a MOO consisted entirely of the left hand side of the screen. The only “images” MOOs displayed were ASCII images created

\textsuperscript{138} For example, writing in a wiki reminds me of and mobilizes my experience with writing in email clients and word processors. This shows that sites like \textit{PBWorks} are designing their user interfaces to leverage different kinds of literacies exhibited by their users.

\textsuperscript{139} I’m harkening back to notion that it isn’t our job to teach computer literacy, or even more specifically, the idea that MOO is so esoteric it is a waste of our time as writing instructors to consider using such a technology.
from letters and keyboard characters, more advanced precursors to texting emotes such as :), the smiley.\textsuperscript{140}

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{enCoreXpress/4.0.1 (BobKatzMOO)\hspace{1cm}Welcome - BobKatz' Writing Pad}
\caption{EnCore Xpress MOO interface.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{140} Isn’t it interesting that when I type a colon and a parenthesis Word wants to change it to ☺. Not only is our (or at least our students) writing changing as a result of technology, but the technologies we use for writing are integrating those changes and, in the course of doing so, putting their stamp of approval on them via making those changes possible.
A discussion of MOO as practice offers the opportunity to begin at the beginning, the login page and discuss components of practice that sometimes we take for granted, or that get lost in the shuffle. If we are talking about building proficiency in modern literacy, the process of account creation and logging in is a simple, but important part of modern literacy. It’s worth noting that while after taking my class students may be unlikely to log into a MOO again, or tinker with their profiles, it’s likely they will have to do so in some other context for some other electronic medium. And while the login process will most certainly be different, some aspects of it will relate. While we may hate the logistics of operating in electronic sites, the account creation, talking students through it, and patiently waiting as they make mistakes in login, forget their passwords, etc., it’s an important part of their development of aspects of literacy that relate to these technological environments. This is particularly aggravating to me. However, it is essential that students have the opportunity in our classes to forget their login info and then go through the process of retrieving it, so that can either learn strategies to not do so in the future (i.e. write it down) when it really matters (for example in an online application system for graduate school) or at least be prepared to navigate the retrieval process on their own in a capable manner. I’m arguing that this kind of facility with technological communicative environments is similar to traditional views that position the writing classroom as the place where students learn where to put the commas in the right places. Learning to remember one’s password, understanding how to log in, being able to troubleshoot are elements of literacy in online writing spaces and though such
details are not sexy, we do our students a disservice when we deny the relevance of such skills to our writing classrooms.

After students login, we practice the groundwork of communicating in the MOO, learning the difference between saying, whispering, and paging. We work on developing our profiles. Since the MOO is a textual environment, a MOO description of a user is a text that is seen when another user clicks on your MOO character. For example, my MOO character,\(^\text{141}\) shovlin, has a description that reads:

> A slightly scruffy character stares back at you. Judging from his worn flannel, old jeans, and unkempt beard this guy might be a lumberjack, if he weren't so short. For a second, you think this fellow looks intelligent, and then you realize it's just because he's wearing glasses. Still, he does look helpful. Maybe, you should ask him that question that's been gnawing at you.

Students are encouraged to develop their own online representations too. While something as simple as logging into an electronic domain may relate to literacy that applies to other electronic environments, self representation is relevant to many other electronic environments too, and particularly related to our jobs in the classroom, as ethos and self representation are often concerns in our writing. If we expand “writing” to include other compositions we create, obviously, then, electronic self-representation is important to consider in electronic environments. In the MOO this is more obvious because it is a text-based environment. Often, but not exclusively, our representation in

\(^{141}\) I often interchangeably used the words character, user, avatar, and sometimes player. Avatar is probably the term most in use. An avatar is an online representation of a person.
the MOO is based on written (i.e. typed) words. But, in other sites, say Second Life, or even Facebook (via the profile) our representations are more or less balanced between graphical and written textual components. Further, I think our ability to analyze self-representation in a given context is a result of contextualization. That is, we are better able to understand what self-representation means in Facebook by comparing its similarities and differences to self-representation in other mediums or other environments. Uncovering those borders between mediums becomes important, then in developing our strategies for self-representation. Recently, because I was on the job market, I spent a fair amount of time scrutinizing my Facebook representation. I picked my current profile picture based on the idea that it would be viewed by a prospective employer. Unsurprisingly, in an on-campus interview the chair of the English Department revealed that I’d been Googled.

While the analysis of such environments as the MOO is important, rather than merely focus on savvy consumption, as important as I’ve argued that is when our communication is funneled through consumer applications, I think production is important too. In the MOO, production (or composition) relates to the communication we produce via chat sessions, which I’ll discuss as practice a little further on. Production also relates to the compositions of MOO objects, in the form of virtual drafts or MOO space. If descriptions of what the MOO acronym means can seem superfluous to someone not accustomed to consider the implications of things from a techno-critical pedagogical standpoint, the idea of students’ building in MOOs may seem to be a total waste of time.

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142 Self-representation in sites like Facebook is very relevant to our students’ abilities to succeed professionally, particularly when prospective employers are asking questions like “Would we see anything embarrassing for you if you were to access your Facebook page right now?”
at worst or at best a nifty, but application-less practice which might just happen to be engaging. Actually, composing spaces in the MOO is important because it forces students to think with different muscles, to represent space in a textual environment in ways they have not had the opportunity to do in the past, or at least aren’t aware of. As a technocritical pedagogue, I believe that developing literacies in environments like the MOO are compelling because they offer an exploration of the borders between textual and graphical and spatial representation. Spatiality in the MOO as applied to MOO writing offers students another rhetorical tool they might not have access to otherwise, because we do not intuitively conflate space and text in the same way when we engage with conventional\textsuperscript{143} writing. Rhetorical strategies incorporating experimentation with conventions in Academic writing are especially useful in new genres such as Vielstimmig’s New Essay and even in new technological genres (wikis, for example) that incorporate blended media. If Second Life offers the opportunity to better analyze self and place as rhetorical construction, the MOO muddles things in interesting ways by conflating written (and sometimes graphical) texts with the idea of virtual (and by extension physical) place. Antlitz has done a good job of exploring this in her dissertation and study previously mentioned.

Currently, in addition to the text-based MOO, we are using a piece of software that has been integrated into the program. The open source software, called EnCore, provides a template that includes graphic components. To put it simply, the MOO is still

\textsuperscript{143} I wanted to use the term “vanilla” here, which is often a software reference to unmodified first versions of software, especially games. So, World of Warcraft without any of the expansion packs might be referred to as vanilla WoW. As you can imagine, the term evolves from the idea of a plain flavor versus something more novel or complex like pistachio walnut.
text-based, and all communication in the MOO is textual. The graphic interface just makes it easier to accomplish tasks, such as moving from room to room, checking one’s mail, and creating objects on the MOO because they are rendered visually. To be honest, I was not sure how I felt about this integration of even rudimentary graphics. But, the possibilities it offers in terms of enriching the MOO teaching experience are just too great. One example of this is that it is now possible to project images from the Web onto a portion of the computer screen that will be visible to everyone in the discussion. So, from our own computers, we can all look at the same image, say a cigarette ad from the 1920s, and analyze it in real time textual communication. Basically, it makes the entire Internet available as a resource.

In the future, it is possible that MOOs may become even more graphically-oriented. For example, in the past a grant proposal was submitted at OU to develop a MOO that integrates a web camera and microphone into the MOO. I had mentioned this to my students one day on the MOO and they were skeptical about the shift to graphics. Part of the nature of the text-based MOO is that immersion into the cipher/TEXT, the word that Haynes and Holmevik coined. Somehow, we feel that seeing and hearing everyone will fundamentally change the discourse for the worse.144 As evidenced by my initial reaction to the EnCore system, and most people’s initial reaction to the MOO, it is quite common to be scared of change. The challenge of the future will be in evaluating and adapting future developments of MOO in terms of our expected pedagogical

144 A reader pointed out that this could be the result of the conflict of interests between different kinds of learners, for example an auditory learner vs. a visual learner. I think it is also more deeply entrenched in Academic traditions that estrange the visual (pictures are for children) and champion the print-textual (serious books lack illustration).
outcomes. In addition, as evidenced by the graphical move being made even by ascii-based games (again, games where various things and monsters are represented by keyboard characters), it appears some educational MOOs may be evolving in this direction. Several years ago at a Computers and Writing conference some schools were showing MOO like applications that functioned with graphical representations, rather than textual ones. Such sites still incorporate text for chat functions, but not in terms of representing MOO avatars and rooms. The result is almost like a low tech, smaller version of a Second Life environment cast in MOO terms, text-based chat with low tech (sometimes top down or 2-D) graphics, configurable code and hosted by individual schools.

MOO’d Swings: Administration of a MOO

My doctoral program was inextricably tied to the MOO, since I was accepted into the program with a stipend based on MOO administration and development. I had several responsibilities: straddling the point between our subject content or focus (writing enrichment) and the structure via which it would be transmitted, in this case the technology of the MOO; doing administrative work on the MOO, (making new passwords for people who lost them, creating accounts for newbies, etc.), and training folks to use the MOO, both students, writing tutors, TAs, and even faculty and other administrators. As our initiative broadened my duties took me to regional campuses. And, of course, I was inclined to use the MOO extensively in my own teaching, in a hybrid class, one in which we met via the MOO once a week and face-to-face the rest of the time. In a class that met five times a week we might use the MOO twice, sometimes in
class, logging on together. Six to eight times per quarter we might meet exclusively in the MOO.

While I saw and realized the pedagogical potential of this technology, it was a hard sell in terms of the TAs, WAC faculty, and administrators I was responsible for proselytizing. There are a few reasons for this. The MOO was new to a lot of people. It wasn’t as intuitive to use as an Instant Messaging client. On the other hand, it was more than an IM client, given the 3rd dimension it offered in terms of that illusion of narrative/prose. It was prone to some of Microsoft Explorer’s growing pains, since it was dependant on a Web browser for access. This made it particularly buggy in some aspects. Macs did not like the MOO much at all, at first. Many of these issues have been resolved as people have, in general, upgraded their hardware and software. The biggest blow to the MOO, though, in my estimation, has to do with the mentality I’ve described elsewhere in this dissertation, the idea that technological literacies are a different animal from and should take a backseat to print-text based literacies. That attitude, coupled with the anxiety many non-techie people exhibit, was a veritable death knell for the MOO. Training sessions were inadequate because I attempted to train in a single stand-alone session. The MOO is not simply an application that one masters, but an environment that one learns to navigate. We acclimate ourselves to new environments over a period of time, not just the first time. Since the first session in a MOO is often chaotic for people, most characterized the environment as inherently chaotic, and it was anxiety provoking for teachers who were concerned with classroom control. Further, it’s worth noting that many of the TAs I’ve trained were negotiating their own identities as new teachers at the
same time. If you imagine something like someone coming up with a new teaching method based on a new kind of literacy, say, the teaching of all math classes in a foreign language, and English speaking instructors were given an introduction to this method by sitting in such a classroom once, most would probably leave the room feeling that it was a waste of time. While this example is a silly one, the difference in my case with MOO is that the alternate language or literacy, the technical literacy necessitated in the case of the MOO, should not be separated from a sense of complex sorts of literacy that are required in our professional and personal lives, which include literacies related to all sorts of different media and technologies. I’ve written a lot about this in Chapter One. As we refigure terms like “writing” and emphasize terms like composition and rhetoric, which may be more encompassing, we’ll find that using technologies like the MOO offers another important facet to the literacy we develop in our writing classes, rather than detract from what we “should” be doing. In fact, the very conflicts and anxieties that get in the way of the implementation of the technology are the sites of conflict and opportunities for learning we should be embracing, rather than retreating from.

Studying MOO

In addition to the administrative work and my teaching experiences, I’ve been involved with a couple of studies which gathered data from students regarding their perceptions of, among other things, MOO’ing. One limitation of these studies as they relate to my dissertation is that they were designed and conducted before I began to work formally on techno-critical pedagogy. They are useful because they offer a window on student and instructor reactions to technologies novel to them. In that capacity they
illustrate some of what I’ve been writing about in this chapter regarding the difficulties in encouraging instructors to get on board with technological practice. The student data we generated from the studies is more closely related to their perceptions of the technology, rather than quantitative data regarding the “actual” effectiveness of the practice. In particular, we designed the studies that way because we noticed a trend by techno-enthusiasts to either disregard student input in their overzealousness and excitement about a new technology or just anecdotally claim that the new technology was engaging. So, while I can’t integrate their data in the dissertation in the same way I might be able to with a study that was specifically designed for it (or that composed the bulk of the dissertation), the data will offer some perspective we should consider in light of technocritical pedagogy. At the very least, it will offer another facet to our understanding of MOO environments and deepen our study of it here, which I promised was the point of this chapter. I’ll begin by looking at a perceptual study focused solely on the MOO then move to a hybrid study that looked at student collaboration in wiki and MOO spaces. I’ll be integrating some student voices along the way as I spin a narrative of what happened, rather than summarize those voices at the end.

The Perceptual Study

A year or so after the MOO was developed, piloted, and implemented, the WPAs associated with it decided it was time to use it as a site for research. We were especially interested in some sort of assessment related to the practice of teaching in MOO environments because the data could help us tailor our services to our students. Candace Stewart, who was Coordinator of the Student Writing Center and Sherrie Gradin, Director
of the Center for Writing Excellence, served as co-developers with me as we theorized what we were going to focus on in our study. After several discussions and a survey of the MOO research literature, Candace pointed out that while the literature gave plenty of air-time to instructor voices, student responses to MOO environments were lacking. She argued that although the theory on MOOs and the teacher reactions were interesting, they constituted only one bookend on a shelf crammed with books. Student voices, we felt, were necessary to offer a counter point to hold up the theory in the literature.

We narrowed our focus to Tari Fanderclai’s ideas about classroom management, which surface in her short but meaningful essay “MUDs in Education: New Environments, New Pedagogies.” As I mentioned in the lit survey in this chapter, Fanderclai argues that virtual spaces such as the MOO, with their peculiar affects on discourse, offer an amelioration of the effects of institutionalized educational classroom management and control. Fanderclai argues that educators should revise their pedagogies to leverage the opportunities that MOO spaces offer for revising classroom power structures. We started our study off by theorizing different classroom management structures for MOO sessions in order to gauge how students reacted to self-managed versus more heavily teacher-managed activities.

As part of the perceptual study, I recruited several teachers to implement the MOO in their freshman composition courses, consisting of twenty students in each course. Teachers were given minimal MOO training, although some were more familiar with it than others through previous encounters. MOO training consisted of a couple of hours of walk through material, similar to that which I described that I do with my
students, logging in together, composing self-representations, and practicing MOO discourse and discussing it.

Our collection of student produced data consisted of short pre-study surveys, weekly free-written journal entries, and a post-study freewrite. The pre-study survey consisted of the following questions:

- What kind of learner do you think you are? That is, how do you learn best? Under what kind of circumstances?

- What are your feelings about group work and group decision-making? How useful are these learning components?

- What role do you think your instructor should play in your learning process?

- What role do you think you should play in your learning process?

The weekly journal entries were left to the instructors (whom I detail in the next few paragraphs) to design based on whatever types of activities were going on in the MOO that week. I encouraged the other instructors to play around with how she structured the MOO sessions, alternating between more openly designed activities, in which students determined their own organization and more closely controlled activities in which the teacher assigned specific roles to different members of groups. While a free for all session might consist of twenty students talking together in a chat focused on a reading (which indeed is the case in the sample of MOO discourse I offer above), a more managed activity might look something like this:
An example of a managed MOO class meeting.

Raymond Carver MOO Session:
Tomorrow we will be testing small group discussion of questions relating to Raymond Carver’s “What We Talk about When We Talk about Love.” We will be meeting in the place we usually meet, the writing classroom (as opposed to our ill-fated attempt to use The Grid). The following groups will be working together at these tables: Red and Blue groups will be meeting at the Red table, Orange and Beige groups will be meeting at the Orange table, Lime and Teal groups will be meeting at the Lime table, Silver and Green groups will be meeting at the Silver table, Purple and Yellow groups will be meeting at the Purple table. If you don’t remember your color, ask today before leaving. The questions will be listed on the bulletin board. You should be able to click on the bulletin board after you are sitting down at the appropriate table, so that you can chat on the left side of the screen and look at the questions on the right side at the same time.

If your group needs to contact me, you can do so without standing up. Choose someone to type: “page <insert name> with <insert message>” and then your message. For example, “page paulshank with we need some help at the orange table” will send me that message.

Agenda:
1:10pm- Class Starts. Sit at your tables. Decide on the roles for the group.
1:15pm- Start your small group discussion of 6 questions. Spend no more than 5 minutes of discussion on each.
1:45pm- Finish discussion and stand up from your tables to join a full class discussion.
1:55pm- Take 5 minutes to write a response detailing the strengths and weaknesses of your session in terms of management issues. Was your time well spent? Why or why not? How was the management for today’s class different than other MOO sessions? How did that contribute/detract from the results?

MOO Meeting protocol:

Recorder: One person will be responsible for recording the session, printing out a hardcopy and bringing it to class the next day. Make sure you choose someone who can take this responsibility. The recorder should also write down the names of the people in their group and their roles on the hardcopy.

Task Manager: One person will be responsible for keeping the session on track when people start talking about something else and keeping the conversation moving forward when you’ve exhausted a topic. How often did people get off track? How did you or your group deal with it? Include your responses to this question in your MOO response (completed during the last 5 minutes of class).

Time Keeper: One person will be responsible for keeping time. Limit yourselves to a five minute discussion of each question. Keep an eye out for any missing or late students. Do they detract from the session (for example, pose a distraction)? If so, how? Did your group just ignore it? Include your responses to this question in your MOO response (completed during the last 5 minutes of class).

Facilitator: One person will be responsible for encouraging EVERYONE to talk. What did you notice about your classmates’ interactions? Do you think everyone participated equally? If not, why not? If so, what did you contribute to the session? Include your responses to this question in your MOO response (completed during the last 5 minutes of class).

Figure 4. Managed MOO activity.

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145 This activity is a good example of a very teacherly-controlled MOO activity. Students are assigned into groups, given an agenda, and roles. The weekly freewrite related to this activity asked students to write about their perception of this session related to less closely controlled MOO sessions and to explain how they did in their role. One issue with an activity like this is that it takes a bit of technological literacy in MOO sites in order to be designed by a teacher and implemented/facilitated. While students did respond to such activities in a positive way, I’m not sure if a teacher new to MOO technology could pull it off. Another issue is that sometimes the areas of contention, conflict, and anxiety in electronic environments are the ones that cause us to adapt to something new or different about the environment, rather than just operate in it in ways familiar to other mediums (i.e. the face-to-face classroom). I think it’s a good idea to mix things up like we did in the study when routinely using particular technologies. Gee would call this becoming literate in the semiotic domain. Giroux would refer to the areas of contention as sites of borders between previous and new experience.
Finally, the last part of the data collection, the post-study freewrite focused on students’ reflections about their experiences over the quarter. Much of the information I describe here was shared as part of a roundtable discussion, entitled “Virtual Bodies, Virtual Management: Student Perceptions of Teacher Control in a MOO Environment,” that I facilitated with Rachel Brooks-Rather at the Computers and Writing conference in 2004. The data incorporated in that presentation wasn’t formalized or published because the study had not yet officially ended; the conference took place during the finals for the classes we were studying and the data we were working with was still raw.

While I only met with the teachers a couple of times at the beginning of the study, I shared many discussions with them in the hallways and realized that the study was evolving soon after it started. In particular, I found myself spending a lot of time in my discussions with other instructors doing damage control. Teachers were having a difficult time navigating the new environment with their limited literacy, which contributed to an almost inability to implement the more teacherly-managed activities. I realized that advanced literacy and the confidence that comes with it was necessary to be able to establish structures similar to those we take for granted in face-to-face classrooms that keep students “managed.” The resulting feeling of illiteracy and of chaos in the MOO classroom, led to panic among instructors and feelings of the MOO as an ineffective practice. Given their inexperience with the environment, and my inexperience at the time with instructing instructors at that stage, they were often unable even to make use of the chaos they experienced with their classes as an opportunity for learning (i.e. discussing exactly what happened, and why, and theorizing strategies for avoiding it in the future in
the MOO). After the study was concluded some data seemed to suggest that changes in the teacher/student power dynamic could be perceived as beneficial to students. One student wrote, “I also like how the teacher’s role is not as traditional. They seem to mash in and act like a student in discussions…The student’s role is increased somewhat because there is some privacy and the teacher can’t always be watching.” This student’s point suggests that it’s not only important to stick in there when negotiating a new technological environment, but also to consider some of the benefits of aspects that may have been previously troublesome.

Although I’ve explained what I mean by chaos when referring to the MOO, I’ll repeat that it often entails a reaction to two particular characteristics of the MOO, the discourse and the ability to perform actions. Since MOO is like a chatroom, there is no default, intuitive way to signal when a person is talking (remember, in a face-to-face classroom students will often hold up a hand). The resulting discourse is somewhat like a discussion board in real time with three or four different threads of conversation going and different people’s responses to different threads, but the conversations and threads are all lumped together in one chat window that everyone has access to. It is a different way of communicating than other mediums most people are familiar with, even Instant Messaging clients, because they rarely have twenty different users on at the same time in the same chat session. An excerpt of a sample MOO session follows:
It can be confusing. And, as all of the participating instructors were graduate student Teaching Assistants, they were still negotiating their authority, and probably nervous about it, in face-to-face classrooms. The ability to perform actions probably affected their lack of confidence in the environment as well. In most movies, for example, that channel

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146 In the excerpt, you can see me (referred to above as “You”) asking questions about MOO discourse in the midst of chaotic activity. The students’ names are all appended with _Mr.S to denote to other MOO users that they are connected to my class. The repeated phrase “goosefraba” comes from the movie *Anger Management*, which was newly in theatres at the time. It refers to a soothing phrase Inuit mothers would whisper to their upset children. While the student is joking around, the idea is a good one….a word or phrase that signals a readjustment or refocus. I’ve used the code word strategy as a part of my “pipe down” rule. But, goose fraba is just as good as code as “pipe down,” if not better because it is less antagonistic. Alex’s suggestion regarding built in “screw around” time is also a good idea, in that it compartmentalizes the under life that occurs in all classrooms, but especially in virtual environments like the MOO, as a part of the class, but distinct from other more focused work which may occur there.
the popular cultural representation of “bad students” in a “bad school,” establishing shots show a new teacher walking into a room in which students are listening to music, dancing, carving on desks, smoking, chit-chatting, doing a multitude of things other than sitting there silently with hands folded nicely on their desks. As soon as students experience the ability to produce MOO actions based on prose text input (i.e. any action they can think of, which they can put into words, they can do), class erupts in strange actions. Often, students will start virtually eating (I think I mentioned virtual burritos earlier in the chapter…that was a real example from my class), tackling each other, “thwoping” each other with newspapers (a built-in MOO command), and doing other playful things that can make an instructor feel as if they are losing control. But, we should remember that the MOO is not the same as face-to-face class, it is a different medium. The kind of chaos that I am talking about here is a natural part of a user’s integration into MOO literacy, necessary, and ultimately productive as it relates to a process of integration and the development of MOO literacy. In the case of an environment like the MOO, which is novel to students, they are establishing the boundaries of behavior by establishing the technological boundaries of the medium. If Gee says we need to the understand the rules of a semiotic domain before reading against the grain, I’m saying that in the MOO (and other interactive environments such as Second Life or videogames) we first engage in probing the edges of possibility and then process it and develop a means to operate that is more functional.147 This student described the risks of the environment, its engagement, and the potential for a teacher’s role in the MOO:

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147 I’m arguing that this sentence explains the role of play in online environments such as the MOO where our actions are compositions (print-text representations) within the medium.
We worked on the MOO which was very new to me, and I really enjoyed the experience. It only grew frustrating when people went off topic, which honestly did happen a lot, but it was entertaining and new all the same. I thought it was really cool and innovative that we could be in a “classroom” while not physically in one. When we did the MOO from home and did not come to class I still felt like Shovlin was taking charge, and still felt like he was our professor. I originally thought that it would be complete madness if we all met on the MOO from our homes; I thought we would get nothing accomplished, but we did it successfully.

A discussion of how chaos transpires and how we might rein it in has been a productive way that I’ve been able to acculturate students to MOO. While I claimed above that I had to damage control in terms of the other instructors’ reactions to the MOO environment, I didn’t do that damage control very well. Out of six or seven instructors that we started with, we ended up with two, including me. While our data pool shrank, we were able to say more, perhaps, about certain things, such as instructors’ reactions to online environments, how those relate to issues surrounding classroom management, and levels of (technological) literacy.

While MOO discourse can often feel chaotic, students do claim they have found it useful. For example, one student wrote “I liked the fact that people could speak more freely…On the MOO you’re open to participate and a lot less shy…real life classrooms are great, they offer a lot, but they also offer intimidation.” Intimidation could refer to me as the teacher, it could refer to other students on the basic level of verbal interaction
(some students who are “talkers” effectively silence others), it could also refer to students increased willingness to voice opinions on questions related to issues that may make them uncomfortable in a face-to-face setting. As a part of the coursework, we often use Duncan Carter and Sherrie Gradin’s *Writing as Reflective Action* which includes bell hooks’s “Killing Rage,” mentioned in Chapter Two as a contentious article for my students, and Paula Rust’s “Sexual Identity and Bisexual Identities: The Struggle for Self- Description in a Changing Sexual Landscape,” an article that can be difficult for heteronormatized freshman to grapple with. MOO can sometimes offer a “psycho-social moratorium” or a place where students are more likely to try out different ideas. Another student wrote, “To me it feels like more people have opinions on things in the MOO. Also, the opinions sometimes tackle bigger issues that wouldn’t normally come up in a classroom setting.” These students’ voices seem to be getting at the potential of the MOO as a kind of environment in which instructors and students might develop and nurture safe rooms for some student concerns, although articles like Dibbell’s “A Rape in Cyberspace” shows that it is not without its risks.

Needless to say, for a study that was organized to collect data on student perceptions of classroom management in the MOO, we ended up with unofficial data on instructors’ perceptions of classroom management in the MOO based on their evacuation. But, we were able to say something about students’ perceptions of educational MOO’ing related to teachers’ levels of experience with the MOO. In other words, we studied how teachers’ levels of techno-literacy, specifically related to operating in the MOO environment, related to students’ perceptions of the productiveness of educational MOO
sessions. Rachel Brooks-Rather, the other instructor who remained in the study, offered data from her class (and from her perspective), as a practitioner new to MOO and an instructor who was not confident in her technological literacy.

We set out to find whether student perceptions of classroom control affected their perceptions of learning. As an experienced MOO instructor, I can attest that students do feel like their time is better spent in more controlled activities on the MOO, until we discuss the nature of chaotic discourse and power structures related to face-to-face classrooms that encourages us to feel that way. We quickly realized that students’ feelings of the educational effectiveness of the environment correlated to instructor’s feelings of being literate in the environment. We found that there was a correlation between students feeling that MOO activities were productive when they were led by those with more experience, and, thus, more confidence. While this may not seem to be groundbreaking news, its implications are broad in terms of writing classroom practices and other technologies, if we imagine the results translating across technologies. If students perceive activities based on technologies that are new to teachers to be ineffectual, then teachers have to deal with the double whammy of both feeling anxiety over the implementation of an unfamiliar technology and the response of students that the activities were not productive. What reason would such a teacher have to use such a technology again? Our study suggested that increased experience on a teacher’s part translated to a perception of effectiveness of practice on the part of a student. These challenges probably explain why the English department at Ohio University only feels a compelling need for two computer classrooms for the entire English department and also
relate to instructional and administrative resistance to new, but important, writing technologies/genres (blogs, wikis, Web authoring, *Second Life*, MOO, etc.). Further, the fact that students’ perceptions of effective technological practice relates to an instructor’s technological literacy supports an argument for systematic technological training for those teaching in writing classrooms, if you agree that such technological practice is important for developing today’s writers. One student pointed out that routine use and the development of literacy was essential to MOO success:

At first I was a little hesitant about the different technologies that we were using in this class. I thought the MOO and other technologies were just not me. However, as the class progressed, I began to really like and enjoy them. The MOO for instance began to really grow on me. I didn’t like not talking at first. Being in class and not having any verbal discussion was odd to me. However as time progressed it became more natural to me. And because of the fact that for one of our last classes were just able to meet online and not in class was awesome. It was cool to me that the longer we participated in the MOO the more people’s personalities came out and we could really almost hear what the different classmates were typing.

Certainly, there are other influences that relate to the resources we have at our disposal and the practices privileged in particular writing program. The proclivities (and

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148 I don’t mean to say that instructors and administrators are outright hostile to new writing practices and technologies like blogging or wikis. I am saying they may be resistant to incorporating them in their own classes in departments that aren’t tech focused. While there are probably some programs out there where digital rhetoric and writing technologies have thoroughly infiltrated the curriculum across the board, there are still many institutions, of all sorts, playing catch up or just treading water.
literacies) of directors do matter, as well. Institutional organization can matter too. For example, a writing program hosted in an English department in which Literature holds sway may find itself under the control of administrators or senior faculty who do not have composition backgrounds. In that case, those who conceive of the resources one might need at her/his disposal in the classroom might conceive of such things differently. If some of these new literacies we’d like to explore are related to “low culture” forms of popular culture, such as videogames, it may be all difficult (especially for adjuncts or Teaching Assistants) to convince others that there is a need for equipment or lab support for such purposes. Further, in a program such as ours, in which Writing Across the Curriculum is posited in the domain of the Center for Writing Excellence (CWE), an organization outside the realm of the English department, resources such as the MOO might be developed with funding under our control. The CWE, as a rogue entity, can do little to better the basic infrastructure of computer lab support available for teaching writing, other than offering training in the form of workshops that the interim director is able to design.

As I’ll chronicle in the conclusion to the dissertation, my current and new position, Interim Director, of The Center for Writing Excellence puts me in the ironic position of writing much of what I have in the dissertation and ending up in an administrative position for which many of my critiques apply. I don’t feel like I was hired in this position because of my technological background, although I’m sure it helped.

149 Currently, the CWE is operating under the Provost’s office. As an Interim Director, I feel like I’m floating in the waves with very little administrative support. This can be strength, as I noted above, because while floating in the waves, I’m also flying beneath the radar (to mash up two opposed metaphors). But, the position of WAC, with no attachment to a buffer department, division, or college is precarious.
New hires in the English department have often had backgrounds inclusive of technological foci. New hires with technological backgrounds are nice, but they do little to compare to the influence of many permanent non-tenure track annually renewed instructors or the quarterly contracted instructors or the majority of tenured professors or the mass of graduate teaching assistants. Undeniably, some of these folks do a good job integrating technology in their classrooms, but their reasons for doing so aren’t built into the program and, speaking from experience, sometimes they aren’t built into a particular pedagogical theory. My inclusion of technological practice in my coursework is a case in point. My reasons for incorporating writing technologies were personal, in that I enjoyed working with technology, it was a compelling addition to my curriculum vitae, and I personally found it to be a fundamental part of the kind of writing instruction we do in freshman composition programs. This project of techno-critical pedagogy, though, is to develop the conversation that will situate the thoughtful integration of technology into writing classes, not just merely because it’s a good idea, but because it’s vital.

While the perceptual MOO study produced interesting results related to instructional technological literacy and its affect on students’ perceptions of effective practice, it also yielded some interesting pre-study data that offers us a potential framework for leveraging students’ preferred learning approaches. One thing that occurred to us as we went over the pre-study questionnaire was that students’ responses to the type of learners they considered themselves might be mobilized in order to affect their perceptions of and engagement with the MOO environment. The majority of students claimed they were visual and/or hand’s on learners. Armed with the knowledge
of how our students view their own learning styles we might build bridges by teasing out how such learning styles relate to new mediums. I think different kinds of learners mobilize their preferred modes of learning when they realize specific practices cater to those modes of learning. One opportunity a rich site like the MOO has to offer is the connections a teacher can make to different modes of learning. The MOO can be viewed as a visual environment on a couple of levels. First, print-text is, by nature, visual. This is exacerbated on the MOO where print-text stands in place of objects and constructs spatiality. Students who are visual learners might be able to interact with print text in different way given the peculiar spatial nature of the MOO. Also, MOOs such as OU’s, equipped with the EnCore engine, are capable of projecting images from files and the Web for class discussion and even for integration into the textual descriptions of rooms, avatars, and other objects. While this opens up opportunities to experiment with composition in a multimodal environment, it also offers a visual element that may be more effective with some students. The peculiar nature of the MOO above, it’s spatiality or it’s prose-based materiality offers a characteristic we might study in terms of hand’s on or experiential learning. While instructors might need to research how this plays out in virtual environments to better inform themselves (for example, on topics such as tele-presence), it’s work worth doing, in order to develop our pedagogical literacies for new media. I’m not sure if a user new to the MOO (for example an instructor using it for the first time) would be able to make connections between students’ visual or hand’s on learning styles and the MOO.

Arguably, the print-text discourse, the synchronous chat, could appeal to verbal learners, as well.
The Wiki/MOO Collaborative Work Study

In another study related to MOO practice, a colleague, John Borczon, and I studied how students felt about collaborative work in two electronic writing spaces, wikis and the MOO. This study focused on two freshman composition classes composed of twenty students each. Students were asked to write individually, but were expected to produce a group text composed in a wiki by the end of the quarter. The agenda for the class is actually still available online at the following site:

http://oak.cats.ohiou.edu/~borczon/, which we referred to afterwards as “The Green Monstrosity,” due to the exceedingly ugly nature of the Web design. This was our first crack at composing a Web site and we designed it as part of a graduate level class focused on technology and composition. We scored badly on the component of the assignment related to design and graphical appeal. Through the nickname, the site and the activity it represents grew to have its own underdog appeal with our students. While the earlier study found that student perceptions of effective practice related to instructors’ experience and perceived competence in a practice, the Monstrosity probably set students at ease as the instructors showed that they had some learning to do too and were capable of laughing at themselves.

Again, while I represented an instructor established in technological practice, John saw himself as struggling with the implementation of wiki and MOO instruction, both of which were new to him. The study was similarly designed to the perceptual study in terms of the qualitative data we produced over the course of the quarter. One major difference, between this study and the perceptual study is that the text the study resulted
in is less focused on student data and more on our reactions to the whole process. We presented on the whole thing (data and process) at the Computer and Writing 2006 conference in Lubbock. Much more information on the study is available via various links from the Web text that John and I co-authored that was published in Computers and Composition Online, available at http://www.bgsu.edu/cconline/Shovczon/. While the students didn’t offer any different input related to MOO compared to what’s been said already (for example, the Wiki/MOO Collaborative study confirmed that students note a binary between chaos and control in MOO environments, that they are able to move past the initial feelings of chaos if the MOO is routinely used, and that they feel MOO environments are more convenient and comfortable to attend versus face-to-face classes), I’ve included this brief paragraph in order to share the links for readers interested in exploring primary sources related to the study.

One aspect of the study that does not relate to MOO specifically, but does relate to techno-critical practice was the data we found regarding student perceptions of technological practice related to their own perceived literacy with the technology. There was a clear split between those who considered themselves technologically savvy being able to appreciate the potential of the wiki and those who were farther behind in the game finding it challenging. Three students wrote: “Computer technology might have hindered the project, because not everyone was as computer literate as [everyone else]; in a way, I think [technology] hindered us because it was something new to us and was confusing to work at first,” and “I guess the only troubling part, if I had to choose one, would be the learning of the new technology that we used in the process of writing the paper” (qtd. in
I’m not sure how the classroom I created at the time related to these student voices. When I look them now, they signal a need for an increased focus throughout the class on the making transparent the pedagogical aims of techno-critical pedagogy, the idea that the challenges that new technologies offer us is the demonstrable development of new literacy, which is never easy. The voices of other students who had more advanced technological literacies sound like advertisements for wiki: “the format of the wiki was very easy to understand so setting up our own wiki and maintaining it was no trouble at all,” and “The easy-to-use setup and interface of the pbwiki was […] was key, since some of the members of my group are not so fluent with wiki use” (qtd. in Shovlin). Perhaps the best response came from a seasoned technological user who wrote “The most satisfying part of this group project was being able to learn a new technique of writing […] the most difficult task associated with the paper was [learning to use the technology]. This took time and was at first confusing to group members. Though once this was mastered, it made the writing process easier and more accessible” (qtd. in Shovlin). Responses such as this last one are important because they signal a process in which students do not shut down in reaction to new technologies, but persevere, and gain confidence in them.

Final Thoughts

One could probably argue that the development of techno-critical pedagogy has been a direct result of my work over the last ten years instructing with the MOO. First, it politicized electronic writing spaces for me in terms of the way it changed student discourse. While this change in discourse is a challenge for some instructors, it was
something I found engaging and fun, as did my students. While it may not be important that a practice is merely fun and/or engaging, it is doubly important when a meaningful or critical practice (one which politicizes electronic writing spaces and offers to make that process transparent) is fun and engaging. Engagement (and interactivity) are at the heart of Gee’s project, and related, I argue, to pedagogical practices such as Freire’s problem-posing model or Dewey’s pragmatic model. MOO became a touchstone in my teaching for getting students to consider how Freirian power structures work in face-to-face classrooms. Second, as I struggled with failures, failing to get other instructors on board, failing to reach administrators on regional campuses after training sessions, some failures reaching students, I began to realize that establishing connections via literacy with other technologies was a way to explain not only the relevancy of niche technologies such as MOO, but the import of it, as well.

I start Chapter Two with a quote that utilizes the shotgun metaphor, the idea of using different practices related to different technologies, to describe the technological practice relates to border technology. Obviously, I’ve experienced the fact that MOO will fail if it stands alone as a practice, especially as a practice integrated only one or two times during the course of the quarter. That is, if MOO is presented merely as a shiny, flashy toy. In the same regard, Second Life will fail. But, such practices are important in our classrooms in terms of our jobs as writing instructors participating in literacy initiatives. It is the synthesis of literacies, the study of borders between technologies and between environments and between communicators that makes these practices effective.

151 In fact, I argue that it is still a red flag with a lot of instructors in higher education. This distrust of “fun” or “engagement” is why the work of people like Albert Rouzie is so important…Because it theorizes how engagement can fruitfully relate to the kind of intellectual work we do in the Academy.
Techno-critical pedagogy ties them together. While I worked to study one technology in depth in this chapter, what I didn’t do was explain how it has become one routine practice implemented among others in my class. Chapter Four is representative of the focus and practice of a technology-rich class, and in this upcoming practice, I offer a broader picture of a class, including course apparati such as a syllabus, paper assignments, and a discussion of the focus, critical readings and critical thought on violent videogames. Often critical pedagogues have been criticized for focusing development on theory, without fully fleshing out how their classes might transpire. For techno-critical pedagogy, the next chapter will address that concern.
CHAPTER FOUR: VISUALIZING A TECHNO-CRITICAL CLASS

“By incorporating these different technologies under the topic of online representation analyses, my intention is to encourage students to apply critical thinking about representations in one technology, say how representations in videogames affect our emotional and critical responses, to other less synchronous environments such as blogs and wikis, and, by extension, social networking sites like MySpace and Facebook.”

In the introduction, I started broadly and discussed some key terms central to my project. In the first chapter, I narrowed the focus, slightly, to address a fundamental concern to techno-critical pedagogy, that of literacy. For the second chapter, I narrowed the focus even more, to scrutinize critical theory related to my project, most fully the work of Giroux. In the third chapter, I continued my trend of narrowing focus to that of a specific technology, MOO, which I covered in depth through the lens of techno-critical pedagogy. For the fourth chapter, I’m surveying how different technologies were implemented in a single composition class. Chapter 4 bridges theory and practice in a way that we’ve been building towards since the introduction. Readers still may wonder what a techno-critical class looks like on the ground. Accordingly, in this chapter, we’ll look at a single particularly techno-rich class that I developed and tease out the relevance of techno-critical pedagogy in terms of the practice. While considering a number of intertwined technologies integrated in the class, we’ll also consider some of the specifics of teaching related to the class, including syllabus, “paper” assignments, and student responses to the course. It is not my intention to model what “should be,” but to use a
particularly technology rich class and the artifacts surrounding it as texts to critically respond to much like we might scrutinize a study or research in the field.

In this chapter, I will be alternating focus among a few characteristics of the class:

- The focus of the class: online representation in interactive environments, tracing an arc from the MOO environment, through *Second Life*, to videogames. In this category, there are two embedded concerns. The content of the course can refer to the technologies employed and the content within those technologies. I’ve spent a great deal of the dissertation focusing on the technologies/mediums to discuss how literacies intersect and transfer, which is a main concern of techno-critical pedagogy. As a critical pedagogue, I am still concerned with the content we find in the course of investigating various technological environments. Readers of this chapter will find a fair amount of time spent chronicling my analysis and argument about the implications of videogame violence, part of the focus of the class I describe here.

- The apparatuses of the class: syllabus, paper assignments, class structure.

- The techno-critical pedagogical perspective that offers us a perspective with which to comment on the two points above and critically consider them.

The Kitchen Sink

When I began working on this chapter, I was in a stage of the writing process that made me remember something one of my profs said in grad school regarding the subject of the dissertation. His class focused on postmodernity and the professor mentioned that the quickest way to hate a subject you previously loved was to focus on it for your
dissertation. Postmodern theory and literature, the focus of his dissertation, was something he knew a lot about, but not necessarily anything he had much personal interest in anymore. I can still visualize the subtle expressions of exhaustion and pain that were evident in his face as he discussed it.

Last quarter, nearing burnout\(^{152}\) after a particularly techno-rich class, I took a break from such practices, neglecting to incorporate any technology, or so I thought, in the class other than the obligatory Blackboard (course management system). As soon as I wrote this line, I realized I was lying, or at least being too dramatic, and had to include the rest, regarding Blackboard. The truth of it is that regardless of how much we try to estrange ourselves from technology, we’re awash in it. From the phones in our pockets, to those in our students’, to their emailed concerns regarding Blackboard or submitting electronic documents in lieu of planned absences, to the way technologies affect their writing, technology continually serves reminders that it is an inextricable part of our lives and literacy.

At one point, I referred to this section of this chapter as “The Perfect Storm.” After participating in the perceptual MOO study and the wiki/MOO hybrid study, which I describe in Chapter Three, while at the same time gaining proficiency in practice with other technologies, such as Second Life and blogs, I felt like I was ready to begin developing a course that integrated them all in a way that structured them so that

\(^{152}\) Having felt technological burnout has really made me scrutinize myself in terms of this document. I think at the heart of such burnout is a feeling of isolation and a lack of institutional support in very concrete ways. For example, merely having hardware and software support capable of doing what we need it to do without undo anxiety would go a long way towards making an instructors’ fears of technological implementation a little more manageable. Currently, at this university, it’s not only a question of “will this work pedagogically?” but “will this even work technically?” It’s tough enough to be an instructor, let alone your own IT support. Beyond this, if you are seen as technically adept, you often find yourself becoming a tech support specialist for others in the department, your extended family, and complete strangers.
students’ experiences in each of the mediums informed their experience with the other mediums. I chose English 153 for the course because it fulfilled our freshman writing requirement here at Ohio University but it offered flexibility in terms of the focus since it is a “Special Topics” course. Students at Ohio University were required to take freshman composition in the form of a one quarter class of either English 151: Writing and Rhetoric, English 152: Writing and Reading, or English 153: Special Topics. Since the class I’m describing above has been taught, the composition committee has streamlined the courses in the English department so that students at the Athens campus are only offered English 151. While English 151 incorporates the basic rhetorical competencies (our programmatic learning objectives for freshman composition) it offers the flexibility to incorporate focuses such as the one I’m describing here that previously would have been relegated to an English 153. It was important for me to develop the techno-rich course within the context of the Tier I writing requirement (the requirement that all students take a writing class at their Freshman and Junior ranks) because I believe that work with advanced writing technologies should be a part of general writing instruction that we require for all our students (an idea which I outlined in the Introduction). While the class I focus on here was designated as a “special topic,” it’s my hope that more of the practices that I employed are integrated in “standard” or “normal” freshman composition classes, such as English 151 Writing and Rhetoric. I have argued in this dissertation that the thorough integration of technological practice (and a transparent representation of the pedagogy that situates such practice as vital) into writing courses shouldn’t only be a concern at my institution, but that it is a concern nationally, even
internationally. In a few paragraphs later, I will detail that although this was a special topics course, it was not advertised in terms of its specific focus on technology and online representation. While it was designated as a class taught in a computer classroom, students often failed to notice that when they registered.

Our freshman and junior composition classes are capped at 20, so there were no more than 20 students in class. The class I’m writing about was taught in one of our two computer classrooms. While I’ve taught classes that employed advanced writing technologies that did not meet in computer classrooms, a computer classroom was a necessity in this case given the visual environments we were working with, Second Life and the videogames. While I’ve been able to talk students in face-to-face classrooms through the difficulties of blog, wiki, and/or MOO work (in addition to relying on technical walkthrough which I give them on handouts), I’ve found it much more difficult to talk them through complicated visual environments like Second Life and videogames. While I’m confident that I could do such a class in a traditional classroom with limited access to computers, it would surely strain me and doesn’t seem like a possibility for instructors with less developed technological literacy. A lack of structured and personal help while they are encountering the medium also puts a strain on students, which can be detrimental to their learning process and certainly affects their perceptions of the usefulness of the practice.

153 Frankly, I would not want to focus on such technologically demanding practices with more students. For faculty development regarding such technologies, I usually limit workshops to 15. A classroom setting really is more ideal than a one meeting faculty workshop, given the fact that a class meets routinely and weekly, and it takes time for users to develop literacy in these semiotic domains which are often new to them.
The course I’m focusing on here (which I taught that particular quarter in two sections) incorporated some of my standard uses of writing technologies, such as a course blog and wiki, the use of a chat-room-like MOO, sessions meeting in Second Life, and multiplayer\textsuperscript{154} play in a first-person shooter videogame, with a few other single player games (such as Oregon Trail and Life and Death, a surgery simulator), the Internet, two movies, a novella, and several essays and articles, and, of course, Blackboard. The class studied representation and communication in these various environments, with an eye on overlap between them. For example, we met in a MOO and discussed class readings, then compared the nature of that discussion and discourse to those we experienced in the face-to-face (f2f) classroom and in other, different kinds of online environments. We also focused on videogames and their relation to online educational sites, such as the MOO and Second Life. I’ll discuss this in more detail a little later in the chapter. Further, we explored how operating in these different technologies related to literacy. I’ve included my syllabus (Appendix A) for the course in the appendix, along with a couple of supporting documents, handouts for the three major paper assignments and the description of the final portfolio.

Room for Everyone

An interesting detail about the class is that it was not advertised to be on the subject of electronic literacies and online communicative environments and few students even realized it was going to be taught in a computer classroom. This led to students registering for the class with broader backgrounds in terms of computer literacy and diversity of interest in these specific topics. While it may make things smoother to

\textsuperscript{154} This means we played against each other.
advertise such classes and attract students with higher levels of computer literacy and interest, I am interested in reaching students that may be acculturated to feel that such subjects are not for them. I have come to realize the importance the first few days of class and the demeanor of the instructor play in reaching students uninterested in digital rhetoric or composition or even resistant to it after hearing a young woman talking on her cell phone after the first day of a class meeting in a computer classroom. She said something like, “Yeah, I didn’t even know it meets in a computer classroom. I suck at computers. I might drop it…” Mini-narratives, such as that one, are useful in establishing that such feelings exist and that I’m aware of the differences we come with to a technologically rich class. I draw on such narratives during the first day of class to assure students we have a mixed crowd in terms of literacies and that that is okay. For instructors, such stories also encourage us to broaden our conceptualization of what constitutes a “developmental composition class.”

While this standard first year writing class was developmental in addressing the basic technological literacy that most students arrived at class with, it also incorporated many routine writing-to-learn assignments via the blog and wiki and used fundamental writing practices, such as peer critique, workshopping, and multiple draftings of writing. In addition, the final portfolio project (again, described in the Appendix) offered a leveling\textsuperscript{155} device for students to really work on their writing and fine-tune it through the process of focused revision. Because the portfolio required reflection on how the writing

\textsuperscript{155} By “leveling,” I mean the portfolio gives students every opportunity to develop papers they may have written earlier for which they received feedback with suggestions for revision. In addition, the reflective component focuses students thoughts on arguing from their own perspective how their work reaches the outcomes for the course. The portfolio as I’ve implemented it comes from a Writing to Learn perspective.
they incorporated in the portfolio related to the rhetorical competencies, they were able to more effectively revise writing they included to fit those competencies. In my writing in this dissertation, my often positioning of “traditional” models of writing in negative ways may sound as if I am throwing out the baby with the bathwater. But, techno-critical pedagogy is meant to augment writing instruction and literacy development in our classes rather than replace all of our familiar pedagogical practices (and content) wholesale. It does ask us to think about how and why we do things and to consider techno-critical pedagogical perspectives.

Scaffolding Technology

The course was set up to scaffold the technologies (ala Vygotsky\textsuperscript{156}), as best as possible, so that they did not look integrated arbitrarily, but one led to another. For example, we began by navigating the MOO. As we began to consider online representations and how the medium affects discourse, we moved into Second Life. Shortly after, we explored videogames, armed with our experience from MOO and SL. Starting with MOO offered a few benefits. First, although MOO navigation requires an instructor who knows what she or he is doing, it is easier to learn, and to learn deeper (i.e. to become a composer in the medium) than a visual technological environment such as Second Life. Creating your self-representation in the MOO only requires a few keystrokes to get to the description field and then your own imagination and writing skills, which are already in place. MOO offers students a quick place to enact online self-representation in

\textsuperscript{156} Vygotsky’s description of Zones of Proximal Development make a lot of sense in these scenarios. In the writing classes I’ve taught that have been technology rich (or even not that rich) there have been few students that didn’t need instructor help as they navigated new technologies before they gained some independent capabilities with them. More than anything, a techno-rich class well taught exemplifies that an instructor can both be an authority AND a facilitator.
an Academic setting, in which we can discuss it. It also offers a high contrast site for discussing how our class’s discourse is affected by that particular medium. The differences between MOO discourse and face-to-face discourse are so striking that it is easy to identify the differences and that makes our job of analysis easier. Moving to Second Life following work in the MOO is an example of scaffolding because some of the skills, processes, and concepts we use in the MOO will transfer to Second Life. For example, MOO communication is similar to the default communication in Second Life. The process of the development of self-representation, i.e. making some rhetorical decisions about what sort of online self to have, is very similar, although it is constituted differently in the visual medium of Second Life. While our self-representation (or Avatar description) is only limited in MOO by our imaginations and ability with prose description, Second Life requires a user to find clothing, body types, props, etc., constructed by other users who are more adept at building in Second Life. You also have to figure out how to put on the clothing, after you are able to find it. It seems like constructing oneself in Second Life would be an easier process, since most new users are only making choices about their self-representation but not composing it themselves. It is actually more difficult, because you need to know how to travel to different places, and how to find things, and even put them on in order to have a good range of choice in SL. The earlier MOO work has offered students the concept of self-representation and introduced them to the process of developing it. In Second Life, then, we are able to concentrate on some of the technical/literacy-oriented limitations of that medium that curtail our rhetorical selves.

\[157\] By rhetorical, I mean that we have a relatively full range of choice in determining how we are
Scaffolding also helps in terms of acculturating the students to some of the concerns of integrating new technologies related to levels of literacy. That is, by scaffolding technologies we not only make it easier for students to build their literacies related to technology, we also model approaches that leverage skills related to literacies that overlap. Let me unpack this. There are two concerns here. First, the practical concern of giving your students the approach and the skills they need to be successful in the practices we implement in our class. That is, at a basic level, we want them to be able to do what we ask them. If we want to use SL as a communication space, then students need to know how to communicate in SL, which relates to what they learned in the MOO. Our experiences with MOO discourse have also prepped them for the differences in discourse they experience in chat-like communication versus the discourse they are familiar with in face-to-face classes. The second concern is that by showing students an approach that makes connections between “basic” skill sets that allow them to negotiate different online environments, we offer a way of looking at technological literacies that seeks overlap, so that students have the tools necessary for negotiating new technologies in the future outside of the class. An example of skill-sets transferring is how the concept of self-representation in MOO preps them to think about issues related to self-representation in SL and then be prepared to extend that concern to their self-representation in Facebook or via the ethos they construct in email correspondence with their professors.

represented in this medium. As a critical pedagogue, the understanding is that such choices offer us more mobility in terms of agency. Representing oneself in Second Life with a basic default skin/clothes/body type is akin to a writer always being tied to Times New Roman font, because a person never learned how to change it. Or, we might envision a writer limited to only one genre, such as the five-paragraph essay. Surely that person could function fairly well as a writer, but his or her ethos and rhetoric would be limited by such limitations. Since I’ve argued in Chapter 1 that agency is tied to writing, her or his agency would be affected as well.
The process I’m describing here, developing literacy in one medium to transfer it to others, directly relates to my treatment of “modern literacy” in Chapter One and my adaptation of border pedagogy in Chapter Two, in terms of literacies. Borders are the sites for the development of our literacies and our rhetoric. One thing I’ve learned in working with the MOO is that when we leverage technologies that users might be familiar with (i.e. chatrooms) we give them the ontological mindset they might need to operate in that environment. If epistemology refers to a system of knowledge construction and ontology refers to the practical means of determining the world around us, I’m saying that by mobilizing epistemologies of “chatrooms” when discussing MOO technology we offer users familiar with chatrooms the ontology they can apply to MOO to understand it.

The rub is that we, as pedagogues, must keep in mind the limitations that an understanding of a particular technology may have in terms of establishing the benefits and limitations of another. Mobilizing other technologies students may be familiar with is a good start for getting them comfortable in a new technology, but it is not an end. Finally, scaffolding is helpful in exploring rhetorical concerns on a more global level than merely being able to function with various technologies. For example, it offers students the knowledge base they need to synthesize and think critically about online self-representation, the nature of interactivity in online environments, how strategies of persuasive “writing” differ from environment/medium to environment/medium.

One final thing about scaffolding, while it relates here to the skills and literacies in one medium feeding into the next, I also employed it in this class as a rationale for the
content of the course. If we consider the trajectory of online Academic communication environments (outside the realm of course management systems) from the 90’s popularity of Academic MOOs to today’s Academic institutions’ fascination with Second Life we see a move from text-based (I mean written or typed text) environments to visual environments. That trajectory also follows the development of communicative environments within gaming contexts that are then appropriated by the Academic world. Second Life is an extension of the massive multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG) just as the Academic MOO is an extension of the Dungeons and Dragons inspired multi-user dungeon or MUD. Our arrival in the trajectory at videogames prepares us to understand the relevance of such media to the development of other kinds of spaces with other (Academic or professional) purposes in mind, such as Second Life. And Second Life isn’t the end of the trajectory, but only a point on the arc. So, while we encounter these technologies in a scaffolded way, I make the evolution of electronic Academic spaces part of the coursework as well. That evolution contextualizes the earlier technologies in a historical/meaningful way and prepares students to anticipate future developments. And, as we experience a transfer of skills from one technology relating to skills in another technology, such as MOO to Second Life, students are better prepared to do so in future cases. Readers should keep this rationale that I establish here (particularly the idea that online educational environments have moved towards visual elements and an investigation of different media may prepare students for the future of online collaboration) in mind at the end of the chapter when I articulate what’s at stake.
In the class that I’m focusing on in this chapter, self-representation, communication, and interaction became our focus as we studied in the several different technological environments. I was adequately prepared to deliver the course from the structural point of view and techno-critically pedagogically from the perspective the technologies’ evolutions and the transference of skills and literacies among them. The most difficult aspect of the class, for me, was the incorporation of a first-person shooter (FPS) videogame, which raised some serious and sticky issues regarding the representation and enaction of virtual violence in college classrooms, in general, and specifically between students and the teacher and students.

Composing Virtual Violence

It strikes me that one can take two different tacks on the practice of incorporating violent videogames in the classroom. One view considers it worthwhile to explore the medium via firsthand experience in order to critically consider arguments made about violent videogames (and often, by extension, about videogames, in general). From a techno-critical perspective, it’s true that firsthand experience in the medium of videogames offers participants experience with a skill set that relates to other related mediums, such as Second Life. I argue that this is a good thing given the trend of an increasing emphasis on visual environments (as we’ve seen from an educational emphasis in MOO in the 90’s shifting to Second Life in the aughts). A negative view positions such practices as dangerous at worst and hurtful at least. For example, in his September 14th, 2007 commentary158 in The Chronicle of Higher Education, Michael

Bugeja argues that rather than jump on the techno-enthusiast bandwagon, institutions should consider the dangers of online environments such as *Second Life*. He argues that while “new-media neophytes come off as cutting edge […] the true motive of technological interfaces and applications is often money.” It’s true that we need money to provide for resources related to technological practice that are governed by technocritical pedagogy, but I’m unclear as to how that denigrates my position.

In particular, Bugeja raises concerns about the legal issues surrounding virtual environments in which we expect our students to participate.\(^{159}\) He argues that institutions, such as Ohio University, that host space in virtual environments such as *Second Life* may be held liable for experiences they have in the virtual world. Bugeja argues that virtual events in which users are attacked by other users are liabilities for the governing institutions that sponsor virtual environments. For example, he specifically compares the shootings at Virginia Tech to a virtual attack on Ohio University’s *Second Life* campus. For Bugeja, “raising concerns” evolves into an alarmist\(^{160}\) argument based on assumption rather than first-hand experience.

The attack on OU’s campus that he is referring to happened in spring of 2007, when an avatar visited the “island” and began “shooting” other avatars. Linden Labs, the

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\(^{159}\) One reason this article raised concerns for me is that in warning universities to crack down on the use of online environments such as *Second Life*, Bugeja’s argument is a step away from arguing that any online representation of violence either equates to real world violence or is close enough to it that schools may be held liable in the case of it. For example, should games such as first-person shooters be considered off limits in college classes because students (and instructors) may in the course of these games inflict virtual violence on each others’ avatars. I wonder about the limits of such arguments. Can we extend them to other media? Should universities not permit violent films in classrooms, such as *Schindler’s List*, because the virtual representations in the media can cause real world pain or grief in that they make us feel bad or disgusted? Do we need to crack down on the practice of out-of-class activities, such as internships because the university may be held liable for anything that occurs to a student in that university sanctioned activity?\(^{160}\) Alarmist and techno-phobic, which, in my opinion, is just as bad as being techno-enthusiastic. Bugeja notes that he is aware that he may be “dismissed as a Luddite,” but I am dismissing him as informed by assumption and ignorance.
company that owns *Second Life*, leases virtual real estate in the form of islands to people and institutions for their development and use. In *Second Life* it’s impossible to kill other avatars; players are merely “pushed,” or teleported back to a home location tied to their account. Behavior designed to antagonize others is known as “griefing” in *Second Life* and other electronic spaces. I actually happened to be present at the attack. By coincidence, I was introducing a faculty member from Kent State to the island that day. Someone flew up and “shot” her and me. We were both pushed away, and after a few minutes of confusion came back together. By the time we got back, the perpetrator had fled to push/grief other people from whom he/she might have gotten a more angry reaction. The “attack” was so swift and the result so confusing to the person from Kent, she hadn’t even realized what happened. But, the attack had real world consequences—I was slightly annoyed. We continued our meeting, finished up, and left. I didn’t think much about the whole thing, until later when I tried to log in with my students as part of our routine use of *Second Life*. As another real world consequence, the island was locked down. With no notice, I was dismayed to find that my lesson would have to be canned because we were denied access. Later, we’d find out that our lack of access was due to the attack.

As a witness to OU’s virtual attacks, and a “virtual victim,” I was fascinated with how easy it was for Bugeja to make comparisons between virtual representations of and real violence. Bugeja’s comparison, in part, affected my development of the coursework on virtual violence represented in the class I describe here. As a gamer, I’d been
accustomed to critiques of videogames from outsider perspectives\textsuperscript{161} which were critical of a cultural phenomenon I participated in, particularly outsider perspectives which read me and other gamers as passive spectators who absorbed negative characteristics that the games transmitted and integrated them into our identities (being told that I was desensitized to violence and more prone to be violent in the real world). Meanwhile, Bugeja painted me as a victim in comparison to victims of truly heinous acts like those perpetrated at Virginia Tech. While I agree to disagree politely with the point of view that posits videogamers as passive (violent) sponges, I was flabbergasted at the implications of Bugeja’s argument which more directly align unethical/criminal behavior online and its repercussions with real life instances of such behavior and their repercussions. I felt Bugeja denigrated the real victims of violent crime, such as those who experienced violence at Virginia Tech by comparing my experience of being teleported as result of being “shot” versus the Virginia Tech victims’ deaths at the hand of a real life gunman. The issue here may be Bugeja’s conflation of the effects of virtual “physical” violence with virtual sexual assault theorized by writers such as Jullian Dibbell as straddling the virtual/physical divide through psychological effect. Bugeja doesn’t go into the details of what it means to be “shot” in Second Life, but only quotes an article in Ohio University’s

\textsuperscript{161} In the class I detail here, my students and I read a lot of negative cultural critiques of videogames. While some videogame critics do “close readings” of videogames in which they analyze them in terms of racial, gender, or heterosexual stereotypes, they often do so from a perspective that never explores the semiotic domain that the gamers themselves experience. While outsider perspectives are important for offering different points of view, they include limitations of their own. I often address these issues of perspective in class by balancing discussions of Clifford Geertz’s “’From the Native’s Point of View’: On the Nature of Anthropological Understanding” with discussions of Horace Miner’s “Body Rituals among the Nacirema.” Geertz explains what’s at stake between experience-near and experience-distant perspectives, while Miner lampoons a Western experience-distant critique of American culture that is so distant it’s alien. I often have whole classes which have to be let in on the joke (that they are reading about themselves) after they’ve read the whole essay and responded to reading questions about it. Generally, we study this under the backdrop of a general investigation of just what “culture” is and how it relates to popular culture domains such as videogames.
Further, I felt that Bugeja was being heavy handed in his representation of his research. For example, in constructing his argument that there are pressing legal concerns regarding online events such as sexual harassment, he cites an article in the Indiana Law Journal, written by Erez Reuveni. Bugeja doesn’t mention the title, “On Virtual Worlds: Copyright and Contract Law at the Dawn of the Virtual Age,” perhaps because it more clearly represents the focus of the article, copyright, rather than liability related to violence or sexual assault. He writes “Reuveni cites a case of assault in a text-based environment, acknowledging that female avatars who experience virtual sexual harassment (and even rape) report suffering real-world anger and grief.” The fact is, though, that Reuveni is merely citing Dibbell’s “A Rape in Cyberspace,” rather than some legal case. In fact, Reuveni offers no new perspective on the work of Dibbell, writes only about a sentence on Dibbell’s work, and Bugeja uses almost the same language that Reuveni uses. Intentional or not, Bugeja misrepresents the source of the information to make it seem that the “case” originated on legal grounds, because of the source, a law journal, rather than the popular cultural grounds of Dibbell’s writing.

A Slight Detour: Virtual vs. Real

While I would prefer to mention Bugeja and just move on to the focus of my class, I am going to take a moment and surface the biggest issue he raises, the borders between real and virtual worlds and the potential for traumatic effects from virtual experiences. Dibbell’s essay, “A Rape in Cyberspace,” (the first chapter in his book My
Tiny Life) is an investigative piece that intends to raise questions about the connection between virtual and real experiences. While it does indeed corroborate that people do suffer real-word anger and grief it does not make a direct comparison between that kind of anger and grief and the kind that a victim might feel from a physical attack. Dibbell writes:

Months later, the woman in Seattle would confide to me that as she wrote [her response about her virtual attack] posttraumatic tears were streaming down her face—a real-life fact that should suffice to prove that the words’ emotional content was no mere playacting. The precise tenor of that content, however, its mingling of murderous rage and eyeball-rolling annoyance, was a curious amalgam that neither the RL [real life] nor the VR [virtual reality] facts alone can quite account for. Where virtual reality and its conventions would have us believe that legba and Starsinger were brutally raped in their own living room, here was the victim legba scolding Mr. Bungle for a breach of ‘civility.’ Where real life, on the other hand, insists the incident was only an episode in a free-form version of Dungeons and Dragons, confined to the realm of the symbolic and at no point threatening any player’s life, limb or material well-being, here now was the player legba issuing aggrieved and heartfelt calls for Mr. Bungle’s dismemberment. Ludicrously excessive by RL’s lights, woefully understated by VR’s, the tone of legba’s response made sense only in the buzzing, dissonant gap between them. (160)
Dibbell complicates simple views regarding RL vs. VR, but Bugeja, by using a distilled description of Dibbell’s experience by way of another source, resituates a more basic correlation between the real and virtual worlds. Dibbell pointed out that “many were the casual references to Bungle’s deed as simply ‘rape,’ but these in no way implied that the players had lost sight of all distinctions between the virtual and physical versions, or that they believed Bungle should be dealt with in the same way a real-life criminal would” (166). This attention to the dissonance between real and virtual worlds seems to be characteristic of the seasoned MOO users Dibbell writes about, but is definitely lacking in the work of Bugeja. To truly understand the nature of online experience we need to experience online worlds as the worlds’ inhabitants do.

Bugeja also misrepresents many players’ relationships with their avatars by characterizing them in a single light: “[avatars] represent our deepest wishes, aspirations, virtues, and yes, vices. Nothing is more authentic.” He does so to make a link between experiences we incur with those avatars and those experiences’ potential impact on our psyches. It is within the realm of possibility that some people may be completely invested in their avatars. But when I (or my students) are trying on a Kool-Aid Man outfit and flying over a newbie area in Second Life, I hardly think we are representing “our deepest wishes, aspirations or virtues.” If someone dogs on my Kool-Aid Man outfit, I don’t feel like they are critiquing some essential authentic crystallized locus of my self. Avatars are more often micro-facets of us as they consist of different representations or even experimentations with different representations in different contexts. We might have an avatar/persona on Facebook, in a fan discussion board for a videogame Web site, and in a
first-person shooter, and we might relate differently to each of those avatars. It takes time and investment to build an engagement with your avatar in a particular environment, because that process signals time and engagement with the environment itself (and perhaps the community there, as well). If we plan to engage in arguments such as Bugeja’s, which seek to advise institutional investment and practice, I think we owe it the pedagogical and intellectual missions of higher education to broaden our investigations and keep an open mind, rather than simplify the results of our argument with little personal experience. OU’s reaction was to lock down all access to the island for some days. In my opinion, this decision was excessive, particularly in tandem with the administrators’ inability to notify instructors teaching on the island or articulate a rationale for their concerns. Discussion during this time with the administration was troubling because some folks posited ideas for new rules that would have impinged on reasonable characteristics of users’ avatars. For example, one administrator, who had a fair degree of power related to the site’s governance, but very little experience in SL, posited making the display of any weapon a ground for ban from the site. At the time, though, Second Life gave new users a bag of props and costumes when they were created that included items such as a fireman’s axe, which one could “put on” with a fireman’s costume. In fact, I did see some of my students flying around brandishing an axe, when they were going through the process of trying different things on and learning about clothing. This often happens before players decide on a more static representation in Second Life. In the end, they decided to make the use of weapons (weapons that actually push users, rather than props which just look like weapons) not permitted.
It was after reading Bugeja’s article that the idea for a class on online representation in different mediums began to coalesce in my mind. Such a class, I theorized, could focus on a whole host of related issues such as: the link between entertainment and educational virtual environments (which I chronicle, partly, in Chapter Three), how different mediums we operate in can affect us, the nature of interactivity in new technological environments, how we might read ourselves and others in online spaces, and how and why we are rhetorical in virtual environments.

While explorations of virtual violence and its potential effects on participants is interesting on its own, it’s especially relevant to Academic study since perceptions of virtual violence can shape Academic institutions’ appropriations of technologies such as Second Life. Further, I suspect that some critics, such as Bugeja, develop arguments that aren’t informed by primary research--real experience with the medium they are criticizing. In Bugeja’s article, for example, he doesn’t cite his own experience within the medium as a basis for any of his arguments. He focuses on potential issues he imagines from a perspective outside the realm of the medium. It’s undeniable that outsider perspectives are important to our understanding of the issues surrounding topics we are familiar with from an insider perspective. But, if our conceptualization of a technology or pedagogical practice is solely based on our assumptions about it, with no real experience with it, we are put at a disadvantage. Similarly, basing our arguments against a particular practice or technology, without basing any evidence on experience with that practice or technology, especially in an article published in a venue meant to shape institutional and instructional practice, is unacceptable. Questioning our practices and critically critiquing
the specific content of particular applications is definitely acceptable. Bugeja’s point of view seems more aimed at locking practice down before investigating it. What’s at stake, then, relates to what happened when my class attempted to log on for a lesson and was restricted.

Let me explain a little further about my logic in the last paragraph. I am not saying that a critic need have experience with content, say, with ethnic cleansing before making judgments about the content in a game related to it. On the other hand, as a medium, I am saying that it is probably a good idea for a critic to have developed some competent literacy in the semiotic domain of videogames before participating in an Academic critique of that particular game or, in the case of Bugeja, of an entire application Second Life, which is used for many different purposes by different organizations and individuals. In fact, even, with a source text as ugly and nefarious as Ethnic Cleansing, it may be worthwhile for an Academic critic to be able to reference first-hand experience\footnote{While I genuinely believe what I’m saying in this sentence, even if I felt inclined to do so, my critical perspective would keep from engaging with the game, since it’s only available “legally” by purchase from an American skinhead organization. In this case, to legally play the game is to support the political organization behind it. However, if I chose to write about it, I could draw on my experience in other violent videogames and my experience deconstructing popular cultural racist texts (as I did in my Master’s thesis on Conan ((aka “the Barbarian”)).} with the game before writing about it, much like a film scholar might watch Birth of a Nation before deconstructing its racist agenda. On some level, I’m talking about a difference between structure or medium and content.

While articles like Bugeja’s show the kind of assumptions that pedagogues and administrators might bring to the table regarding videogames, videogame-like environments, and representations of violence, our students (and their parents) are likely
to bring other kinds of assumptions. There was one student in my class who made it clear that she was deeply offended at the plotline of the FPS, *Return to Castle Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory* (*RTCW:ET*). *RTCW:ET* is situated during World War II, with a multiplayer component, which we played, consisting of Allied troops fighting against Germans. The student, reasonably, was disturbed at the casual gaming representation of a conflict charged with horror and the lack of humanity. She was allowed to forego participation in the game, although she did observe, and was encouraged to, and did, write her next paper in the class detailing her stance. She also spearheaded a discussion the next class period detailing some of these perceptions to the rest of the class in order to present a more balanced view of how different people see the same cultural phenomenon. In the case of this class, our coursework mostly focused on negative critiques of videogames, and offered an entrance for her views.

This story of the student who took issue with the representations that were part of a videogame draws attention to the issues that may arise with different technologies and the responsibility we have to create a place where learning can happen. I hesitate to say our responsibility to create a “safe” place for students, a description that hearkens back to Pratt’s “safe houses” of contact zone theory, because a “safe” place may not be learning space. I guess it all just depends on what we mean by “safe.” For heteronormatized students, covering an article which deconstructs gendered acculturation may not feel like

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163 In classes like this, that focus on electronic environments I participate in outside the classroom, I tend to play the devil’s advocate. The firsthand experience with the medium, for the most part, gives students the tools they need to dismantle many of the kinds of negative critiques, such as Bugeja’s, particularly those based in assumptions about the media with little insider experience. On the other hand, students such as my conscience objector are able to construct stronger positions based on her observations and the classroom discussion related to the weaknesses of those particular negative critiques.
a safe place. In fact, it may feel fairly threatening. But, of course there are ways to cover such material that ameliorate those feelings, to some extent, or at least give them voice and make them a point for critical discussion. As critical pedagogues, when we talk about creating safe places, we mean something that shifts depending on particular topics, students, students’ needs, and perhaps many other things. Effective critical pedagogy is a rhetorical practice. While it may appear that the cultural content is at the heart of this conflict, violent representations of war, such representations can’t be removed from the technological package, an interactive videogame, that it comes in. While I can’t say for certain, I doubt the student would have reacted quite in the same way to a viewing of Saving Private Ryan, or if we had played the board game Risk as a class. My point is that ethical conflicts that arise in the course of the study of violent videogames not only shed light on the message, the violent content, or depictions of war, but also the medium of videogames and how they alter our feelings about that content in ways other media cannot.

Without an exploration of the primary texts, the games themselves, particularly in light of the interactive element the medium of the videogame is based on, non-gamers have no personal experience with which to gauge critical response to this important cultural phenomenon. This lack of a focus on primary sources is problematic because such widespread cultural phenomena should be served by well-informed Academically-oriented perspectives. It’s true that there is much at stake regarding the analysis of interactive engaging media, particularly in terms of the online shift from an emphasis on print-text to visual that I argue is under way. I hate to make an argument based on money,
but as a billion dollar industry (even in the midst of an economic depression),

videogames deserve at least some attention in terms of the popular culture analyses we do
in composition classes. Further, as videogames and videogame-like environments
continue to expand and as violent videogames may be connected to school violence, it
behooves us to develop critical skills via firsthand research. While it serves well the
student ethically opposed to *RTCW:ET*’s representation of World War II to be able to
draw on firsthand experience in her critique of the media, students already familiar with
videogames also need such educational spaces in order to view a practice they may be
familiar with in a non-formal setting in more critical ways.

The interactive nature of violent videogames presented the most hairy issues for
me to navigate as a critical pedagogue. I think that the videogame, an important form of
popular culture, is one of the most difficult to study in an introductory class such as
Freshman composition. We were really able to get at the heart of what makes videogames
different from other forms of popular culture by negotiating the conflicts that arose (for
example that of the student mentioned above) but also by discussing my own conflicts
with the class about what we were doing and why. While I am accustomed to the critical
readings regarding games that we cover, and plan to continue using them as a unit that
prepares students for some of the issues regarding game-like environments, such as
*Second Life*, virtually waging WWII with them again is something I need to think further
on as I negotiate my own pedagogical moves.
Dangerous Representations: An Identity Crisis for Videogames

Early at the beginning of Fall quarter, on September 14th, 2006, I read in the news that Kimveer Gill, a 25 year old from Quebec, went on a shooting rampage at Dawson College in Montreal. The news coverage following the act was interesting to me as an instructor who focuses on the study of new media in the rhetoric and writing classroom. I began posting questions on our class blog about the media representation of Gill after the event. I was initially interested in how the news reports focused on explaining the event through Gill’s self-representation online in a profile on a Web site called vampirefreaks.com.

Gill’s profile was definitely one of a dark and troubled individual. There were many pictures of him brandishing guns and knives, blog postings in which he details his angst and hatred for others, and profile information offering his taste in media (as far as the videogames listed, they are mix between shooters and so-called real-time strategy games (RTS) and the music listed focused on gothic rock and heavy metal). Most news stories mentioned that his favorite videogame was *Super Columbine Massacre RPG*, a game based on the Columbine shootings. Wikipedia has since claimed that *SCMRPG*

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164 You can check out the blog entry on [http://supawondablog.blogspot.com/search?q=montreal+shooting](http://supawondablog.blogspot.com/search?q=montreal+shooting).

165 Although many are violent none are really standout as red flags to someone well-versed in the genre. One of my dissertation readers wrote next to this footnote “What in God’s name would be a red flag!” In terms of games, you might look for a pattern which includes videogames that are reviled by many gamers themselves as inappropriate, such as *Ethnic Cleansing, SCMRPG*, the JFK assassination game, etc. While none of these games on its own offers us evidence that someone is psychotic and while there may be “normal” gamers who include games such as *SCMRPG* or the Kennedy game on their favorite lists, these games are a little more fringe-oriented and weird compared to mainstream violent games like *Grand Theft Auto*. But, there is no easy way to determine who has the propensity to kill and who doesn’t based on something as diffuse as a preference for a videogame.

166 After the Columbine shootings reports focused on, among other things, the Columbine shooters’ favorite videogames *Diablo* and *Doom*. Part of the point here is that one of the first ways our society, via our news, explains school shootings is by focusing on the media that the perpetrators consumed, usually music and videogames. Blaming media for a tragic school shooting unfairly reflects suspicion towards people who
was not listed anywhere in the blog or online postings, but that it was an error in reporting. The media focus on Gill’s allegedly favorite game, *SCMRPG*, was what initially piqued my interest…and what ultimately began a trace through different sources that chronicle many of the negative critiques leveled at videogames and their effect on players.

One thing that concerns me is that mentioning Gill’s “favorite” game is often where we stop in representing such events. Stopping at his favorite game is disconcerting to me because that game represents only a small potential part of Gill’s identity which may or may not be related to his pathology. The title alone, *Super Columbine Massacre RPG* (*SCMRPG*), offers a point where critical thinking can break down due to an emotional response to the very concept of a videogame-based on the event. Earlier, in May, the game was making the rounds in the news through an AFP story which included quotes from the creator’s Web site, families of those killed in the shooting, and an employee of the game industry, wounded in the shooting and confined to a wheelchair.

When we discuss *SCMRPG*, students often react in ways similar to those mentioned in the story by the families of the deceased. One father is quoted as saying he has not and never will play the game because he believes it devalues “the value of the

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play those games in general. What is at stake here, though, is that by scapegoating media such as violent videogames, communities risk facing the real and personal issues implicit in school shootings related to the communities themselves. While banning *Diablo* is unlikely to have stopped Columbine, a host of other strategies related to counseling support, family intervention, gun control laws, etc. may have had some impact at diminishing what happened. Just as many composition instructors would like their students to be able to look at an advertisement in a magazine and be able to competently analyze it rhetorically, I want my students to be able to respond to criticism leveled in the wake of tragedies that oversimplifies the causes of terrible things that happen. Issues related to school violence are not only relevant in the wake of Columbine to the community of Columbine, they are relevant to all our communities. After Virginia Tech we are beginning to realize that they are relevant to our safety on college campuses, in the classroom, as well.

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innocent people and it glorifies the murderers and the crime." Aside from the fact of the sheer emotional response the Columbine shootings often evoke, even from people who haven’t lost loved ones due to the killings, this point of view seems to hinge on the juxtaposition of serious and play. What I’m talking about is the visceral response people have after confronting content such as the Columbine shooting or the JFK assassination or other subjects (for example, the response my student showed to representations of World War II in a game) in the context of a *videogame*. The response I’m talking about is as much focused on the medium of videogames and assumptions and expectations people have about that medium as the particular content itself. Videogames are often considered mindless entertainment for children or child-like men.

One issue related to “games” is that people associate them with “fun,” while gamers may be able to distinguish between engagement with content and engagement with gameplay. So, people are outraged at their assumption that gamers enjoy having fun shooting the president, or killing Columbine students, or playing at the Vietnam war. The Vietnam first-person shooter might be engaging because the “capture the flag” model it’s based on is fun. A gamer might focus on that engagement, rather than engaging with the content, which may appear to the gamer to be arbitrary. Because the medium is

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168 Albert Rouzie writes about how the split between work and play (here characterized as between serious and play) informs much of our pedagogy in writing classes. He argues that we might develop a new rhetoric that seeks to integrate the two for powerful effects. For the most part, Rouzie focuses on the kind of play that may have been previously been viewed as a waste of time (kind of like the theory of “underlife”), not play in the way I’m describing here.

169 Slate magazine writer Clive Thompson writes a thoughtful article about this entitled “Player, Attack Thyself: Why Japanese Gamers Love Avenging Pearl Harbor.” Thompson argues that content, such as World War II in a first-person shooter, is more visible to outside critics than gameplay, which is invisible. I’ve experienced that myself after playing WWII-themed *Return to Castle Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory* off and on for three years. After playing the game many times, the engagement you feel is towards the gameplay: the focus on teamwork, completion of objectives, playing your role well, exploring the limits and potential of the game engine, rather than engagement in its content WWII. Really, what a game comes down to is its engine, or the software that makes it work.
entitled *videogames* and within that medium we are denoted as *players*, we are somewhat victims of our own language.

In my gaming life, I, for example, have played *Battlefield Vietnam*, based on the Vietnam war, and had a lot of fun doing it. I am aware, though, that the game can be problematic when certain aspects of its representation are considered in certain contexts.\(^{170}\) In my defense, the game was not fun because I felt like I was participating in the Vietnam war, or because I felt some sort of pleasure in playing on the Viet Cong side or the American side. Rather, the “rock, paper, scissors,” model, though, of different weapons and vehicles was engaging. For example, the range of vehicles, tanks, jeeps, jet fighters, patrol boats, scooters, coupled with the mode of capture the flag made for some fun games. Reading about and watching videos about the Mai Lai massacre, though, is not fun, although it might be engaging if you consider it a critical component to your knowledge base about human injustice and the potential for wartime atrocities and military cover up (especially in a time in which we are engaged in questionable wars overseas).

Arbitrary, the word I use in the paragraph above to describe content to gamers in some situations, is a loaded word. I don’t mean to claim that all content is moot. Many gamers,\(^{171}\) myself included, would be outraged with content such as that of *Ethnic*

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\(^{170}\) I was interested in veterans’ impressions of such games and searched through the discussion forums for posts related to Vietnam vet’s perspectives. There was a bit of a debate, but no outcry regarding the game’s content. One problem is that it is impossible to tell if a user really is a vet. Another issue is that those bothered by the game probably aren’t going to take the time to learn about it and its community and post in the discussion forums. I imagine, though, even among those who fought in the war there are mixed feelings regarding movies, games, and other popular cultural representations of the war.

\(^{171}\) The Entertainment Software Association’s 2008 survey concluded that 40 percent of videogame players are women and that 35 years old is the average age of videogame players. This may be surprising to some people who envision a different sort of population for this kind of popular culture.
Cleansing, which I cover on page 270. In the paragraph above, though, I am arguing for readers to open their minds to a more nuanced approach to conceptualizing consumers of videogames. Just as critics such as Linda Barlow and Jayne Ann Krentz worked to debunk simple views of romance readers as passive readers of trash, I think we have to consider the context of each individual game in regards to its content and in formulating our judgments of the games and their players. We might ask questions such as: Who makes the game? What is the purpose of the game? How exactly does the games content relate to real world events? How are these events represented? How does the game relate to other cultural representations of the particular content? Who is the intended audience? What does the audience think of the game? How do other people feel about the game and who are they? What have critics written about the game? How does the medium of videogames affect a user’s relationship to the content? In the case of Ethnic Cleansing, the gameplay could be awesome (although I doubt it is), but that wouldn’t change my response to the content. But in terms of a game like Battlefield Vietnam, a game that’s content has been featured in many different (and mainstream) representations in other media, from films like Rambo to films such as Born on the Fourth of July, the general content of the Vietnam war alone might not trump some of the other contexts of the game when we consider players’ reactions to it. Lest readers wonder why any of this is important at all, I’d argue that it’s only important if we consider more accurate representations of those in sixty-five percent of the households in America who engage in a twenty-one billion dollar industry important, particularly in the light of composition
classes that increasingly find popular cultural analysis an important component of coursework (ESA).

In my experience with game content and people’s reactions to it, the most important thing is to be able to be reflexive and understand how others’ identities may relate to their perspectives on the media. While I don’t think my students and I are bad people because we played a WWII game, I don’t think my other student was wrong for taking issue with it. Her perspective definitely influenced the way we were able to talk about the game and our perspectives and her experience watching the game, I’d like to think, influenced the way she was able to argue her point of view.

I find the rationale behind SCMRPG compelling because it argues that videogames can be used for “socially conscious” purposes. On the SCMRPG Web site, the creator of the game, Danny Ledonne, argues that:

There is little in the realm of socially conscious gaming—software that does more than merely amuse for a few idle hours. Yet while some low-selling games offer pedagogical education (in geography, math, etc.), games that genuinely challenge social taboos or confront real cultural issues are nearly non-existent. I wanted to make something that mattered.

(Artist’s Statement)

Let me be clear that I don’t think Ledonne’s game lives up to its rationale. But, the rationale is compelling nonetheless. The game is interesting to me because of its rationale. Considering the two, the game and the “Artist’s Statement,” in tandem offers a process of critical thought that is meaningful and worthwhile to me because it forces us to
think about the issue of school violence and how its representation obscures strategies for avoiding it and the limits and potential of media such as newspaper articles and videogames for representing that violence.

Negative critiques of videogames often argue that violent videogames are particularly dangerous because videogames engage with users in a vivid way, due to interactivity and immersive characteristics of the medium, among other things. This is not the case with SCMRPG. SCMRPG is not very immersive. Unlike most first-person shooters, the game utilizes a 2-D third-person approach in which you are looking down at a map at the characters you control. The graphics are subpar. The gameplay, frankly, sucks. It’s hard to imagine that the prime characteristic of videogames, immersion, is at work in this game. What people react to in this scenario, then, is the idea of a “game” focused on the content here, the Columbine shootings. It’s important to note that because pathos, in this case, can get in the way of fully critically considering a game a like SCMRPG. We should consider games like SCMRPG, because the process of thinking about them expands our possibilities in thinking about and responding to future school violence, the causes of it, and our responses to it. For example, the game’s emphasis on the boys’ voices via their journals and representations of their videos raises questions about instigating factors, support networks available in our schools, the role of families’ presence or lack thereof in such situations.

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172 Simon Penny’s “Representation, Enaction, and the Ethics of Simulation” makes a good argument for the unique characteristics of videogames as genre that, he argues, should raise our concern.
What a player is overwhelmed with when playing *SCMRPG* is the sheer pathos the concept of the game evokes. There is something voyeuristic and slimey about the reflexive move interactive media makes when we step into the simulated shoes of the Columbine killers. While the game feels icky (this term makes light of the really sick feeling that I had in the pit of my stomach, which is hard to describe, it borders on a slow-burning feeling of Kristeva’s “abjection”) as result of its positioning of the shooters as the protagonists, whose roles you take on, its focus on bringing primary texts, clips from the boys’ journals and the movies they made before the attack, adds a human aspect that is sad in ways the representations of the media typically avoid. That is, the game offers a picture of the perpetrators, which I believe is fairly inaccessible from normal news. Without diminishing the tragedy of the victims, such interactive media can point towards a view that humanizes the monsters that perpetrated the crime and opens up questions about our communities’ negligence and the ways we failed everyone, including the two teens who masterminded the shooting. This point of view is not generally popular in mass media that only wants to assign blame outside of the realm of our complicity. *SCMRPG* doesn’t realize the humanization of its antagonists—but motions towards it.

When we really get to the work of considering something from an *Other* point of view it is unavoidable to feel uncomfortable...Feelings of discomfort offer evidence

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173 I played for about an uncomfortable hour. Based on the uproar the game caused, I’d consider that a “normal” response. It’s true that some players might be enthralled or excited by playing *SCMRPG*. Given the fact that the game engine and resulting gameplay are not compelling, we could probably argue that enjoyment as relating more to the cultural content of the game. This might constitute one of those “red flags” that I mentioned in a footnote on page 20 of this chapter. As I previously said, “red flags” are problematic though. Just because a reader enjoys Lawrence Sanders’s *Deadly Sin* novels, which include first-person narratives from the perspective of a serial killer, does not mean that the readers are pathological.

174 I would argue that this is the case, when we are truly talking about *Otherness*. 
that we are approaching space where reflexivity is more possible than if we avoid playing
the game because it "devalues the tragedy" or is merely "sick." In terms of crisis
resolution, I'm afraid that those reactions shut down critical thought and create a space
where we are likely to passively accept media representations that blame such incidents
on the killers' consumption of popular culture (Marilyn Manson, videogames, etc.)...This
rationalization of an irrational act (making sense of a school shooting by focusing on the
media that the perpetrators consumed) may be comforting but will not help in
determining what we can do for our schools and communities to try and avoid something
like this in the future (other than ban the offensive media, which avoids the more difficult
job of repairing families, communities, and schools).\textsuperscript{175}

Although I’ve been implying in this chapter that the dangerous/risky/unsafe site
of the game is actually the kind of psycho-social moratorium we need to critically think
about media and school violence, while we talk about SCMRPG in my class, I don’t
encourage my students to play it. We talk about the game as a cultural phenomenon,
considering the “Artist’s Statement” in light of critiques of the game.\textsuperscript{176} The fact that the
game focuses on Columbine, a perpetually open wound, often evokes such a visceral
feeling in my students that it is difficult enough to talk about it…it is enough to ask
questions about such claims, but I don’t think we’re at a point, at least in my context

\textsuperscript{175} In the aftermath of the recent Utah Mall shooting, according to Rebecca Walsh, a writer for the Salt
Lake City Tribune, Jack Thompson, well-known anti-videogame crusader spread a rumor that the shooter
was “probably trained on Grand Theft Auto videogame.” Walsh goes on to inform, “that rumor was stated
as fact on Capital Hill,” just as Gill’s allegedly favorite game, \textit{Super columbine massacre RPG} was stated
as fact (“Childhood offers clues about killer”).

\textsuperscript{176} While it may seem ironic that I’m not encouraging my students to play the game given my arguments
that primary research is important in videogame studies, my students draw on their experiences playing
other games, like \textit{Return to Castle Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory} in order to discuss SCMRPG. If I were a
tenured professor, I might have a different perspective. As it stands, studies such as the one I’m describing
here border on being risky considering visceral public reaction to games like SCMRPG.
where we can systematically explore conflicts in ways that Ledonne’s “Artist’s Statement” suggests. On one hand, I feel compelled to explore such issues in the classroom, because of the possibility for reflexivity that might lead to change, but on the other, I feel fearful that some of my students and many of their parents might stop thinking critically as soon as they hear the title of the “game” and mischaracterize or be incapable of understanding just why a study of this kind of game might be meaningful. And, finally, the analysis of the pathos involved, which I describe in the paragraph above, comes as a result of playing and thinking critically about the game and the controversy surrounding it. I don’t wish to suggest that the game itself is “good” in some way or to suggest anyone playing it will arrive at the same conclusions I did. Its investigation offers a better approach at understanding school violence and media representations of it, than accepting critiques that posit all blame on media such as videogames and avoid the more pressing concerns of revising our communities at local and personal levels. For example, we might work at developing psychological support systems that are able to better identify and serve the needs of our children, rather than depend on identification strategies that focus predominantly on particular media consumption (omg the kid plays Diablo II) or clothing choices (trenchcoats). An investigation of the game also offers a position to consider the limitations of media critiques.177

Issues of media representation and school violence are important because they relate to the content of a techno-rich class, representations of (and in) the medium of

177 Critics argue that immersive environments, such as those found in 3-D first-person shooters (FPS), develop the “skill and will to kill.” While one might be able to argue that SCMRPG might encourage or enhance the will to kill, it is a different kind of game than an FPS shooter. The differences between different kinds of games can be lost on critics unfamiliar with the games.
videogames, which often become scapegoats for real world violence, but they are also important because they open the door for us to deconstruct other stories we tell about the affect of media on our children and ourselves. For example, it is a lot easier to blame media for transmitting “ideal” standards for female “beauty” that are unattainable for real women and have destructive consequences on their self-image than it is to look at our own complicity in the construction of those standards. I’m not going to deny that media does not damage us in those ways. But, when part of the problem is easily defined as outside the realm of our behavior (i.e. it’s a problem because of media representation, not because I actively consume the media, or because my community has a beauty pageant, or because we exclude certain body-types from the cheerleading squad at our school, or because mom and dad make catty remarks about our waitress’s weight…), then we have very little impetus to change.

War Games

Playing games like RTCW:ET in class builds literacy in videogames (which translates to other environments, such as SL), but also open the door for discussion, such as the one above focusing on Super Columbine Massacre RPG, on the different kinds of representations that surface in gaming media and the social and political implications of such media. Focusing on such representations can be important when our nation is in a time of war. Several months ago, a colleague forwarded me a machinima piece called “Taliban Hunting,”178 a video that was making the rounds among those who forward “funny” Internet bits to each other through email. Machinima is a relatively new genre in

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178 One version on Google video reported that it has been viewed over 200,000 times via their service. It is available via a search for “Taliban Hunting” on Google video/YouTube.com. Or, watch it [here](#).
which movies are made through videogame environments. One player acts as the camera and records a scene in which other players, virtually, act. Later, audio is dubbed over the scene and the creator is left with an animated movie.

“Taliban Hunting” is a particularly offensive representative of machinima. It parodies a hunting show in which two hunters (Bubba and Billy) visit Afghanistan for “a weekend hunting trip in Kabul” to hunt “feral Afghans” in order to collect “turban trophies.” I use it in class as an instance of a new media portrayal of middle-easters through the medium of the videogame, mediated as it is through the genre of machinima. And, since a critical analysis of “Taliban Hunting” is so easy to accomplish (it’s only a three minute video) it might offer a good beginning point for an exploration of other representations of middle-easters, not in machinima, but in videogames as part of their content. Obviously, too, it helps students keep abreast of the kinds of representations we are manufacturing during a time of conflict and in the midst of calls for patriotism that are sometimes tied to such representations. In the class I’m focusing on here, “Taliban Hunting” dovetailed nicely with Quest for Bush, another game that made the news around the time I taught the course.

A few days after the Dawson shooting that I began this section with, a videogame called Quest for Bush made national news. Quest for Bush is a FPS in which players move through the game shooting adversaries who have the face of George Bush. A CNN article,179 “Web videogame aim: ‘Kill’ Bush characters” mentions that the game was based on earlier games called Quest for Al Qaeda and Quest for Saddam, in which

characters went around shooting terrorists and hunting for Saddam Hussein. *QfB*, a reappropriation of derogative representation, was created by an Islamic group considered to be a terrorist organization. What’s startling is that the original versions, *Quest for Al Qaeda* and *Quest for Saddam*, with their one-side representations of the middle-east, are not more startling to us.

For one thing, the lack of news on the first two games (*Quest for Al Qaeda* and *Quest for Saddam*) is interesting because of the kind of news (i.e. national) *QfB* merited. The news story from CNN seems very unemotional, as if it is being objective in its reporting. Ostensibly, I suppose Americans are supposed to be mildly outraged at the idea of a FPS created by a terrorist Islamic group which makes play of killing our President. A Google search for news on the other games, those focused on Al Qaeda or Hussein, turn up the *QfB* stories or game reviews, but no question of how representations of violence against middle-eastern characters might trump the games’ contexts of a fight against terrorism or the capturing of a dictator. Needless to say, “Taliban Hunting” is not of interest to national news.

If students do get caught up in arguments over context, and see *QfAQ* or *QfS* as fundamentally different than *Quest for Bush* because our investment in the “war on terror,” educators might point to other games, like *Battlefield 2* (*BF2*) which incorporate middle-eastern characters in FPSs. *BF2* is a multiplayer FPS which offers a fictional near-future scenario in which a Western coalition fights against a middle-eastern coalition, with players deciding which side they want to play for. It’s worth mentioning that *BF2* offers a depiction of an ongoing war in the middle-east while there is a real war
we are engaged in currently. Some game reviews have mentioned that the middle-eastern locales in which the battles take place, cities, completely lack a civilian population (much like games such as QfAQ which represent all avatars in the middle-eastern setting as enemies). Part of the fallout of a game like BF2 is that it may encourage players to envision the Iraq war in a very clean way, in which the good guys and bad guys battle it out amongst themselves without any collateral damage. Since initially writing this, the wildly popular Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare carries on this tradition of inaccurate representation in its multiplayer games devoid of innocent bystanders and collateral damage.

James Paul Gee, in What Videogames Have to Teach Us about Literacy and Learning, details a controversial FPS, Under Ash, in which a Palestinian protagonist battles Israeli settlers and soldiers. Gee’s argument about the worth of such a game, or at least opportunities games could offer based on his study of Under Ash, sounds eerily similar to that of the creator of SCMRPG, “videogames have an unmet potential to create complexity by letting people experience the world from different perspectives” (151). Gee argues that videogames offer a platform in which we encounter and enact different cultural models than we may be accustomed to in our everyday lives. For example, he does not believe that playing Under Ash makes him want to kill Israelis, but that it “mean[s] that, far more interactively than you could in any novel or movie, you would have experienced the ‘other’ from the inside” (151). We read Gee in class to help make sense of the power of representation in videogames for bad and for good.

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180 The name of the game itself, “modern warfare,” is interpellating, as it creates a conceptualization of war based on a stilted view of reality that represents certain political perspectives regarding the war in the middle-east.
Recruitment for Hate

Gee sets his argument concerning the potential of videogames up against games that recruit and train people for hateful purposes. He focuses on a game called Ethnic Cleansing, a FPS designed by a white power group, the National Alliance. In Ethnic Cleansing, players progress by killing people of ethnic minorities. Gee writes “any attempt to stop the flow identities that new technologies allow presents the danger of locking everyone into their most cherished identities, and that has brought us a great deal of ethnic cleansing of its own” (152). What Gee is pointing out is that burying our heads in the sand to the content being produced is not going to be helpful in getting at the underlying causes of hateful media. Like I’ve described with SCRPG, it’s important to confront these phenomena in the classroom, where we can think critically about the games in an Academic setting, rather than leave the students to encounter them elsewhere.

Other issues arise in an Academic setting, for example, the bias towards forms of popular culture that still exists makes it all the more difficult to actually study the games as primary sources. It is difficult to get some lab or English department administrators to see the value in studying any videogames at all. In addition, the juxtaposition of subjects that carry a lot of emotional weight that I’ve covered here, school shootings, representations of the “other” during war, and how the vast array of identities being peddled via games might dehumanize us in the worst sort of ways (or make us more humane), make it difficult to convince some people studying a devalued medium may be worth the resources.
Trailing Bias

In the techno-rich class, we definitely do discuss the “unmet potential” that videogames offer, as outlined by Gee and Ledonne, but we don’t stop the conversation there. In Bill Bigelow’s article “On the Road to Cultural Bias: A Critique of The Oregon Trail CD-ROM,” he ultimately details a call for a critical element to be considered in terms of computer literacy. Bigelow’s analysis is particularly interesting because he focuses on a canonic educational game that many instructors and students take for granted as wholesome. Bigelow exposes some of the cultural biases that exist in The Oregon Trail’s portrayal of history. Bigelow argues that he doesn’t intend to bash the company that produced the game, or the game itself, but the way we use it. Bigelow calls for a careful considered response to such media, in which teachers and students ask particular questions about the simulation after they’ve experienced it. In particular, he raises concerns about the game’s positioning of the white male perspective as central to the experiences players interact with. While this may be empowering to some players whose identities (based on race, class, religion, sexual preference or identity, etc.) position them with less privilege in our time, but certainly in the time Oregon Trail focuses on. So, for example, while girls may play the game as females, the experience they are offered is no different than that of a male. This avoids a historical representation. The game also ignores some unsettling history as it glosses over the oppression and destruction of the Native Americans during Western settlement or the experience of African Americans at the time.
Applying Bigelow’s concept of a critical computer literacy to a game like *The Oregon Trail* seems rather innocuous… The main pitfall with *The Oregon Trail* is perhaps the nostalgia many of us who grew up playing it at school feel for it. I was surprised that the game resonates with current freshman, who experienced *Oregon Trail* in grade school. We play the game in class and read Bigelow, but by and large the majority response is to argue that while what Bigelow says is true, perhaps the children the game is targeted at are too young for such harsh history lessons. That kind of resistance to critical analysis, based on nostalgia, makes a critical analysis of the game all the more important, because nostalgia can encourage us to take things at face value. Similarly, though, it is equally important to face more difficult analyses, such as those that evoke a deep pathos, head on. If nostalgia can blind us to the social implications of a game like *The Oregon Trail*, then revulsion can blind us to the social implications of a game like *SCRPG*, which may relate to pressing concerns in our communities. Ultimately, a discussion of Bigelow’s analysis of Oregon Trail clears the way for wider discussion on the value of history, different representations of history, and the capacity of our children for knowing how things really were or are. Further, a discussion of Bigelow’s work can highlight what’s at stake in scrutinizing the weaknesses of videogame critiques that look at violence or cultural representations.

While the topic of the class I describe here was online representation, technological practice was not restricted to videogames. There were a number of other techno-practices related to the class, which I’ve mentioned at the opening to this chapter, but not visited yet in detail. I encourage you to visit these sites (password...
permitting...some of them have changed over the years to restrict access as a result of new versions of software). At the beginning of this chapter I referenced that, in addition, to the content of the course (which focused on online representation and issues related to representation in visual environments such as videogames), I’d detail my use of “class apparati.” When I first wrote that I originally conceived of it as relating to the structure of the course as evidenced in written documents such as the syllabus, paper assignments, and the like. I’ve realized though, that content, apparati, and practice are all interrelated when we consider some of the practices related to writing in different mediums. What I mean to say is that the mediums of blogs and wikis are practices, but they are also related to content because we specifically talk about how our representations, communication, and interactions relate to each other from medium to medium. I turn to detail these practices now.

The Supawondablog

Two other practices related to the techno-rich class were the course blog and wiki. A blog is a kind of online journal, often related to a particular topic or theme. The blog can be found at supawondablog.blogspot.com. I’ve used the blog differently over time. Some posts reflect the teacher making a post, which students respond to, others are from students which students respond to. The most current are the most low tech; they simply represent student voices engaging other students in discussion regarding connections they might make with the course materials and their own lives. This falls on

181 Both the blog and the wiki that I write about here were a part of the class that I am referencing in this chapter, but they also include work from other classes. They are practices that have persisted across classes and over time. I mention this to avoid confusion for readers who may be interested in taking a look at them. The online representation entries may be buried in the blog, for example. The archival link I offer in the next page should help those interested make sense of it.
the spectrum more towards the concept of writing to learn, rather than the students formally writing to produce a product graded according to the standards we might use for a major assignment. In these posts, students are free, to some extent, to produce typos, use everyday language, and generally be themselves, in the context of discussing the course materials. Students might use the first ten minutes before class starts to write their comments to whatever has been posted that day. By exploring the archive, you can see different classes’ different approaches to blog work. The URL, [http://supawondablog.blogspot.com/2008_02_01_archive.html](http://supawondablog.blogspot.com/2008_02_01_archive.html), offers a range of posts by students and me related to the classes mentioned above. These will show students (and me) making posts in which we tie outside sources, often news items, to topics and sources we’ve discussed in class. When I refer to a post, I am referring to what you see on the main page of the blog. Under each “post” is the “comments” page. If you click on “comments” you can see what other people wrote in response to the main post. You can tell my work from my students because it is attributed to my Avatar, “Hambone.” Many of the posts may be dated, but that is because I’ve shifted my pedagogical explorations to the blog tool offered as a part of Blackboard.

Blogs and wikis offer very different kinds of writing technologies than MOO, Second Life, or videogames (which I’m grouping together because they are more synchronous), as blogs and wikis are asynchronous communicative environments. By incorporating these different technologies under the topic of online representation analyses, my intention is to encourage students to apply critical thinking about representations in one technology, say how representations in videogames affect our
emotional and critical responses, to other less synchronous environments such as blogs and wikis, and, by extension, social networking sites like MySpace and Facebook.

Although silly, the “supawonda” persona is effective at framing these educational environments as engaging and offering an amelioration of students’ unconscious tendencies to be turned off by formal, academic settings, or, at least, technologies with more institutional feels, such as that of Blackboard. Jared Stein, the director of instructional-design services at Utah Valley University describes the dangers of the feel of institutionalized technologies in a blog entry on the definition of “creepy treehouses,” a term signifying the Academic world’s tendency to adopt practices based on technologies students use in their own lives, such as social networking sites. The blog is not locked down in the same way the wiki is, so you’ll see students are encouraged to use usernames that are not related to their real names in order to protect them. You can distinguish my posts/comments from theirs by my username, Hambone. The sister to the supawondablog is our course wiki, the supawondawiki.

What’s a Wiki?

Time to learn some Polynesian. “Wiki” comes from the Polynesian word wikiwiki, meaning really fast. Most people are familiar with Wikipedia, the online encyclopedia written by wiki users. Thus, wikis are Web pages that are quickly and easily modified by different users. They were developed to make collaborative writing easy and convenient. You can check the supawondawiki out at supawondawiki.pbwiki.com,

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182 I better emphasize here that this is how I use the blog. While that may fall in the writing-to-learn end of the spectrum, it should be clear that other teachers have more formal blogs and writing activities in their courses.
183 http://flexknowlogy.learningfield.org/2008/04/09/defining-creepy-tree-house/. This is an excellent article.
username: dissertation, password: passpaul. The wiki does not have as polished an appearance as the blog because we use it as a more of a “sandbox,” or environment to try out different kinds of collaborative writing exercises, which we evaluate together afterwards. For example, the “IdeasForNewEssays,” link called for the students of one of the technology-rich classes I’ve been focusing on here to generate prompts for their third “paper.” Collaboratively, we produced a long list of possibilities, which we polished up, paired down, and included in the prompt for the third paper. I’ve used Wallace Stevens’s well-known poem “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird” as a departure point for a collaborative composition on “20-ish Ways of Looking at Court Street184,” an activity aimed at developing our descriptive chops and to get us thinking about point of view and perspective.

While such activities develop participants’ literacies, as they learn to negotiate the blogs or wikis merely to complete their coursework, they also relate to the pedagogy for the class by shaping how students feel about the writing they are doing. One potential benefit of the wiki is its ability to offer an increased sense of ownership over student writing (which can lead to increased confidence in composition), based on activities that encourage them to construct educational artifacts related to the class. For example, they may feel more engaged (and invested) in academic assignments they’ve contributed to by designing writing prompts. Further, most writing we do in the wiki becomes a point of study for the class, on some level. Finally, they are interacting with others’ writing and it can foster a sense of community, if a teacher is careful to balance work in the wiki with reflection about that work in class. Just as students aren’t likely to intuitively be able to

184 The main drag in Athens, Ohio.
constructively criticize in peer critique, students need training in order to interact effectively in wikis, blogs, or other writing technologies. Usually, the first step to this is to decompress after writing activities in the technologies and discuss what we saw happening, how we felt about it, what the good and bad things were, and strategies we might employ to avoid the bad in the future.

The Assignments

My favorite essay in terms of the first paper assignment (Appendix B) was the “Lead Pencil Noob” option. In this option, students had to write the entire paper (and draft it) with a pen or pencil. In this medium, students were encouraged to respond to a technology debate we read about in class. The description follows:

Lead Pencil Noob: We’ve read a few articles detailing a conflict between those enthusiastic about technology and those who believe it is detrimental. Wendell Berry, for example, argued against using computers for writing. Bill Henderson, of the Lead Pencil Club, made similar arguments for low tech writing utensils. They seem to be implying that the medium affects the act and outcome of writing. If you choose this prompt, I want you to write your paper via pen/pencil and paper. Explain how you feel about the debate, then try to explain what Berry and Henderson may be talking about in terms of the difference in mediums (by integrating specific quotes from the original sources)...Finally, detail your experience (good or bad) writing low tech. When you turn in your final version of the paper, be sure to include all the pre-writing material (notes, prior drafts,
etc.) related to the final version. If you wish to choose this option (pencil and paper) but would like to develop your own topic, which applies to some focus in our class, you can run it by me. The final copy should be polished and readable. Do not choose this option if you aren’t prepared to go through with the experiment. (Appendix B)

While many students hated the process, they often produced more polished work than I am accustomed to. There were fewer types of local level errors (typos, grammar issues, misplaced punctuation) than you expect to see if the draft had been quickly produced. We talked about that in class. The discussion yielded a greater capacity for students to consider that their perceptions of the handwriting process as tedious might mask the real benefits it offered. We extended that experience to discuss how our reactions to readings in the class, such as those by the “Lead Pencil Club,” might be enhanced through students’ personal experience in drafting by hand. This prompt is a novel activity that exposes the differences mediums have for writing. One student composed a paper entitled “Why I Won’t Use a Pencil and Paper,” a riff on Wendell Berry’s essay “Why I Won’t Buy a Computer,” which we read in class. I encouraged the student to do so, when half way through the “Lead Pencil Noob” prompt she was floundering and on the cusp of rebellion.

In general, though, I like to offer students a few different options in terms of the essay they write for any given major assignment. This is more engaging for them, because they have some say in the matter. In terms of the second assignment (Appendix
C), I enjoyed some of the papers I received written on the first prompt, the videogame analysis. The description follows:

Find a computer or videogame that you are unfamiliar with, preferably one with both diegetic [plot-related, i.e. related to the narrative reality of the text] and non-diegetic [content related to game-play, rules, structures of the media, i.e. things outside the scope of the story told within the game] content…not something simple like Minesweeper. If you need help finding one, ask for help. Do an analysis of the game similar to the way Bigelow or the critics in Game Over do it (you may, however, decide to give your analysis a positive spin). In particular, create a set of questions like those Bigelow develops for simulations, or if it makes sense use Bigelow’s. Be sure to get plenty of research time (i.e. actual time spent playing the game with a notebook nearby to jot down what you are specifically seeing as you encounter it). If you choose this prompt, be sure to integrate quotes from at least 2 sources. A final paper should feel like an in depth cultural/gameplay analysis of the game you’ve chosen and should feel complete and accessible to someone not familiar with the game.

These were good because the students were able to incorporate advanced language for videogame analysis that we covered in course readings. I remember one student turned in an excellent paper, which was closer to twelve pages than four, focusing on a racial and gendered reading of a zombie videogame. The Bigelow article really came in useful for
his interpretation which focused on African-American stereotypes the game reinforced along with the weak roles of the supporting female cast. The third assignment (Appendix D) generated all kinds of interesting texts, as you can imagine. My favorite is available on YouTube at http://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=dQ5x_5DA5wk. This student followed this prompt:

Movie. For this new essay, you could create a short film. This allows you to see on-screen text, hear people actually saying other text, and add in music and sound effects in order to enhance your meaning. It also adds a visual component to your essay that is unlike a simple picture or hyperlink. You can actually see people as they explain their opinions to you and they can demonstrate their ideas via the TV screen. A movie could be done in a variety of styles including a documentary (Why I would choose to create a movie essay), a spoof film that makes fun of the other types of essays or anything else you could possibly come up with. The trick here would be to still be true to the idea of "essay"...can you imagine making an argument through video?

In the movie, a student engages with the work of Myka Vielstimmig,185 which we read in class, while making comments on more “traditional” modes of writing. I was particularly interested in the visual rhetoric she employed, for example using black and white to represent the “real” world, and academic writing, and color to represent the virtual world, and multi-media composition. This kind of text offers opportunities for us to discuss the

185 “Petals on a Wet Black Bough: Textuality, Collaboration, and the New Essay” is the text we read in class. Vielstimmig is the writing persona of Kathleen Yancey and Michael Spooner, who utilize the name (“Many voices”) to represent the way collaboration affects the “author” of a piece.
possibilities (and problems, for example musical attribution and in-text citation) of “writing” in new media. Vielstimmig is concerned with just such a discussion in her/his/its work. Like the blog, these mediums create different kinds of academic texts, in terms of their “permanence” or life outside the classroom and their publicness. These characteristics refigure writing in ways that can’t help but change writing and our relationship to it, just as these mediums do for our writing outside the classroom.

The Portfolios

I don’t always use portfolios, but I’ve found them to be effective when I do. The portfolios186 (Appendix E) required for this class consisted of the collection, revision of, and reflection on a number of pieces of writing, or other compositions. Particularly, students were required to be knowledgeable of the Composition Committee’s rhetorical competencies, which are the foundation of the first year composition program. In their reflective essays, students were required to explain how their work addressed each of the four major competencies, the abilities to write, read, research, and respond to and assess student writing rhetorically. This sort of reflection relates to the pedagogical transparency I practice, in that the portfolios ensure students are aware of the intentions of FYC and by the time they finish them are able to articulate how they’ve internalized those competencies. While techno-critical pedagogy holds a particular view, which I’ve explored throughout the dissertation, regarding rhetorical competency, the reality is that the competencies as they were constructed by the Composition Committee come from a

186 It’s sincerely a coincidence that the portfolios wound up as Appendix “E.” They are not, however, e-portfolios, in that they are not developed as electronic documents to be hosted online. Obviously, though they are composed in electronic spaces (word processors, for example) and many times components were, often, new media, such as the YouTube video mentioned above, or my students’ Facebook accounts for the New Essay and the Traditional Essay.
broader perspective based on fundamentals and closer in spirit to the traditional values of composition programs. That is not a bad thing. It’s hard to argue that a truly “innovative” or “cutting edge” model would serve students well in a program meant to offer them the fundamentals for writing. The portfolio has been useful in ensuring that I adequately attend to the needs of the students as the program has been designed to reach, while techno-critical pedagogy offers me the pedagogical perspective which enhances those kinds of fundamental competencies with other kinds of fundamental competencies, that, while not mutually exclusive from the Committee’s guidelines, aren’t especially emphasized in them.

I’ve included this material on portfolios, because, technological or not, they were a part of the class I’m describing here. Again, I’m interested in offering a description of a class that includes the major components I used in order to avoid offering an articulation of theory that neglects a reasonable window on practice as some other critical pedagogues have done. The portfolio also illustrates the idea that there is always room for improving, too, as I imagine it could come in the form of an e-portfolios that would be a nice capstone to a techno-rich class. I was not ready at the time I taught the course to integrate e-portfolios. I restrict myself to integrating one new technological practice (at most) per quarter, and teaching with first-person shooters was new for me at that time.

What’s at Stake?

In terms of the project (and product) of my dissertation, one thing at stake here is the inclusion of a picture of practice and content related to theory. That is, while I don’t wish to convince you to do exactly as I do, cover the same topics, or take the same exact
perspective regarding those topics, I do wish to represent practice as it relates to one
 techno-critical pedagogue’s class. A science fiction writer whose name I forget described
his stories as being influenced by other writers before him. He compared the stories that
influenced him to his work by relating the phenomenon of “undiscovered” Pacific
Islanders seeing airplanes flying overhead and creating idols in their shape and a belief
system based on but outside the conceptual realm of the culture the airplanes came from.
If you can imagine our hypothetical islanders wanting to go further in their
representations and crafting some of the innards of the airplanes, distant and unattainable
as they are, you might be on to something in terms of this chapter. I love the work of
Freire and hooks and others. I would pay anything to get an inside look at Freire’s
classes, replete with lesson plans, course work, assignment descriptions, etc. I’d love to
sit in on hooks’s classes that she described in Teaching to Transgress. But Freire’s and
hooks’s class are as unattainable to me as a plane high overhead. In my own undertaking
of theoretical construction, though, I’ve built in a component based on practice related to
a particular class through this chapter.

I think that sometimes we are afraid to offer descriptions of what we do in the
classroom replete with course documents because we fear the scrutiny that comes with a
“published” form. I’m certainly not the best or worst instructor at Ohio University. I’ve
found that in introducing faculty and TAs to techno-critical pedagogy, theory and
practice are both vital in explaining the whole package to them. I started out with theory
in the early chapters of the dissertation because without it, practice seems empty. But,
like it or not, as soon as readers start demanding examples for the theory we write about,
it’s difficult not to cite practice. Discussions of technological practice can be complex in their own right, because sometimes our technological literacy is a stumbling block in understanding what a practice, such as blogging, entails, before we can understand how it illustrates something we’ve claimed about techno-critical pedagogy.

Incorporating a blog or wiki into a class or even just figuring out how to use the discussion board function of their class management system (if it offers one) is a good beginning. But I would like readers to do so while developing a techno-critical perspective that can articulate why and how that practice relates to developing students’ agency. Accordingly, this chapter hasn’t been a technological walkthrough, but more of a technological why-through. The course I describe here represents an integration of multiple technologies that instructors may accomplish overtime as they work towards the “shotgun” method of techno-critical pedagogy (again, mentioned at the start of Chapter One). This is a vital approach for techno-critical pedagogy because the use of and study of multiple technological medium/environments offers many different borders with the potential to exchange the different lessons we learn about our representations and communication in different mediums. Negotiating different technological tools/applications/environments in the course of the class develops students’ modern literacy as it relates to technological writing and communicative spaces.

But What’s Really at Stake?

What’s really at stake here, in terms of the focus and practice as I’ve specifically laid it out is personal agency. In a broad way, the class centers around questions of self-representation. We study self-representation through written communication (MOO
communication, email, etc.) and through the representation of identity in the shape of the avatar (MOO, Second Life, videogames). When students discuss MOO discourse and how their voices may differ from MOO discussion and face-to-face discussion they begin to notice some of the benefits of increased student voice. I encourage them to consider the implications that silence in face-to-face settings may have on their personal agency and the knowledge base we are able to construct together as a community. A thorough discussion is also surely to include considerations of how silence can be a useful rhetorical strategy in other face-to-face situations. As electronic mediums increasingly become the de facto way for teachers and students to interact, exploring the ways in which we may be inclined to represent ourselves (consciously or unconsciously) in different mediums is an important part of our jobs in preparing student for their college careers and the careers they move on to as they move out into the “real” world. Further, as communicative environments, from social networking sites to professional collaborative spaces such as Breeze, Skype, or others offer profile features that increasingly approach an avatar model, as the professional collaborative space Second Life does, it is vital for students to consider how the choices they make about their avatars relate to their construction of an ethos in virtual worlds. That focus on self-representation through avatars may necessitate the expansion of some traditional expectations regarding what writing is and what is in the purview of a writing class. Dressing up in formal attire for a job interview is a no brainer, for many of us. Many of us would not consider dress to be the focus of a writing class (although those of us who teach “writing in the workplace” may mention dress when covering cover letters, resumes, and interviews). On
the other hand, you can make the argument that the decisions we make about the clothes we wear are part of a composition process and they definitely can be a rhetorical process, when we make decisions about our appearance in order to persuade others. When we shift to a virtual world and work with visual texts such as avatars, we are more clearly composing rhetorical texts...texts that exist outside the realm of our physical bodies. When we interact in virtual worlds such as Second Life we represent ourselves through visual and textual compositions, the choices we make about our avatar and the means with which we communicate with others. To make a long paragraph short, it is vital from a techno-critical perspective that students are not only competently literate users in these environments, but that they are consciously rhetorical beings in virtual environments they will inhabit for work and play. The discussion of videogames in the class and this chapter definitely relates to the points I raise in this paragraph regarding online self-representation. Environments such as Second Life are videogame-like and in understanding their potential and their limitations and the way other people may think about them a study of videogames is useful, especially from a techno-critical perspective that looks for overlapping borders of literacy. Further, I believe we will see social environments moving in the direction of Second Life, if the evolution of multi-user dungeons MUDs and MOOs to massive-multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGs) in the past twenty years is an indication of what may continue to happen in the future.

187 A smaller concern, perhaps, for readers who do not play videogames are the millions of identities at stake in a culture war in which critics seek to reify videogame players as violent, racist, and sexist sponges that passively consume a popular cultural low art form. The work of critics such as James Paul Gee have been imperative in opening up a discussion about the culture of videogames, rather than a lecture.
CONCLUSION

“It’s not enough to simply adopt or be an expert with a particular technology, although that may be a good start towards implementing techno-critical pedagogy, but this must become an ongoing pedagogical process.”

–Page 302

You Are Here

When I started work on this final chapter I felt like the conventions of dissertations expected me to look forward and prognosticate about how things are going to develop in the future. The more I think about it, looking forward and looking back aren’t as intuitive to this project as looking at where electronic culture is now and relating it to our institutional and personal contexts. Thus, I’m envisioning a map with an arrow pointing to the one place you already know how to get…where you are. The map gets more amorphous the further out it gets from our immediate contexts, which we are obviously more knowledgeable of. I’m just hoping that the edges of our perception, in relation to this map founded on our technological literacy, don’t become denoted as “where there be monsters.” The future of the composition class is the changing landscape of our technological literacy. For some that might be (finally) integrating our institution’s course management system (CMS), for others it might be learning to podcast, for others it might be learning what a podcast is. My emphasis here is not the practice, but the pedagogy that influences our development of practice.

One particularly interesting characteristic of writing on techno-critical pedagogy is the demanding revision process, particularly in terms of my penchant for narratives temporally constructed. I am constantly updating claims or statements I’ve made regarding technology that have changed since then. Often, this is exciting, surprising
(even though it shouldn’t be), and on some level satisfying. For example, in one of the earlier chapters, in a footnote, which I revised at least twice, and which is probably outdated now, I comment on how much a modern computer system costs. Recently, I configured and bought a new computer system for some friends of the family. When it came time to transfer their data, we had a problem. Their old computer was so old it had no USB ports, no CD RW drive, nothing but a floppy disk drive. The new computer was so new that it had no IDE connector on the motherboard to connect to their old hard drive. Further, the new computer had no floppy or Zip drive, defunct technologies. I was deep in thought and my wife took a look at me and asked if it was even possible to transfer the data between the two. The truth is there were several different ways to do it and I was just trying to figure out which would be the most cost effective, easiest, and least wasteful. I could email the data to my address, then download and install it on the new computer. Or, I could compress it and upload it to a file-sharing site. In the end, I bought an external hard drive enclosure, installed the old hard drive, and then hooked that up to the new computer via a USB connection. For people who aren’t aware of the different options, though, there is an insurmountable divide between old and new technologies. To some extent, I feel that a techno-critical pedagogy is focused on bridging old and new.

Several people have commented to me that they consider this kind of project, one focused on technological concerns, to be difficult in regards to the constant ebb and flow of new technology. During the course of the dissertation I’ve continued to offer workshops for faculty based on integrating “new” writing technologies such as blogs and
wikis in their courses. I grimace inwardly whenever I refer to them as “new” because they seem pretty old to me now. I’m always waiting for someone to call my bluff at a seminar that’s been advertised as such, but they never do, because the newness of technologies is all relative. I think this speaks to the value of techno-critical pedagogy, because we’re not playing a zero sum game here. There’s no flipping a switch and becoming an adept with technology. We always have something new to learn as new technologies and applications spring up constantly. One concern readers of this text have had regarded much of the anecdotal narrative I’ve provided which are based, for the most part, in one particular context at one particular institution; but I believe, it’s all relative. I base this belief on the discussions I’ve had with other practitioners at national conferences, workshops I’ve given at regional campuses, work I’ve done with area high school students, and presentations I’ve given in the course of my job search, particularly at other institutions which are “progressive” enough to require their writing courses to be hybrid, taught part of the time in traditional classrooms and part of the time in computer classrooms. Even at such a “progressive” institution, I found no one in the room who challenged my assertion that wikis were new technologies and for the vast majority, including the department chair, they were. And if wikis weren’t, then Facebook was, or Twitter, or Tumblr, or FourSquare, or whatever the next new technological application is. Recently on CNN.com an article chronicled new trends in search engines seeking to supplant Google. Nova Spivack, a tech developer, said “The topography of the Web is shifting much faster. Instead of happening kind of glacially, you’re on the beach right where the water is coming in and it’s constantly changing the way the sand is laid out”
(http://www.cnn.com/2009/TECH/05/12/future.search.engine/index.html). What this means to me is that change is at the heart of technological innovation. It’s not enough to simply adopt or be an expert with a particular technology, although that may be a good start towards implementing techno-critical pedagogy, but this must become an ongoing pedagogical process.

In my last on campus interview, the committee asked me about Second Life, and I sported a line directly from the dissertation…“it’s become hip to hate SL.” It’s unmistakable…on the faces of some of the interviewers I saw an unabashed satisfaction when I made that statement. Most of the time, I feel like such instructors think that SL’s waning popularity somehow justifies their indifference towards it (which may mask their inability to figure it out). When I was in grade school I read several Stephen King books merely so that I’d have a legitimate ethos in order to negatively critique his work. In the process, I discovered that his writing had both bad and good characteristics. To some extent, those who feel that the benefit of a focus on a technological trend, which will end sometime in the future (even soon), is negated are missing point. As Spivack’s quote above notes, the nature of technological development is always in flux. The pedagogical focus on new technologies and the techno-critical perspective which seeks to constantly explore the new topography of technological development relates to a focus on process rather than particular product, similar to trends in the field of writing that have alternated from the product to a focus on process. I don’t mean that product (in this case a particular technological practice) is completely unimportant. Nor, do I mean that we don’t need to seek real means for assessment as we make claims about the effectiveness of
technologies. But, as I’ve made clear in proceeding chapters, part of the benefit of techno-critical pedagogy is the way in which students and teachers critically analyze and respond to technologies and their impact on their classroom.

(Re)Writing Writing

There must be a million articles in the field that chronicle what changes are coming in our field or should come. The 2010 Conference on College Composition and Communication, entitled “The Remix: Revisit, Rethink, Revise, Renew,” evokes similar sentiments. To be fair, most of my dissertation has focused on similar concerns. To repeat myself, it’s better to consider our current realities\(^\text{188}\) and respond to them rather than try and guess what’s coming down the road 20 years from now. Now that I’m wrapping up this dissertation, I am reluctant to find myself in the final chapter claiming I know where we’re going from here. In preparing for a faculty seminar focused on first year student writing and concerns from faculty from other disciplines, a colleague turned me on to Douglas Downs and Elizabeth Wardle’s article “Teaching about Writing, Righting Misconceptions: (Re)Envisioning “First-Year Composition” as “Introduction to Writing Studies.” Downs and Wardle argue that we should forget about claiming that it’s possible to teach some sort of general “academic writing” that directly relates to the kinds of writing students will be expected to do in other particular disciplines. Rather, they argue that first year writing courses might be re-imagined as introductions to writing studies.

\(^{188}\) While working on this chapter, I have been chatting with my dad in Cleveland. Literally, while writing this line my mother broke into the chat and upon discovering I was writing and chatting at the same time she asked “what does that say about the quality of your work,” perhaps evidencing an older and more traditional view towards writing. I replied “it says it’s modern and reflects the modern technologies that inform our lives and shape our writing.” She said, “i guess so. btw…” (sic) and continued on with something else. I think it’s interesting how new technologies have shaped her discourse in that last line!
They argue this will “improve students’ understanding of writing, rhetoric, language, and literacy in a course that is topically oriented to reading and writing as scholarly inquiry and that encourages more realistic conceptions of writing” (552). While Downs and Wardle don’t explicitly focus on technology, I’m interested in their ideas because in their model for change, writing, rhetoric, language, and literacy are up for revision. In the earlier chapters of the dissertation I argued that the term “writing” itself causes misunderstandings in terms of what writing means today. While Downs and Wardle argue that the subject of an introduction to writing studies may more appropriate focus for first year composition classes, I argue that a more appropriate and flexible model might filter what writing means today in the context of the technologies we use to write, i.e. from a techno-critical pedagogical perspective. While a techno-critical pedagogical perspective assumes that technology is a vital aspect of writing, it is flexible in that it seeks to explore new technologies and new applications as they evolve in a technique that seeks overlap between old and new.

Let me talk a little about where we are now.

As I write this, the downturn in the economy has had terrible repercussions in my department and center, at least from my perspective as a former graduate student administrator (GSA) and a newly minted Interim Director. Many of our program’s GSA positions have been cut or are at risk of being cut, and the programs will accordingly suffer without our support. In terms of full disclosure I should mention that my former position of Assistant Director to the Center for Writing Excellence was cut as a result of the budget being decimated. I’m in the novel position of being the one who sat in an early
budget meeting and declared “I’d cut my position before I cut anything else.” I’m trying to understand the ease with which that statement came given that my position specialized in teaching faculty how to implement writing technologies in their classes. Basically, it was a vanguard position in terms of developing the writing technology end of faculty’s literacy. And part of me continues to support my declaration. As the academic institution and concepts of writing as it relates to pedagogical and programmatic concerns here are currently constructed, a writing technology specialist is the first thing that can afford to go. The Center for Writing Excellence, for example, has some concrete programmatic demands, for example developing, proctoring, and evaluating exemption exams for first year and junior writing classes. These are concrete responsibilities that must be handled. There is no one else currently equipped to do this. These responsibilities could be absorbed by the English department, if the department was willing or coerced to absorb them. Such a change would signal that Ohio University is one step closer to dissolving even the semblance of Writing Across the Curriculum which conceptualizes our general education writing requirements outside of the realm of the English department (even if the majority of general education writing classes are taught within the English department). It’s important to note that in my run down of “concrete programmatic demands,” I’m avoiding the work of our Student Writing Center, which is under the domain of the Center for Writing Excellence, but in a different physical location and with a fairly full staff it feels almost like a separate entity. Increasingly, I find myself drawn into supporting the writing center given the huge demand for writing tutoring and related workshops.
It is no one’s “job” though, to do what I do, at least institutionally, and thus, although the need is there, those who fulfill it are decentralized and contextualized within different departments. Some technical expertise (how to’s) is passed on via Academic Technology and their seminars, the computer consultants in the English department offer training for TAs and English faculty, and I imagine there are some nerds (like myself) sprinkled around in other departments offering help and training. I’m heartened by developments in the English department. The computer lab and its consultants have increasingly played an important role for professional development related to technology in the department. Recently, the English department’s lab positions’ descriptions have been revised to more concretely explain how their roles relate to various aspects of literacy. It’s heartening to see seminars on technological practice being offered. The revision of the job descriptions suggest a continual focus and development of what it means to work in such positions and what such work consists of, that evolution of computer consultant positions is important as it runs parallel with the evolution of new technologies. Further, just as Downs and Wardle argue that writing studies will serve to educate folks on what writing encompasses and respond to misunderstandings, similarly the trends in the computer lab in the English department suggest that they are working on articulating important distinctions to the population they serve. While computer consultants might be considered specialists, the job descriptions delineate general categories they are supposed to fulfill. For example, the computer lab, is actually a “literacy lab” and each of the consultants has been given a description relating to what they can accomplish in terms of responding to particular needs related to technological
literacy. I hope to see trends like this continue as computer expertise and technological literacy disseminate among the whole department, rather than stay contained in a few specialists, a few nerds here and there.

Demolishing the Master’s House

Since the implosion of the writing across the curriculum program here, I’ve found myself in the unlikely position of interim Director of the Center for Writing Excellence and in a strange position given the critiques I level in most of the dissertation regarding administration and its location in the positioning of electronic literacy as it relates to the kind of literacy we should be teaching in our writing initiatives. That is, I find myself in a position of more authority than in the past, when I did the majority of my writing, to make some sort of impact on writing in our institution. To be fair, I am in a poorly funded position with program that has a decimated budget. As an ABD (All But Dissertation) interim Director, I have little institutional authority as opposed to the tenured professors and established administrators I’m expected to operate among. A colleague in the suite of offices that mine is in balked when I told her my role. Taken aback, she said, “I’m sorry. I just expected a director to be a lot older.” As you can imagine, I could go on about it. I’m not quite so sure about dismantling the master’s house with the master’s tools. It feels like a more likely scenario is to let the master’s house fall apart due to shoddy construction.

Accessing the Techno-Critical

Along with my new status as interim Director, I’ve been continuing teaching composition for the English department, but in a diminished role as adjunct faculty. In
this role, my access to the sparse resources we have at our disposal is even more limited. While adjunct faculty often teach composition classes, we’re the last group considered in terms of our desires versus the needs of the department. Occasionally, I’ve heard, instructors higher on the list are placed in one of the computer labs without even knowing they’ve requested a computer lab class. So, while I may consider myself a computer and composition specialist, and other folks in the department may agree, I haven’t taught in a computer classroom in over a year.

I’m of two minds about this lack of access I’ve experienced. On one hand, I believe that the issue is not that I haven’t been able to teach in a fully computerized classroom, but that writing classes on the whole aren’t taught in fully computerized classrooms. On the other hand, I can’t claim that techno-critical pedagogy does not come into play when we teach with limited technological resources. I’ve spent a fair amount of time and space in the dissertation explaining how technology surrounds our Academic lives in terms of the communication we do and the way technology is integrated into our recreational lives. And, for me, a Returned Peace Corps Volunteer, who taught for two years in a classroom with a failed chalkboard, a pedagogy is useless if it relies on a piece of equipment related to practice.189 An instructor can integrate blogs, wikis, MOO, and other technologies without teaching every day of class in a computer classroom.

The title of this conclusion, “You Are Here,” chronicling my lack of access to computer classrooms for composition instruction is a good place for me to end the

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189 While I was writing this, I realized that in the first couple of chapters I don’t argue that we need to teach writing in computer classrooms because techno-critical pedagogy requires particular practices, for example using Second Life. To refresh your memory, I argued that a computer backdrop for writing instruction makes sense because of the way computers have infiltrated modern writing and the kinds of modern literacy that are expected of us in the “real world.”
dissertation. While it may seem like a pessimistic move, the point of a map is that there are other places to go. I look forward to continuing the focus on techno-critical pedagogy that I developed in this dissertation. I encourage other instructors to discuss techno-critical pedagogy when discussing practice with their colleagues.
WORKS CITED


Crump, Eric. “At Home in the MUD: Writing Centers Learn to Wallow.” *High Wired*:


Gee, James Paul. What Videogames Have to Teach Us about Learning and Literacy.


<http://www.ohiou.edu/instres/student/ACTClassProfile.pdf>.


APPENDIX A: SYLLABUS

English 153:
Special Topics
Writing and New Media, New Environments
T,TH 6:10-8:30pm, Ellis 20
Call Number: 02966

Instructor: Mr. Paul Shovlin
Office: Alden 301T (located in the faculty commons)
Phone: 740-818-9046
Email: ps138792@ohiou.edu
Office Hours: Tentatively T, TH 4-6pm, or by appointment


Electronic documents (.pdf format) available through the Blackboard “Text Books” link (some will be downloadable, others will be links to materials on the Web). Be sure to print out a hard copy and bring it to class.

Other Requirements: A USB flash drive with enough space to carry your files. Bring these to class always. I will begin checking for these on week 2.

Course Philosophy:

How does the changing face of modern literacy affect texts which we “read” and “write”? How do we compose in new media? How are we composed through new media? What is the nature of virtual representations of our selves in gaming and other kinds of environments? In this course, we’ll explore these questions as we “read” a number of different kinds of media. We’ll explore the educational use of online environments, investigate the videogame traditions behind them, read some scholarly articles that seek answers to how videogames affect us, and how fears of such technology surfaces in the novella Ender’s Game, and the movie Brainscan. While the focus of the course will be on technology, we will be using rhetorical analysis to discuss the texts and our own writing. Over the course of the quarter, we’ll explore wiki, blog, MOO, and Second Life technologies; multi-modal composition; and develop an online portfolio of our work.

Course Requirements:

- **You will be expected to keep up with the reading.** There will be reading each night. If the reading sounds too challenging (it will not insult your intelligence), you should think about picking a different English class. If you plan on coming to class, plan on doing the readings. **Remember to bring print copies for reference in class discussions.** We will be sitting around the table, not using our computers when we discuss.

- Connected to keeping up with the reading, **you will be required to post comments on the class blog (http://supawondablog.blogspot.com) before each class meeting.** Please write at least a couple of short paragraphs in response to the blog posting. These can be somewhat informal, but should be intelligent.
• Once during the quarter **you will be expected to do a more formal blog entry/post**, that others will respond to. You will sign up for a slot which prompts you post before the next class meeting.

• You will choose from your writing during the quarter to **create a final portfolio** presenting your work. In addition to revising your choices, you’ll write a 5 page reflective essay that argues you’ve satisfied the rhetorical competencies and reflect on your work. This portfolio will count for a considerable part of your final grade. This will be described in greater detail later.

• **You will be responsible for participation.** If you proactively participate and show that you are knowledgeable about the reading, you’ll be fine. You may lose participation points if you participate less than once a class.

• **I may institute reading quizzes at any time,** if I feel participation is waning. If everyone is actively participating, we won’t resort to these.

• You will be responsible for bringing in **rough drafts of your papers** the class period before they are due for peer workshopping. Attendance will be very important for these three days. **If you are unable to attend a peer workshop, you will be docked points.** In addition, if you are unable to attend you are still responsible for producing a rough draft, emailing it to me before class meets on the peer workshop day.

• **You will write 3 five-page essays** (although **you may write more** than five pages). Turn in the essays (and any accompanying work) in a 2-pocket folder. Give the papers cool and interesting titles. You should cite at least a few sources either from your readings or from your own research in your papers. They should have citations formatted in the MLA style. Each paper should include a one-page reflective statement: an explanation of why you chose your topic, what you were trying to accomplish, and how you tried to do that. This reflective statement does not count towards the page expectations for the paper.

• **You are welcome to bring your papers to my office for feedback before the papers are due.** You should do this at least once during the quarter. Contact me after class or by email to set up an appointment.

• **Grading:**
  - Paper 1  15%
  - Paper 2  15%
  - Paper 3  15%
  - Blog Posts 15%
  - Final Portfolio 35%
  - Participation/Pop Quizzes 5%
  - Attendance/Peer Workshop 5%

Accommodations for students' special needs are made in instruction, not in evaluation. Students with special needs should contact me during the first week by email or after class.
English 153 papers are graded according to the instructor's judgment of the overall quality of the manuscript.

Course Policies:

- **If you want to revise a paper that I have graded, you can turn in a revision within a week after receiving the grade.** Your grade will not go down, but it won’t necessarily go up if you don’t do a reasonable revision.

- **Late papers cannot be revised after they are graded.** GRADES FOR LATE PAPERS WILL BE LOWERED BY ONE WHOLE LETTER GRADE. If you are absent the day that something is due, it is late unless you get a classmate to turn it in for you. Contacting me before turning something in late is a very good idea. Perhaps, we can work something out.

- **Do your blog comments.** You will be responsible for monitoring your completion. I will not remind you to do them. I will check them weekly and make notations in the gradebook.

- **Don’t routinely come to class late,** it’s annoying. In particular, on days in which we are using the computers to explore online environments it will be important for you to be on time. It will definitely disrupt class if you are late on such days (even if we are meeting virtually). If you routinely come late to class your grade will be lowered.

- **Attendance is part of your grade.** You can miss 2 classes (for any reasons, good or bad) without repercussions. Each additional missed class will cost you a third of a letter grade off your final grade (if you end up with an A- in the class but have missed 4 classes, you’ll have a B). Students who have perfect attendance, participate in class, and come to class prepared are welcome to write a one page request (submit it during Week 9 or 10) asking me to raise their grade by a third of letter grade.

- **Attendance for Peer Workshops is a special requirement.** There are only three days scheduled as peer workshop days. If you miss a peer workshop, you will still be accountable for the above policy, but you will also lose points associated with your “Attendance Peer Workshop” part of your grade.

- **Plagiarism is defined by the Ohio University Student Handbook as a Code A offense,** which means that "[a] student found to have violated any of the following regulations will be subject to a maximum sanction of expulsion, or any sanction not less than a reprimand...Plagiarism involves the presentation of some other person's work as if it were the work of the presenter. A faculty member has the authority to grant a failing grade... as well as referring the case to the director of judiciaries" (10). If you have any concerns about plagiarism, please see me BEFORE turning in something questionable. **I will not accept plagiarized material.** This policy is non-negotiable and applies to ANY plagiarism. We will be using MLA style. I will talk briefly about MLA style in class. If you are unfamiliar with it, it is your responsibility to ask more about it.

- **Civil Discourse:** In our class discussion, in our readings, and in our writing throughout the quarter, we will most likely be exploring sensitive topics and
examining ideas from different perspectives. At this university, students and faculty
are afforded an academic environment that allows for intellectual expression;
challenging issues and ideas may arise, but none of these should be expressed in an
inappropriate manner either verbally or in writing. One of the goals of a university
is to challenge us all to think again about all that we know (and all that we don’t
know). This demands that we all share responsibility for creating and maintaining
an enabling environment in our classrooms and in the larger university community.
**We will all be responsible for maintaining an environment that encourages
civil interaction.** In part, this means that we will be sensitive to what we say and
do, how we act, how our words and actions have consequences, and how our words
and actions affect others. As a teacher, I pledge that I will treat each of you with
respect. If at any time any of us thinks we are not fulfilling our goal of maintaining a
respectful and civil environment, she or he has the right and responsibility to share
her or his concerns with me or with the class.

**Week 1: We earn the right to slack a bit at the end of the quarter...**
**Tuesday, January 8**th: Syllabus and Introductions. What is writing? Composition? The potential
of this class? What is rhetoric? What are the rhetorical competencies? Intro to wiki.
**HW:** Read the first two (boring) chapters in *Reading Rhetorically*. Log onto the course wiki and
post/revise our crib sheet of the most important stuff from the chapters.

Blog entry for next class: Paul Shovlin

**Thursday, January 10**th: Discuss *Reading Rhetorically* and wiki technology. Intro to Blog Create
Accounts.
**HW:** Read Chapter 3 of *Reading Rhetorically* (Including “Who Cares if Johnny Can’t Read?”). You
are now officially locked in a self-boring contest between me and you. Read it because I have to.
Read “Luddite vs. Tech Fetishist” and “Why I am not Going to Buy a Computer” (available on
Blackboard, Text Books).

Blog entry for next class: __________

**Week 2: We continue to earn the right to slack a little at the end of the quarter...**
**Tuesday, January 15**th: How does technology affect “writing”? Thinking in genres. Intro to the
“New Essay” genre. MOO session.
**HW:** Read Chapter 4 of *Reading Rhetorically* and Scott McCloud’s “Show and Tell.”

Blog entry for next class: __________

**Thursday, January 17**th: Discuss Chapter 4. Build in the MOO.
**HW:** Read Chapter 5 of *Reading Rhetorically* and “Reading the Visual in College Writing Classes.”
Read Chapter 6, Post on Wiki.

Blog entry for next class: __________

**Week 3: I throw down the gauntlet...**
**Tuesday, January 22**nd: Discuss Chapters 5 and 6. Wiki work.
HW: Read Chapter 7. Read “Second Life.” Do an Academic Search. Complete search on “Second Life” via the Library Web page. Find and read 1 article on SL related to business, 1 on SL related to Education, and 1 on SL related to culture. Don’t sweat it, find some short articles. They’ll be interesting.

Blog entry for next class: __________

Blog entry for next class: __________

Thursday, January 24th: Second Life Intro.
HW: Bring two copies of your rough draft to class next time. Volunteer for workshop.

Blog entry for next class: __________

Week 4: Fun and games...
Tuesday, January 29th: Peer Critique Day. 1 hour of workshopping
HW: Paper 1 Due next Class.

Blog entry for next class: __________

Thursday, January 31st: Paper 1 Due. Intro to gaming.
HW: Read “Immersion, Engagement, and Presence” Read “Representation, Enaction, and the Ethics of Simulation.”

Blog entry for next class: __________

Blog entry for next class: __________

Week 5: Pwning the Oregon Trail!!!
Tuesday, February 5th: Second Life Session
HW: Read “On the Road to Cultural Bias: A Critique of the Oregon Trail CD-ROM”

Blog entry for next class: __________

Thursday, February 7th: Discuss Oregon Trail. SL Session.
HW: Read “Violent Videogames Recruit American Youth”

Blog entry for next class: __________

Week 6: We truly become nerds.
Tuesday, February 12th: Discuss “Game Over.” Play games (Return to Castle WolfenStein: Enemy Territory, America’s Army, Life And Death, and Oregon Trail).
HW: Read “Ender’s Game” Pages 1-19, and stop at the “* * *.”

Blog entry for next class: __________

Thursday, February 14th: Discuss “Ender’s Game.” Play? (Possibly view “BS”?)
Blog entry for next class: __________

Blog entry for next class: __________

**Week 7: Hyperdrive to Paper 3**
Tuesday, February 19th: Peer Critique.

Blog entry for next class: __________

Thursday, February 21st: Paper 2 due. Discuss Paper 3
HW: Read “Petals on a Wet, Black Bough.”

Blog entry for next class: __________

**Week 8: Composing Paper 3**
Tuesday, February 26th: Discuss “Petals.”
HW: Think about Paper 3.

Blog entry for next class: __________

Thursday, February 28th: Practice with Powerpoint, Word, Frontpage...multi-modal essays.
HW: Bring 2 Copies of your Rough Draft for Peer Critique

Blog entry for next class: __________

**Week 9: Nearing the portfolio.**
Blog entry for next class: __________

Thursday, March 6th: Paper 3 Due.

Blog entry for next class: __________

**Week 10: The final portfolio, finally.**
Tuesday, March 11th: Work on Final Portfolio- Optional

Blog entry for next class: __________

Thursday, March 13th: Work on Final Portfolio- Optional

Final Portfolio due:
Tuesday, March 18, at 7:00 p.m
APPENDIX B: PAPER 1

Paper 1
Literacy, Technology, and Rhetoric
(2 copies of) Rough Draft Due: Tuesday, January 29th
Due: Thursday, January 31st

Write a 4-6 (it may be longer but not shorter) page essay on one of the following prompts. 4 pages means 4 complete pages. Don’t to forget to include a 1 page reflective statement, as described in the syllabus (this does not count towards the 4 page minimum limit). Submit the final materials in a 2 pocket folder.

1. Lead Pencil Noob: We’ve read a few articles detailing a conflict between those enthusiastic about technology and those who believe it is detrimental. Wendell Berry, for example, argued against using computers for writing. Bill Henderson, of the Lead Pencil Club, made similar arguments for low tech writing utensils. They seem to be implying that the medium affects the act and outcome of writing. If you choose this prompt, I want you to write your paper via pen/pencil and paper. Explain how you feel about the debate, then try to explain what Berry and Henderson may be talking about in terms of the difference in mediums (by integrating specific quotes from the original sources)...Finally, detail your experience (good or bad) writing low tech. When you turn in your final version of the paper, be sure to include all the pre-writing material (notes, prior drafts, etc.) related to the final version. If you wish to choose this option (pencil and paper) but would like to develop your own topic, which applies to some focus in our class, you can run it by me. The final copy should be polished and readable. Do not choose this option if you aren’t prepared to go through with the experiment.

2. We’ve read a few texts that encourage us to broaden our perspectives on visuals, both on their potential and their relevance to writing/rhetoric classes. Given our readings and discussions, write an essay in which you defend an exploration of some of the different online environments (MOO, wikis, blogs, etc.) in a freshman composition class. Pretend that your audience believes such classes should merely focus on writing mechanics (grammar, punctuation, how to write a research paper, etc.). Be sure to pick at least two sources from class and integrate meaningful quotes. In addition, your paper should integrate at least one meaningful (rhetorical) visual element. You should develop your own unique voice in the course of your essay.

3. Write a personal essay in which you try to survive 2-3 days without a particular kind of advanced technology (cell phones, computers, Ipods, or some other kind of electronic media). Keep a journal which you update periodically (say twice or three times each day) explaining your progress, anxiety, etc. Only use such devices/technologies for unavoidable purposes, like turning in your homework over email or calling AAA because your car broke down. Try and pick something
that will keep you on your toes. In the final essay, be sure to draw on our class readings (Barkow and Henderson or Berry) and your journal for quotations to integrate/respond to in your essay.

Format the text the way you like it. Be advised that your essay should feel complete. If it seems to end abruptly, or you don’t develop ideas that should be developed, you will have to do so in a revision. Your paper should have proper MLA citation for both in-text and Works Cited citations. Cite all sources; I will not accept plagiarized work.

You will be graded on:
How developed your essay is in terms of its structure (beginning, middle, and end) and content (its ideas and your integration of others’ ideas via quotes formatted in MLA style).
The rhetoric of the essay. How persuasive it is. How it anticipates and writes to or against reader responses.
The relation of you to your writing. How well you incorporate your particular view or experiences into your essay. How well you establish your own voice.
The look of your essay: your grammar and punctuation and document design.
APPENDIX C: PAPER 2

Paper 2
Literacy, Technology, and Rhetoric
(2 copies of) Rough Draft Due: Tuesday, February 19th
Due: Thursday, February 21st

Write a 4-6 (it may be longer but not shorter) page essay on one of the following prompts. 4 pages means 4 complete pages. Don’t to forget to include a 1 page reflective statement, as described in the syllabus (this does not count towards the 4 page minimum limit). Submit the final materials in a 2 pocket folder.

1. Find a computer or videogame that you are unfamiliar with, preferably one with both diegetic and non-diegetic content...not something simple like *Minesweeper*. If you need help finding one, ask for help. Do an analysis of the game similar to the way Bigelow or the critics in *Game Over* do it (you may, however, decide to give your analysis a positive spin). In particular, create a set of questions like those Bigelow develops for simulations, or if it makes sense use Bigelow’s. Be sure to get plenty of research time (i.e. actual time spent playing the game with a notebook nearby to jot down what you are specifically seeing as you encounter it). If you choose this prompt, be sure to integrate quotes from at least 2 sources. A final paper should feel like an in depth cultural/gameplay analysis of the game you’ve chosen and should feel complete and accessible to someone not familiar with the game.

2. Pick a particular technological environment, Second Life, the MOO, a social networking site you are familiar with, a videogame, or something else. Analyze it in terms of McMahan’s essay focusing on immersion, engagement, and presence (including the characteristics related to presence). Explain how these elements contribute to the unique aspects of the environment. Focus on one environment, not all of the above. Be sure to use McMahan in the course of the essay.

3. Write an essay in which you focus on the ethics of representation, by citing material from Simon Penny’s essay, in the course of examining one of the games we were introduced to in class. If you focus on a game like *America’s Army* (bringing Lugo into the conversation) you may want to play the game a little more extensively. Or, you may focus on what you observed during our class experiences with *Return to Castle Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory*. As you re-read Penny in preparation for this prompt, what are the concrete ethical problems that arise in a game like RTCW:ET, in general? How do problems of representation figure in in-class research on a game like RTCW:ET? What do such issues say about the medium of the videogame itself?

4. Come up with a different idea, still related to our class focus these last few weeks and run it by me in person or via email.
Format the text the way you like it. Be advised that your essay should feel complete. If it seems to end abruptly, or you don't develop ideas that should be developed, you will have to do so in a revision. Your paper should have proper MLA citation for both in-text and Works Cited citations. Cite all sources; I will not accept plagiarized work.

You will be graded on:
How developed your essay is in terms of its structure (beginning, middle, and end) and content (its ideas and your integration of others' ideas via quotes formatted in MLA style). For this one, I'll give a few extra points when determining a final grade to those who find excellent outside sources and are able to do a good job integrating them into the essay.
The rhetoric of the essay. How persuasive it is. How it anticipates and writes to or against reader responses.
The relation of you to your writing. How well you incorporate your particular view or experiences into your essay. How well you establish your own voice.
The look of your essay: your grammar and punctuation and document design.
For your third paper, I’d like you to investigate new forms/structure/media and see how one might adapt academic writing/the essay to experiment. You are encouraged to emulate/learn from Vielstimmig and the YouTube video “Web 2.0” in the course of your process. There should be at least 5 pages, but it is up to you how to break that down between your “text” and reflection/rhetorical analysis of your “text” (explaining the choices you made). There should be at least one full page of reflection. You may write/compose more than the minimum limit. Choose a prompt below or run something by me.

1. The hyperlinked essay. This probably is the easiest and potentially the most boring and easiest to do bad. Word allows you to put hyperlinks in your essay as you write it. If you print it out, those links are not accessible, but if you submit an electronic copy of the document the links are still active. For this option you'd write an essay and integrate hyperlinks to texts outside the essay in the Internet. You'd have to have a rhetorical reason for doing so and be able to articulate it in a reflective statement. For this option, it’d be important to consider the choices you make in terms of the links you provide and why you provide them. The reflection work would be crucial to making this fly.

2. The Web-text. For this one, you'd compose in a Web page application like Dreamweaver or Frontpage (or PowerPoint). You'd construct a text like an essay but in a different structure. Each page would have links to other pages in the essay but they wouldn't be arranged chronologically like a print essay...more like the hierarchical or organic or hypertext mentioned in the Web page we studied in class...it is an example itself of a Web-text. You would then "publish" your result in your oak Web space and make it either oak password protected (only we can view it) or publicly accessible (anyone can read it). Advanced users might integrate music/video (especially self-created content) to make it multi-modal.

   - Hyperlinked Powerpoint- Use Powerpoint to create something like a “choose-your-own-adventure” story. Hyperlinks on the first slide would lead to a different slide depending on the hyperlink you clicked on. This kind of essay would allow you to be able to separate your points so that the reader could just focus on one at a time. It would also allow for videos/sound to be integrated into the slides.

   - Virtual Collage- Make a Web site and get different types of font, pictures of words, video clips, photos and put them together on a webpage to create your masterpiece "new essay." This essay incorporates every kind of “new essay” medium: text, picture, video. The text could be hyperlinks to take you to other collage pages as well, giving you numerous pages and new surprises "Easter eggs" hidden in the design.

3. Second Life basic mini-visual "essay." For this one, you'd learn how to make a basic object and paste a graphic image (composed in something like Powerpoint) on to it. You might use a flat object like a poster board and hang it on the wall or create a 3-D object, like a pyramid, and paste a different "page" on each side. Viewers would then have to "physically" walk around to "read" your text. In this case, you'd have to adapt to the constraints of the medium...texts might have to be shorter and smaller, but you'd have to do reflective work to argue for how your piece is rhetorical and thought out.
4. Second Life slide show. Similar to three you might compose graphic files and offer them in a more traditional chronological order via a Powerpoint slide show that automatically cycles through your text. Likewise, it’d have to be well thought out and you’d have to rhetorically explain the decisions you made.

5. The profile essay. This could be an essay where you start a new account on Facebook, MySpace, or some other website in which you post facts and stories about yourself. Except, when you create this page, you create it as if you are a "new essay" telling people how you work, and the pro's and con's about yourself. You can include hyperlinks, and pictures to help demonstrate the aspects of this essay. You could discuss the rhetoric of an essay like this and the why the way it is presented is good or bad. Add all of the people in the class who have the Facebook/Myspace and send out something that can have them leave comments on your wall pertaining to different questions.

6. Movie. For this new essay, you could create a short film. This allows you to see on-screen text, hear people actually saying other text, and add in music and sound effects in order to enhance your meaning. It also adds a visual component to your essay that is unlike a simple picture or hyperlink. You can actually see people as they explain their opinions to you and they can demonstrate their ideas via the TV screen. A movie could be done in a variety of styles including a documentary (Why I would choose to create a movie essay), a spoof film that makes fun of the other types of essays or anything else you could possibly come up with. The trick here would be to still be true to the idea of "essay"...can you imagine making an argument through video?

7. Moo Virtual Essay. Create a room using different objects, visuals, mediums, or even bots. You can create several rooms, or even make a guided pathway in which people look at each room as if it were a virtual museum. In the rooms could be bulletin boards with text or pictures on them as well, to add information to your Moo essay. Once again, keep in mind the idea of the "essay."

Format the text the way you like it. Be advised that your essay should feel complete. If it seems to end abruptly, or you don’t develop ideas that should be developed, you will have to do so in a revision. Your paper should have proper MLA citation for both in-text and Works Cited citations. Cite all sources; I will not accept plagiarized work.

You will be graded on:
How developed your essay is in terms of its structure (beginning, middle, and end) and content (its ideas and your integration of others’ ideas via quotes formatted in MLA style).
The rhetoric of the text. How persuasive it is. How it anticipates and writes to or against reader responses.
The relation of you to your composition. How well you incorporate your particular view or experiences into your text. How well you establish your own voice.
The look of your essay: your grammar and punctuation and document design. The rhetorical use of your medium. Do you use the medium you employ in persuasive ways? Or, is just random stuff?
Your ability to reflect on your work.
APPENDIX E: PORTFOLIO

Final Portfolio
Due: Tuesday, March 18, at 7:00 p.m
(Put it in the box marked “Shovlin’s Portfolios” outside Ellis 113)

A portfolio is a collection of a writer’s work. This collection will consist of at least four of the pieces you have written this quarter: one formal essay, and three informal pieces, as well as a reflective essay which makes an argument about how these pieces fit the rhetorical competencies established by the English Department as a requirement for this course. This portfolio will reflect your very best work, and in order to accomplish this, you will need to revise, rethink, rewrite, and carefully edit the essay(s) you choose to include, and, if you wish, any of the four informal pieces as well. This is your final chance to demonstrate how hard you have worked throughout the course. I know that every one of you is capable of putting together an impressive portfolio, but it will take a great deal of determination and effort on your part to resist the impulse to slack off, quit, or just coast until the end of the quarter. You need to push yourself to take this final assignment as seriously as it needs to be taken. This portfolio is a significant part (35 percent) of your final grade for the course.

The essay(s): 25%

Review all of your essays, keeping in mind the comments I have made on your papers, your peer reviews, other feedback you’ve received, and your own feelings about good writing and the content you are working with. Choose one essay to revise. You should add substantially to the paper you revise (between 30 to 50 percent new material). You will probably need to cut out old material. This will be a challenging exercise for those who have already written a good paper. I will be checking for focus, development, analysis, organization, and clarity. Highlight all added material so that it’s clear to me what’s new and what’s old. Be sure to submit both the old and the new draft in your portfolio. Write a few sentences at the end detailing your revision process, explaining the choices you made.

Informal writing: 25%

Along with the formal essay, choose three pieces of informal writing (blog entries, or writing from your notebook, or other informal writing we’ve done). It isn’t required that you revise this writing, however as you write the reflective essay it may help you to make your case if you revise based on your understanding of the rhetorical competencies. If you revise, make sure you submit both versions, old and new and clearly label them, and include a short explanation of your revision.

Reflective essay: 50%
Respond to the following question: How does the work you have chosen to submit for the portfolio fulfill the rhetorical competencies?

Take a look at the rhetorical competency sheet. Consider the definition of rhetoric from your notes and early class discussions. How has your understanding of the competencies changed (or not changed)? Write a 4-5 page paper in which you explain (with evidence from your writing) how the work you’re submitting fulfills those competencies. Be sure to address each of the 4 categories of competencies, although within each category you may not address every point listed on the sheet.

In this essay, you may argue that certain pieces you’ve chosen fulfill more than one of the competencies. That’s fine. You can structure the paper how wish (around the pieces you’ve chosen, or around the competencies). You DO have to write about yourself. Examine what’s gone on in your writing this quarter and look at what may have influenced this process.

How should it look?

You can choose the form you prefer. Some people turn in their portfolios in folders. Others have produced small book-like packets with a table of contents. If you can think of some creative way to display your work and still achieve the goals listed above, go for it.