Language games and computer-aided composition

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LANGUAGE GAMES AND
COMPUTER-AIDED
COMPOSITION

By

Ryan M. Moeller
Bachelor of Arts
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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

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ABSTRACT

Language Games and Computer-Aided Composition

by

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Wittgenstein's theory of the "language game" looks at the specific context in which language finds meaning. This theory significantly influences composition theory and practice within the problematic context of the computer-aided classroom, a much more complex and fast-paced environment than the traditional composition classroom. Students face a challenging, semester-long language game of creating a context from learning and meaning by actively participating in the rule-making processes of language. As a result, they are responsible for creating and maintaining their own language games by negotiating their ways through chatrooms (synchronous discussions), email (asynchronous discussions), virus complications, and other technological problems. Therefore, this thesis examines how students must define yet another context for their writing and how this "new" context forces them to engage with each other as fellow writers.
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I would like to dedicate this thesis to my mother-in-law, Toby Stoffa, who left what would have been a brilliant career in psychology to raise three wonderful children. If I owe my desire for a career in higher education to my parents, I owe much of its reality to her. She has made many personal and professional sacrifices to give her children the ability and the freedom to make their own decisions regarding their educations, their careers, and their families. Paraphrasing the words of Virginia Woolf in A Room of One's Own, she has spent her life reflecting the figures of her children at twice their natural size. Until such a time as all men would make the same sacrifices for their families, all women have the ability to love and care for their families without having to sacrifice their careers, or, at least, until she can find the time and the energy to write one of her own, I would be honored if she would consider my thesis hers.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: THE IMPORTANCE OF CONTEXT(LESS)NESS IN THE COMPUTER-AIDED CLASSROOM

The theoretical inspiration for this investigation stems from language's inherent philosophical, theoretical, and social power. As Susan Miller states in her introduction to Textual Carnivals, "we must allow that language learning is the crucial locus for power, or for disenfranchisement, in any culture" (7). She quotes Richard Ohmann in stating that we must examine the study of composition against the superstructure:

We need, that is, to place composition against "a superstructure--laws, institutions, culture, beliefs, values, customs" that controls a "whole way of life including culture and ideas far more subtle and effective than naked force supported by ideological institutions... and in general serves as a means of preserving and reproducing class structure. (Miller quoting Ohmann 7)

I would take this one step further and argue that we cannot help but examine composition and how it is taught as an examination of the superstructure itself. Language is the superstructure. Imbedded within any language are the hierarchy and the power of any culture or society that bases communication and thought upon it. Composition, then, is the development and study of this power structure and our relationship to it.
Although the study of the power embedded in the language we use is important, we quickly realize that language would not function in quite the same capacity without certain non-linguistic characteristics that make up specific contexts for its use. Just as the structure of a building is nothing without occupants who define the purpose and function of that building, so, too, with language. The context in which language finds utterance plays an equally important, if not more important, role in the creation and maintenance of the idea of "meaning." Thus, the locus of powers shifts away from an unchangeable and monolithic notion of language to a more flexible notion accommodating a play between the rules of grammar, syntax, and diction.

In "Shaping at the Point of Utterance," James Britton looks at how writers manufacture meaning when they use language as a starting point toward the expression of ideas. Within the specific context of written utterance, Britton argues that unskilled writers are more concerned with how "a mistaken sense of a reader's expectations may obstruct or weaken the 'sense of what they wanted to say'" (Britton quoting Perl and Egendorf 31). Granted, our language is embedded with rules and hierarchies. The fact that our students see us, their instructors, in a state of agreement about these rules, especially grammatical rules, makes them all the more powerful. Students look at their grammar books and their instructors' responses in regard to grammar as though they are speaking from one, universal, grammatical rule-
book. In reality, as Joseph Williams points out in "The Phenomenology of Error," these grammatical “rules” display more play than we realize:

This way of thinking about error locates error in two different physical locations (the student’s paper and the grammarian’s handbook) and in three different experiences: the experience of the writer who creates the error, in the experience of the teacher who catches the error; and in the mind of the grammarian—the E.B. White or Jacques Barzun or H.W. Fowler—who proposes it. (165)

With the experience of error existing on so many different planes, it is a wonder that students see any uniformity to the confines and rules of grammar at all.

First-year composition students, by virtue of their own language awareness, implicitly know the rules and regulations of the conventional composition classroom language game. They see revision as a process of minor editing: running a “grammar check,” “spell check,” or simply giving the writing a “once over” to make sure no glaring proofreading oversights remain. However, as Patrick Hartwell points out in “Grammar, Grammars, and the Teaching of Grammar,” this concern with sentence-level “correctness,” stemming from what amounts to the rote memorization of grammatical rules at the elementary and high-school levels, does not significantly impact “control over surface correctness nor quality of writing” (251). He cites several studies, dating back to the turn of the century, all of which point to the same conclusion: “It would predict that any form of active involvement with language would be preferable to instruction in rules or definitions” (251). Still, though,
students in the first-year composition classroom must be aware of these rules and regulations in order to succeed within their chosen areas of academic discourse. This reality leads me to the following questions: how do we, as instructors, (1) make our first-year composition students aware of these rules and limitations and (2) get them to break out from these rules and attempt to forge new ground and make new meanings?

Britton suggests that since "what is delivered to the pen is in part already shaped, stamped with the images of our own ways of perceiving," our intention of sharing these preconstructed thought patterns sets up a "demand for further shaping" (31). Since the utterances found in both the synchronous and asynchronous "chat" environments of the networked, computer-aided classroom are written, the form of each utterance is available for such further shaping. The environment does not leave time for obsessive concerns with grammar, syntax, and diction. The chatroom emphasizes ideas and thought patterns which reveal more about each writer than simply the language she chooses or the conventional constrictions she may place herself under, thinking that her instructor will be concerned, first and foremost, with issues of editing.1

A look at Ludwig Wittgenstein's philosophy not only allows us to be aware of the rules and structures of language, but to be even more aware of the play behind these rules. As he states in his Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus, "The limits of my language mean the limits of my world" (5.6). Scholars and artists from the
fields of mathematics, philosophy, critical theory, and literature have painstakingly traced Wittgenstein's arguments for the impact of this single sentence. Most importantly to this investigation, though, is how Thomas O'Donnell in "Politics and Ordinary Language" uses Wittgenstein in his defense of expressivist rhetorics. O'Donnell is concerned with creating a reaction against the current, traditional "sterilizings" of composition (424). Evaluation, grading, university policies, and students' previous indoctrination into our current educational system have produced instructors and students who look at language, with its seemingly fixed rules of grammar, syntax, and structure as an immovable beast that is formulaic, straightforward, and capable of being judged. This concern with "appeals to allegedly 'objective' standards has created a 'certain sterile objectivity and disinterestedness'" (424) in writing instruction.

Susan Miller also looks at the standardization of composition as this process has tried to scientifically objectify its "typical" student:

These administrative practices, like the persistent habit of exempting some but not other students from requirements in composition, define composition as a particular kind of universal test, a task to be gotten out of the way. (86)

O'Donnell turns to expressivist rhetorics to show how composition classrooms can accomplish the goals set forth by Wittgenstein to, "bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use" (§116) . . . what we do is encourage students to bring words to bear on their experiences, to ground their writing in their lives, to be
responsible for their words, and to be responsible to the community in which they are reading, writing, and responding. (429)

In this way, philosophy shows that first-year composition need not be sterile, objectified, nor simply an obstacle with which to be dealt. Rather, we see how composition is infused with the reality of students' lives and surroundings. O'Donnell points back to the importance Wittgenstein places on the context behind the meaning of words:

Wittgenstein frequently asks questions calling for recollection: 'How did we learn the meaning of this word? From what sort of examples? In what language games?' (§77). These prompts are reminders that we learn words in specific contexts. (431)

In other words, "learning a word is learning how to do something, and what someone does with their words is a standing indication of their understanding of the concepts being employed" (430). Context informs learning, which leads to meaning, which informs context, and leads to communication and mutual understanding. As Paulo Freire states in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, "Implicit in the banking concept is the assumption of a dichotomy between man and the world: man is merely in the world, not with the world or with others; man is a spectator, [not] re-creator" (211).

In Richard Miller's recent evaluation of Freire's liberatory pedagogies as they relate to composition studies, and even how they play out in a typical classroom, he comes to some surprising conclusions. In "The Arts of Complicity," he questions the possibility that any classroom, no matter how student-centered, can ever foster truly "authentic" interactions:
The students, however, never forget where they are, no matter how carefully we arrange the desks in the classroom, how casually we dress, how open we are to disagreement, how politely we respond to their journal entries, their papers, their portfolios. They don't forget, we often do. (18)

Miller goes on to state that in the division between the public and private transcripts that arise in each classroom and for each student (and instructor for that matter), we are not surprised that the hidden transcript exists, but that it gets expressed at all.² The students are well aware of these competing spheres of influence; however, when asked, they almost always default back to what they think the instructor would want them to say. The computer-aided environment serves to decenter and disorganize this typical first-year composition student’s notion of the conventional composition classroom, and reorganizes that notion into something more akin to social collaboration. As Rosanne Potter argues in "What Computers Are Good For in the Literature Classroom,"

In the classroom, the only reason that a teacher is able to talk to everyone simultaneously is that the conventions of the classroom discussion require that when one person is speaking, all others are listening (or at least not speaking)... When computer mediated conversations begin to happen [whether in] real time or asynchronously, the teacher’s central position evaporates and in the space thus created, students begin communicating with each other as co-learners, editors, researchers, and general sharers of information. (186)

This productive chaos of voices reduces the linear teacher-to-student type instruction and increases each writer’s awareness of and reliance on her peers, her fellow classmates. However, as Lester Faigley points out in Fragments of Rationality, maybe it
is the awareness of the student that recognizes the possibility of the classroom:

Instead of a scenario of technological determinism where computers are changing radically how we think and how we teach writing, perhaps radical changes in our thinking are embodied in the software for hypertext and electronic written discussions and in the ways writing might be taught using hypertext and electronic written discussions. (166)

Either way, Faigley argues, "the utopian dream of an equitable sharing of classroom authority at least during the duration of a class discussion, has been achieved" (167). These are strong words, but they merely echo several other voices in composition studies, all praising the glories of the computer-aided classroom.

Gail Hawisher and Cynthia Selfe, two outstanding researchers and practitioners in the field of technology, networks, and writing, queried 25 instructors from 10 states who listed the following reasons for preferring the computer-assisted writing environment to the traditional classroom. In order of commonality, the reasons are:

1. Students spend a great deal of time writing.
2. Lots of peer teaching goes on.
3. Class becomes more student-centered than teacher-centered.
4. One-on-one conferences between instructor and student increase.
5. Opportunities for collaboration increase.
6. Students share more with other students and instructor.
7. Communication features provide more direct access to students, allowing teachers to "get to know" students better. (Rhetoric of Technology 59)

Citing the similarities of the above comments with most of the published claims about the computer-assisted classroom, Hawisher
and Selfe move on to discuss these positive comments in comparison with some of the drawbacks of the same environment. I would like to explore how the decentering effects of the chat environment (the virtual erasure of the instructor, the orality of the written transcript, and the language of the chatroom itself) all lend themselves to the results of which Hawisher, Selfe, and Potter write.

Here, the linguistic theories of Wittgenstein and Jacques Derrida help us to see why. Wittgenstein, in his Tractatus, very quickly eliminates the dichotomy about which Susan Miller, Thomas O'Donnell, Richard Miller, and Paolo Freire write: "Logic pervades the world: the limits of the world are also its limits. . . . The world and life are one. . . . The subject does not belong to the world; rather it is a limit of the world" (§5.61, §5.621, and §5.632). In other words, we limit our language and are limited by it. It is up to us to negotiate our language and its uses and meanings and to constantly (re)create it in the process. As Patrick Hartwell concludes his examination of grammar taught in the classroom, "It is time that we, as teachers, formulate theories of language and literacy and let those theories guide our teaching" (252).

My theory of language espoused in the computer-aided classroom combines a Derridean sense of play with words and a Wittgensteinian awareness of the lack of context within the potentially problematic environment. In "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," Derrida rejects the
notion of the literary "center" which serves to "orient, balance, and organize the structure. . . but above all to make sure that the organizing principle of the structure would limit what we might call the play of the structure" (83). While chapter 2 describes my research endeavors and methodology, in chapter 3, I will use chatroom transcripts to show that the environment of the computer-aided classroom forces students to see language in this light. Furthermore, Derrida states that "the concept of a centered structure is in fact the concept of a play based on a fundamental ground, a play constituted on the basis of a fundamental immobility and a reassuring certitude, which itself is beyond the reach of play" (84). In chapter 4, I will show how the contextless atmosphere presented to students of the computer-aided classroom forces them to deal with a challenging, semester-long language game of trying to create a context in the computer classroom out of which learning, meaning, and rules can be made.

When faced with a room full of computers and blank screens rather than desks and lecture notes, the students quickly realize that this is not an environment in which a general knowledge of grammar or the ability to memorize will come easily or do them any good. As Potter writes, "Students who would normally sit quietly, scribbling notes, or spacing off, or wanting to ask a question but fearing to look foolish or stupid, now are free in the general melee, to throw their two cents in" (186). I would argue that almost immediately, first-year writers learn that they can now be responsible for the biggest chunk of their own and
each other's writing development that they ever have been. They
do not have the safety of hiding behind their notes and their
desks and hoping that they will not have to participate because
they are now responsible for creating and maintaining the context
of the classroom every day whether it means negotiating chatrooms
and email discussions or overcoming viruses and other
 technological problems.
Notes

1. What I am referring to here is that based on Hartwell’s investigation of the teaching of grammar in the classroom, and based upon Britton’s study of the shaping of meaning at the point of utterance, the computer-aided classroom, and especially the environment of the chatroom, offers a unique perspective for the first-year composition student. She has a singular opportunity to write without concern for grammatical structure, spelling, and other issues of proofreading. Her writing becomes more fluid, more like written or recorded speech where there is no chance to take back, revise, or edit what she inserts into the conversation. For a discussion on the irreversibility of speech as opposed to the nature of writing as subject to revision, please see Roland Barthes’ “Writers, Intellectuals, Teachers” in Image, Music, Text.

2. In “The Arts of Complicity,” Miller uses James Scott’s argument of the “hidden” and “public” transcripts that exist in any power relationship to explain classroom relationships. “The public transcript serves ‘as a shorthand way of describing the open interaction between subordinates and those who dominate’ (Miller quoting Scott 15). The hidden transcript refers to the interaction that ‘takes place ‘offstage,’ beyond direct observation by powerholders’” (Miller 15).
CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY

Subjects

My subjects are the students who enrolled in my English 101 classes over the past three semesters: Spring 1997, Fall 1997, and Spring 1998. I did not select either male or female subjects as I simply used those who randomly registered for my particular sections of English 101. The prerequisites for English 101 standing are through test scores (21 or higher on the English portion of the ACT or 555 or higher on the verbal portion of the SAT) or by successful completion of English A, a developmental writing course. These prerequisites were imposed only as those of the Writing Program at UNLV in general and were not used to limit the participants of this study.

One important prerequisite that did effect this study was the fact that all three sections of English 101 met in a computer-aided classroom each class period. This requirement quickly removed several students who had registered for the class, not knowing it required substantial computer literacy. This computer literacy involved being familiar with basic word
processing functions as well as an elementary working knowledge of the Internet and an ability to navigate the World Wide Web following simple instructions. Only those students who felt comfortable enough with their own computer skills remained as participants in the study (and members of the class).

Subjects were not paid nor was any extra credit offered for participation in the study, as it required no extra work on the part of the subjects. The data collected in my research was simply transcripts of class discussions that would have taken place whether or not this study was ongoing.

Purpose, Methods, Procedures

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the computer-assisted classroom, especially the environments of the synchronous and asynchronous chatrooms available in such a classroom, as a liberatory teaching environment for first-year composition studies. Synchronous environments are defined by Richard Selfe in "What Are They Talking About? Computer Terms that English Teachers May Need to Know," as "networks that allow users to exchange written communication at very high speeds so that written conversations take place in 'real time,' much like regular conversations" (216). Participants in a synchronous "chat" environment enter conversation into the environment as fast as they can type it. Dialogue is displayed on the screen in the order that it is received by the server. Asynchronous environments are more like email. They are "networks that allow the exchange of information or written messages, but in a
slightly delayed fashion" (214). The information is still available to all users at any time; however, the software simply allows messages to be posted for all to see at any time, much like a bulletin board. For the purposes of this study, I looked at chatroom transcripts of class discussions over the Internet and asynchronous discussions that took place over Norton TextXtra Connect (a writing software package that allows peer feedback and commentary). The methods of obtaining my data were simply saving and printing written class discussions. After spending a class period in a chatroom on the Internet, I simply copied and pasted the transcript into a word processor and printed. This, incidentally, is what many proponents of the computer-assisted classroom like most about the discussions held here. Cynthia Jeney wrote an email post to the Alliance for Computers in Writing listserv, and subsequently put this posting up on the World Wide Web. In it she outlines her arguments for "supporting the acquisition of real-time computer networking capabilities in English composition classrooms" (1). Her third argument states: "No comment is lost. All posts are present in their entirety, so that even when the text scrolls quickly, all comments are complete and accessible to all readers" (1).

The computer-aided classroom at UNLV consisted, at the time of the study, of approximately 24 computers, networked through a daisy chain configuration to a server. The computers were arranged in rows of six with each computer facing the front of the room and an aisle down the middle. A station of four
computers stood in the back of the room, facing each other. The "Instructor" computer was in the front of the classroom, facing the rest of the room, but off to one side. For the purposes of the chatrooms, the location of the "Instructor" computer was negligible as spatial and temporal location within the virtual chatroom superseded physical location. Again referring to Jeney's list of arguments for real-time networking capabilities,

On a practical level, many computer classrooms are designed poorly, separating the instructor from the students with tons (literally!) of hardware placed in daunting rows, where the teacher can barely see the students, much less be heard by them. Synchronous [chat] helps bridge the physical problem of holding discussions and lectures in these classrooms. (1)

Students chose their own stations, and often these stations varied as certain computers might have been down on particular days, or the "daunting" rows of hardware impeded discussions and collaboration.

No special instructions or procedures were given to any of the classes. It was of utmost importance that the students remained free to express themselves within the environments I was studying without prior instruction from me. While I did usually open the discussions with a question or two, those questions were usually quickly disregarded or simply used as points of departure for further, student-driven conversation. It was actually quite an odd sight to see an entire class of 15-20 students, typing at computers and not saying a word. Very few of the chatroom discussions were accompanied by any audible communication, save the clicking of the keyboards and the occasional laugh or
snicker. The simple irony presented by a classroom of writers, communicating through writing over a network as large as the Internet while sharing relatively the same space is surely fodder for a future study. For the purposes of this study, though, I simply printed up existing class transcripts. No surveys, questionnaires, nor tests were required.

Risks

The risks involved in participating in this study were negligible as I simply printed up normal, computer-aided classroom activities. A slight risk may have been a student’s apprehension to having his or her work published or having his or her in-class comments used in my master’s thesis. To overcome this risk, each student was informed of the study and asked to sign a form acknowledging his or her voluntary consent to be a participant. Please see the section entitled “Informed Consent.” The only other foreseeable risk might have been a general insecurity with computers in a writing class that would be dependent upon them for communication, and fast-paced communication at that. However, as previously mentioned, this risk was eliminated during the first week of classes when those not comfortable with the environment had the chance to transfer into a different, more traditional section.

Benefits

I undertook this study with an open mind, but had hoped to show that the computer-aided classroom would provide an ideally student-centered environment, one that promoted increased
improvement in writing skills, critical thinking, and peer responding over conventional teaching environments. My thoughts were that the "different-ness" of the classroom itself would substantially increase student construction of the class environment as it would prove to be unlike any other classroom. I had hoped to find evidence of this construction both in student participation and interaction in the chatrooms as well as in their comments regarding their peers' writing in the asynchronous dialogue offered by the Norton Textra Connect software package.

Risk-Benefit Ratio

The benefits of proving that this type of classroom environment is a moderately free space for student learning far outweighs any possibilities of student apprehension at anonymous participation. This is true especially since student participation was voluntary.

Costs To Subjects

There was no added expense to a subject's participation in this study over the expense already incurred by taking the course. A participant's involvement did not involve any more effort (economic or otherwise) than would have been required already by the class. Norton Textra Connect did have to be purchased by each student for an approximate cost of $25.00. The software was not mandated by the protocols of this study, but rather by the English Department itself.
Informed Consent

I obtained the necessary participant consent forms during regularly scheduled class time. Each student was handed a blank form, was told in detail about the study I was conducting and how their work would/might be used as a part of such a study. Each was asked to write this information in the appropriate places on the consent form. As the students' instructor, they were aware of who I was in the classroom, in the university, and in the field of composition and rhetoric. They were told that their participation was voluntary, and that no other efforts would be required on their parts should they decide to participate in the study. The study would last throughout the course of that semester, and no extra time would be required outside of that already demanded by the class. They were read the section of the consent form stating that there would be no monetary compensation for any participation in the study. Each student had the choice to remain anonymous in the study or to have their names associated with their work. The students were informed that these consent forms would be retained and filed by their instructor along with their written work. I informed them that they could withdraw from the study at any time if they felt uncomfortable with sharing any of their written comments or work.

Finally, please refer to Appendix E of this study for the Office of Sponsored Programs' approval of this Human Subject Protocol, OSP #105s1098-100e.
CHAPTER 3

SYNCHRONOUS CHATROOMS AND THE CONTEXTUAL ERASURE OF THE INSTRUCTOR

In his chapter on "The Achieved Utopia of the Networked Classroom," Lester Faigley examines what he calls "current-traditional or process-oriented" practices of teaching composition as examples that utilize Foucauldian disciplinary technologies "involved in the production of rational subjects" (165). He then compares these conventional composition environments to the "achieved utopia of the networked classroom" through a close reading of several asynchronous chat discussions:

By allowing everyone to "talk" at once, the use of networked computers for teaching writing represents for some teachers the realization of the "student-centered" classroom. The utopian dream of an equitable sharing of classroom authority at least during the duration of a class discussion, has been achieved. (167)

He sets up an interesting comparison between interpretations of disciplinary technologies and what he seems to describe as a truly liberating environment. For example, before having any experience in a synchronous chat environment in the classroom, I thought the very format of chatrooms and email discussions would give me power as the instructor to view all aspects of discussion
and would allow me more control over the classroom and the
direction of the conversations. In other words, I thought that
the synchronous chat environment would closely resemble
Foucault's disciplinary ideal of the panopticon. My central
position as the instructor at the server would give me an ideal
vantage point from which to view each aspect of each writer's
discussion and from which to direct the conversation.¹ Having
access to all of this information, and keeping students guessing
as to my actual whereabouts, I could have greater control of the
class. As Eugene Provenzo points out, this is not unusual; in
fact, it is a driving motivation in software production: "The
desire to partition individual student behavior into ever more
subtle units—to systematically collect data—is built into the
structure of many computer education programs" (185). He goes on
to argue that the sheer capabilities computers have of collecting
vast amounts of data, all of which can be used to gain,
manipulate, and monitor power, "is creating an increasingly
panoptic society" (186).

However, this proved not to be the case in the actual
context of my virtual classrooms, which were anything but
panoptic. The vantage point of the instructor in a networked
classroom includes all the vital information about the class
discussion, where it is going, where it has been, and what
students are discussing on their own. What is amazing about this
type of teaching environment is that very little control is
derived from the absolute abundance of information. By the time
the instructor can insert an argument or idea to get the class more on topic, three or four other messages have popped up on the screen, drowning out the instructor’s voice almost entirely. What was once a structure of power and authority, a central guard’s vantage point over each of the inmates under his control, has become, through the aid of technology and awareness, a useful tool for the student in taking back her classroom.²

This new technology places the students and the instructor on the same plane (at least as long as they remain in the chatroom)—there can be no instructor-to-student “depositing” or linear-type instruction.¹ The negotiated medium of the chatroom actively requires the student to take action and responsibility for her learning environment. As Paulo Freire argues, “Liberation is a praxis: the action and reflection of men upon their world in order to transform it” (213). I wonder if Richard Miller would have had the same experiences with his students’ lack of desire to transform their worlds had he taught in the computer-assisted classroom, where they would have no choice but to transform its world.4 He does, however, point to a very real problem: our students very rarely feel that they are able to take part in this transformation—they feel that it will take place whether or not they are involved. Kate Ronald and John Volkmer studied their students’ writing processes and suggest that this hesitance on the students’ part may correspond to the idea that “contemporary composing theories have distressingly little relevance to the way students perceive how they actually write.”
First-year composition students seem to be more motivated by writing as a product than by writing as a process:

A Student Writer
1. WONDERS what the teacher really wants
2. PROCRASTINATES until the night before the writing is due
3. SUFFERS guilt and dread, making a handwritten draft
4. TYPES, trying to catch errors
5. JUDGES according to the GRADE assigned to the writing the worth of
   a. the writing (unconfident student)
   b. the teacher (confident student)

In the chatroom, the conversation is written, and students have the unique opportunity of incorporating that written conversation into their future drafts. The beauty of the networked environment is that the students are and must be intricately involved in the shaping, the maintaining, and the deconstruction of the context around them. This process of constructing a context through the writing of the classroom conversation allows them the opportunity to begin looking at writing as a process of conversing rather than simply a means to an end result: the grade.

What I mean by this breakdown and reconstruction of “context” is that on the first day of classes, most of my students were finding themselves in one of their first college classes. Not only did they have to deal with the anxiety of entering a new academic discourse community, but they were then faced with a new and greater challenge: they had no context on which to base this networked computer classroom experience. Their past encounters with education had been limited to traditional classrooms where their instructors (objects) stood in the front
of the class lecturing and writing on the chalkboard while they (subjects) frantically scribbled down notes, trying to absorb nearly unabsorbable material at a fast pace. They certainly had not walked into a classroom and had to realize that they would be using the technology (i.e. the networked computers) nearly every day. For example, in the Fall semester of 1997 a student wrote on his evaluation, “At first I was a little scared to take this class because of the computer aspect of it.”

Speaking of similarly traumatic experiences, Wittgenstein explains how to manipulate the structures of language and open up a very closed system, such as the conventional composition classroom, from the inside out. In Wittgenstein and Derrida, Henry Staten describes this endeavor:

[Wittgenstein] is concerned with a technique that by its very nature makes language open to new signifying chains, chains that are connected with old uses but that vary away from them. . . . For example, he ponders these sentences:

A new-born child has no teeth.
A goose has no teeth.
A rose has no teeth. (Wittgenstein quoted by Staten 98)

While the first two statements make relative sense to us, the third would make little sense without the context of the other two. Yet, Wittgenstein argues, we can still understand the sentence, although it sounds nonsensical, by placing it into some sort of rhetorical context. Is this new use of these words, “A rose has no teeth,” a new usage, a metaphoric usage, or a literal, nonsensical usage? Similarly, the context of the
chatroom engenders new speech patterns almost as nonsensical as Wittgenstein’s example:

   <dolphin_VM> even if we make up the story, lets make one interesting
   <Guest32541> I have afeeling [sic] that you have been for a long time. (Appendix A)

Without the context of the previous conversations that these comments fall under, they make little sense. Does “Guest32541’s” comment refer to “dolphin_VM” as interesting? Is her idea interesting? Is she making the comment that “dolphin_VM” has been making up interesting stories all semester? Is “Guest32541” referring to something else entirely? Another example occurs at the beginning of the transcript in Appendix B:

   <Guest30621> marchioni, check out your your/you’re relation. . .
   <melon> I didn't read at all, I fogot about it :(!
   <Da> lol
   *** Danny has quit IRC (Killed (quantum-r.ny.us.dal.net (netcom-r.on.ca.dal.net <- qis.md.us.dal.net[207.114.41.10])))
   *** Da is now known as Guest29072
   *** Val is now known as Guest16408
   <Guest29072> this sucks

Did “melon” not read “marchioni’s” “your/you’re” relation? Did she exhibit the same mistake in wording? What is “Da’s” “lol” (or Laughing Out Loud) referring to? “Guest30621’s” comment? “melon’s” use of the emoticon “:()”? What exactly does “Guest29072” think sucks? the name changes? “Danny’s” murder? the entire conversation?

The overlapping circles of language and context create meaning at their union, representing a specific utterance being located within a specific context. Say, for example, the context...
is two graduate students in English discussing Bakhtin's idea of the carnivalesque. They will use the word "carnival" as a tool to convey all the tropes and signifiers that represent Bakhtin's notion of controlled social upheaval which masks the ultimate maintenance of the prescribed social order. Assuming the context of a parent and child talking about what to do the following weekend, the word "carnival" takes on a completely different meaning. Change the context or change the language and their intersecting union changes, thus changing meaning in the process.

In the chatroom, students must create the context from nothing familiar in the classroom, leaving language and meaning in a temporary state of flux. The environment of the chatroom consists of a blank screen where text is popping up constantly as other students comment. On either side of this screen, there are boxes with information telling the "chatter" what "room" she is in and who else is in it. Once the room is filled with 15 to 20 students, it is very easy to get lost in the dynamics of the conversation. In Appendix A, the reading assignment for the class had been Donald Murray's "The Maker's Eye: Revising Your Own Manuscript." We began by discussing our responses to the reading with students bringing up points about his ideas of information in writing, the effect of deadlines on writers and their drafts, and issues of a writer's authority over her text. However, at first glance, there are at least four different conversations going on there. Within these different conversations writers are coming to terms with Murray's ideas about the writing process,
brainstorming their own writing, helping each other understand the validity and purpose of the writing assignments, as well as getting information on the environment itself and helping each other navigate the chatroom.

The topic of conversation began as we responded to Murray's article. Obviously, "miyo," after her entrance onto the scene with her quick "hi," maintains this line of discussion throughout the transcript. At different points, her comments solicit responses from others, but she maintains her discussion of Murray throughout. Her first comment, "In murray's article he does say information is important," apparently comes from nowhere within the context of the discussion. She is trying to shape our conversation by inserting her own ideas. "Guest32541" picks up this strand a couple of lines later by asserting "He doesn't jsut [sic] say it. . . . he focuses on it." Within another couple of lines, "miyo" has responded back. An interesting aspect of this particular exchange is the fact that it is undercut by comments, within the space of the discussion, from a different conversation. The reader of a chatroom transcript must reconstruct meaning from not just one conversation, but several that coexist in the same space.

The conversation between "dandan," "dolphin," "Perk187," and "Elwood_Blues" centers on the validity and purpose of the writing assignments being discussed. There is definite frustration in "dandan's" written voice as he objects to the overall sequence. The others in this discussion try to give him
advice, but in the middle, "Perk187" exclaims "im lost." A little
further down, "dandan," the protagonist of this conversation also
gets lost. This quick dialogue between "Perk187" and
"Elwood_Blues" provides a humorous break between all of the
conversations, and shows just how fast the conversations move.
One minute a participant can be writing a response, and by the
time it is posted the conversation has shifted and the comment
and the writer are lost in the shuffle. Almost as quickly,
however, the new strand gets picked up and the writer is onto the
next comment.

Intermixed throughout the discussion are notations that
certain chatters have changed their names or discussion blurbs
such as "<Perk187> call me flipper then," "<Elwood_Blues> This
class is fun (except for Perk, hes boring)," and "<dolphin_VM>
the screen name" (Appendix A). These comments serve to decenter
the discussion at hand. They are distracting and oftentimes
misleading to the goals of the discussion. However, they are
indicative of the chat environment, and we need to re-evaluate
whose goals are being misled. With everyone talking at once, only
items that people want to discuss are going to be picked up by
the rest of the class. Here is where the idea of the panopticon
breaks down. Obviously, we are privileged to a great amount of
information about the class—which students are talking, what they
are saying, and where they want to go with the conversation—
however, none of this information leads the instructor to any
tangible notion of power. For example, in Appendix B, my comment
"um . . . this is boring . . ." about three quarters down the page does little, if anything, in the way of bringing new participants into the conversation, or stopping many of them from being more concerned with changing their names rather than staying on task.

The one discussion that does run throughout the chat transcript is the discussion on writing about writing between "melon," "Guest32541," and "mensahib." Throughout it, "melon" is constantly trying to keep the discussion going where she wants it. "Guest32541" jumps into the other discussions every once in a while. She makes the response to the comment by "Perk187," "im lost," by stating, "I have afeeling that you have been for a long time," For the most part, though, she stays engaged with the topic at hand. "Mensahib's" comments are directed at "dandan's" objections also, but always come back to the discussion between "melon" and "Guest32541." Of course, I was "mensahib," a name I had changed from "Guest30621" and "bob." The name really had no mystical or pedagogical reasoning behind it except that it is a favorite pseudonym of mine when ordering take-out and it has a nice "mysterious" ring to it. I was trying to use my intriguing name and virtual entity to bring the fractured discussions back around to the discussion I valued more, that initiated by "melon." However, it is obvious that the rest of the class was going to talk about what they needed to talk about, whether or not I tried to direct them anywhere.
The comments I find most revealing though are the last two by "melon": "this is easier to talk in because I am shy" and "you know what I mean." Here is a student who has made a valuable contribution to the class' discussion, so much so that "Perk187" wants her to identify herself. She even refers back to previous points of discussion, pointing out "Perk187's" reference to Tolstoy to bring him back into the conversation. In his article, Murray quotes Tolstoy as an example of a professional writer who says, "I scarcely ever reread my published writings if by chance I come across a page, it always strikes me: all this must be rewritten; this is how I should have written it" (Tolstoy qtd. by Murray 64). "Melon" refers to the quote, but more importantly to "Perk187's" comment on Murray's final words on writing in this article: "Writing is never finished. It is delivered to a deadline" (64). "Perk187" initially attributes the quotation to Tolstoy, and this attribution, however misleading, is what "melon" refers back to as it is what is written on the screen. She ends this discussion with a comment that tells us that if this conversation had been held in a conventional classroom, even if it had been broken up into groups, she probably would not have contributed to the context of the discussion.

Much like the transcript of the chatroom, Wittgenstein's philosophy seems disjointed at best: his use of images and examples seems to endlessly confuse and distract the reader and his organization of sentences and thoughts by integers seem to
have no pattern. For example, the following section from his Tractatus displays this almost random sense of numbering:

3.5 A propositional sign, applied and thought out, is a thought.
4 A thought is a proposition with a sense.
4.001 The totality of propositions is language.
4.002 Man possesses the ability to construct languages capable of expressing every sense, without having any idea how each word has meaning or what its meaning is—just as people speak without knowing how the individual sounds are produced. (19)

In short, he creates an antithesis to philosophy. In fact, in his Philosophical Investigations, he states the futility of philosophy as a practice of truth-seeking: "Philosophy may in no way interfere with the actual use of language; it can in the end only describe it. For it cannot give it any foundation either. it leaves everything as it is" (124). There is no experience beyond language: "what we cannot talk about, we must pass over in silence" (Tractatus 3). His goal, rather than to philosophize, is to give pleasure to his readers and spark similar ideas in their minds. Likewise, my goal in using the chatroom in the first-year composition classroom is to find a way of turning writing into a pleasurable activity which will, in turn, serve as a springboard for students' drafts.

As Marjorie Perloff argues in Wittgenstein's Ladder, Wittgenstein introduces the metaphor of the ladder at the end of the Tractatus to illustrate this idea of using writing as a starting point for the development of ideas. The use of language, and the context in which language is used, defines its meaning and changes meaning with every repetition:
Wittgenstein himself understands that his mode of "investigation" cannot have a beginning, middle, and end, that it cannot have organic unity, a causal, logical, or sequential structure, an underlying theme or master plot. "Sudden change, jumping from one topic to another," is the lifeblood of the work. (65)

However, the Tractatus was not complete—it did not accomplish what Wittgenstein wanted it to, and so he developed the metaphor of the ladder—"the Tractatus moves toward the recognition that there is no ideal language, no 'system' to be 'mastered,' that indeed, 'the world is independent of my will'" (Tractatus #6.373 qtd by Perloff 134). To follow Wittgenstein's arguments is to come to a point at which we no longer need the ladder and it can be thrown away. "In fact," as Henry Staten argues, "Wittgenstein's language invites being chopped up and carried away in pieces even more than most writer's language, because of the extent to which he has opened up its articulatory spaces" (65). On the one hand, Wittgenstein's direct remarks make for easy quotation and extended application, but on the other, they require an intense engagement because they work on several different levels.

This aspect of Wittgenstein's writing almost mimics the chatroom environment. One can read the aforementioned transcript as a disjointed and convoluted conversation that yet displays chunks of meaningful and quotable material, or one can look a step deeper into the meaning behind the language. As Wittgenstein argues in Philosophical Investigations, "Language is a labyrinth of paths. You approach from one side and know your way about; you approach the same place from another side and no longer know your
way about" (203). The meaning behind this statement becomes clear as we look at the language of the chatroom. It is at once written, yet conversational, informal, and surprisingly oral. We see "ya" used instead of "you," and many participants using phrases instead of grammatically correct sentences to convey their points. Capitalization is used sparingly; obviously manipulating the "shift" key becomes too time consuming. However, "Guest3254l" does consistently capitalize her "I’s," even while neglecting to capitalize the initial word in the same sentence. Is this just habit rearing its ugly head or a more deeply rooted concern about establishing a sense of authority in a mess of slippery signifiers? Punctuation rules also fall into question as many of the lines of the chatroom are technically enjambed, forcing the reader to look for further meaning in the next line. This poetic device would be much more effective if the chatroom design did not print the participant’s name right before his or her comment. Apostrophes are rarely used, even though quotation marks are. The characteristics of writing in the chatroom display a rushed sense of time and a lack of concern for editorial correctness. Spelling is atrocious by conventional, well, any standards, as evidenced by "somethin" and "descrdng." We also see a rise in Internet lingo such as "lol" which stands for "Laughing Out Loud" and ":(," an emoticon which iconographically symbolizes surprise. What we are seeing is a fairly fixed and rigid set of grammatical rules becoming a little more relative to
the participants playing the game and less dependent upon each player’s understanding of the implied rules.

This brings me to another important aspect of the chatroom. Who are the participants playing the game? With the control over their virtual identities, and with the ability to change their names, who is actually participating? The last line of the transcript found in Appendix A brings us into a discussion of Appendix B. “Perk187” asks “melon” to identify herself. Now, he could be asking her to reveal her identity because he does not recognize her voice. She has admitted to not participating much in oral discussions. “Perk187” could also be attempting to transpose the chatroom space onto the classroom space, physically mapping out the two geographic locations. Either way, the second transcript, found in Appendix B, exemplifies the problems in doing so. On the first page alone, there are 10 name changes and two notifications that users have quit. “Danny” is “killed” by the Internet Relay Chat (IRC) connection very quickly in this transcript. After reconnecting, he announces: “ha ha ha!!! You cannot get rid of me! I’m invincible!!” This humorous declaration of existence becomes very telling as we see all the participants (except maybe for “Guest32541”) jockeying for names.

When logging onto the IRC network, the user is prompted to give a pseudonym for herself. That name, if already being used by a user on the network, is given a random “Guest” name and number. A user can change her name at any time. This can cause even more confusion as the IRC protocol randomly changes the names that
students in the classroom have chosen for themselves. Moreover, students seem to enjoy the power of creating their own names throughout the discussion. For example, in Appendix B, "Val" is soon known as "Guest16408" (a change made by the IRC program) which she changes to "mad," indicating her displeasure at inconvenient name changes. "Mad" becomes known as "Guest97561," a name the user changes to "MAD." After this change, the system apparently becomes annoyed with her, because she is "killed" one line later. The student is not connected again until the bottom of the next page, where she enters the chatroom as "m." She enters the conversation with a quick "hello," and "m" gets changed by the system to "Guest11541." She quickly changes this back to "m" and again to "vale." Obviously, this student's concern with maintaining a name she has chosen for herself supersedes any concerns she might have with the conversations taking place because in two-and-a-half pages of transcript, she only manages to enter a greeting between name changes. My comment to "dandan" at the end of the transcript in Appendix A to "just read and respond to what you want to... it doesn't matter who wrote it" obviously becomes inappropriate as it seems very important to the students to know who is writing what. It is obviously an important factor to the students to have an idea of to whom and to what they are responding as several others spend chat time changing the randomly assigned names to something more indicative of their desired personas. "Guest29072" is changed to "Rza" is changed to "Guest76575" is changed to "Ghost" is changed
to "Guest27794" is changed to "Flava" is changed to "Rage." At this point, "Rage" wonders what has taken place in the meantime: "So what's going on." "Smarcioni" changes to "SHM," changes to "Elwood," which is again changed to "Elwood_Blues" by the time that the transcript used in Appendix A was taken. We can see why, by the end of the transcript in Appendix A, "dolphin" is concerned with whether or not the system will remember her designated name: "so everytime we sign on we have to type in the same name. it's not saved or anything [sic]." This concern with a self-designated name contrasts with "Guest32541's" concerns, as she is content to use the "Guest" name for the entire transcript. She never tries to change the name, as she is more concerned with the conversation going on in front of her. Her comments almost always have a specific target and goal; she follows the conversations and enters at those points where she can contribute the most.

Faigley points out the importance of pseudonyms used in the chat environment as they serve to further decenter the subject from the writing (191). His students respond positively to this experience as it provides an example of "the 'ecstasy of communication,' the pure, empty form of anti-pedagogy" (Faigley quoting Baudrillard 199). This "ecstasy of communication" connotes a distilled form, divorced from any sense of artificially-imposed reality. Faigley uses Baudrillard and Lyotard to argue that the chatroom opens up some dangerous possibilities in regard to students' hidden transcripts: "The
issue of student 'empowerment' thus becomes problematic in the networked classroom and exhibits many of the contradictions inherent in Lyotard's description of the postmodern condition" (24). He is concerned that anonymous discussions might allow a forum for "racism, sexism, and homophobia"; however, in returning to "melon's" example in Appendix A, I see a greater value in her contribution that might not have found expression in any other forum, than in a concern that another student's racist comments might undermine class discussion. We are privy to the conversation as it really would develop without any student-to-student or student-to-teacher power relationships. Racism, sexism, and homophobia may, in fact, enter the conversation; however, in any student-centered environment, students will raise these issues when they feel they need to be addressed or asserted whether or not we are in a chatroom or in front of the technology. We are seeing what Richard Miller would describe as the hidden transcript in all of its anti-academic and transformative glory.  

Freire writes that "to exist, humanly, is to name the world, to change it. Once named, the world in its turn reappears to the namers as a problem and requires of them a new naming" (69). Thus, the networked environment of the chatroom allows first-year composition students the authority to exist. Even in the relatively simple act of (re)naming themselves in the chatroom, they have changed the environment, they have made an indelible mark on the transcript. These marks simply outnumber
and quickly outweigh any marks the instructor might make. When the hidden transcript overwrites the public transcript and the students' powers of naming and claiming overpower the instructor's, even for the brief time the class discusses in a chatroom, students have the opportunity to define and maintain the context of the classroom. As I have shown in reference to the power of context over the meaning(s) ascribed to language, students with control over context also control meaning in turn.
Foucault develops his idea of the panopticon as a disciplinary ideal in *Discipline and Punish*. However, the actual model was developed by English philosopher Jeremy Bentham. As it is described by Eugene Provenzo in "The Electronic Panopticon," the panopticon "outlined a master plan for the observation and control of individuals living and working in any of a number of institutions" (168). It is a circular structure that allows a central guard or administrator access (at least visually) to each cell or room. Prisoners or occupants of each cell cannot see each other, nor the guard. Hence, each subject does not know when he or she is being watched, "the individual [comes] to believe that he was under constant observation" (169). Foucault refers to this as the "constant trap of visibility" (168).

In this case, the subject's ability to see and interact with her observer, not to mention the fact that there are many subjects observing, being observed, converting, and subverting one another, have overturned the disciplinary power of the panopticon. Information in the hands of the authority, the instructor, in this case does little to no good.

Paulo Freire, in the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, refers to the lecture scenario of education as a banking transaction. Knowledge is "deposited" impersonally and disinterestedly from the instructor to the student. Several dangerous assumptions are set up under this system, including myths such as "the teacher knows everything and the students know nothing," the teacher thinks and the students are thought about," and "the teacher talks and the students listen—meekly" (54).

In his article, "The Arts of Complicity," Miller refers to Freire's objections to his own philosophy. He looks at possible reasons why his students would reject his Freirian, problem-posing pedagogy, in favor of the oppressive, banking-type instruction. As Freire states, "the oppressed, having internalized the image of the oppressor and adopted his guidelines, are fearful of freedom. Freedom would require them to eject this image and replace it with autonomy and responsibility" (29).

Combining Miller’s arguments about James’ opposing public and hidden transcripts with Faigley’s arguments, using pseudonyms in the chatroom environment may bring the hidden and public transcripts closer together.
CHAPTER 4

ASYNCHRONOUS CHATROOMS AND THE (RE)CONSTRUCTION OF CONTEXT

The fast-paced, textual environment of the chatroom resembles a primitive form of a language game with little concrete context or environment left to hold on to—either for the student or the instructor. Contextualized meaning, which first-year composition students would usually derive from the context of the traditional classroom (with the students’ ability to read vocal, facial, and bodily expressions of the instructor and vice versa, contributing to understanding and overall communication), must now be rethought. This virtually instructor-less and context-less environment sends its repercussions into other aspects of the computer-aided classroom as well. The language game, which has its roots in the real-time virtual classroom of the Internet, plays out more fully in the slower, more constructive aspects of the classroom.

If Art Berman can define deconstruction as “the point at which the underlying logical inconsistency of the text is discovered, unmasked” (212), and this definition carries with it the knowledge that “deconstruction of the text is necessarily contained as a possibility within it, ‘Writing structurally...”
carries within itself... the process of its own erasure and annulation'" (Derrida quoted by Berman 212), what happens when the text, or the student, or the instructor, or the classroom is already deconstructed, decentered, and is undergoing "the process of its own erasure and annulation"? Assuming that the context of the post-chatroom classroom is a relatively deconstructed space, where the contextual erasure of the instructor and the breakdown of traditional classroom context or structure for meaning-making have turned the creative energy and authority over to the first-year composition student, what happens if we try to further deconstruct or decenter this already shifting space?

For example, in "The Blank Page' and the Issues of Female Creativity," Susan Gubar takes on the enormous issue of the objectified female body as written by the subjective male author. Gubar uses Isak Dinesen's "The Blank Page" to "illustrate how woman's image of herself as text and artifact has affected her attitudes toward her physicality and how these attitudes in turn shape the metaphors through which she imagines her creativity" (295). Dinesen's short story of "The Blank Page" focuses on a particular convent of Portuguese nuns who are known for their superior weaving of flaxen linen. To reward their superior craftsmanship, they retain the honor of displaying the bridal sheets which had been stained—"[bearing] witness to the honor of [the] royal bride" (Dinesen qtd. by Gubar 295). The final image of the story centers on a single, non-stained sheet, which bears a blank name plate unlike the named, stained sheets around it.
Gubar uses this image to show her concern with the context of writing, especially male writing the female form, experience, and expression, as it has created a stigmatized meaning. Like the metaphor, either the female form is stained or it is not. Gubar's "either/or" schematic of textuality (the male-written female) begins to conflate and disseminate, just as the "blank page" begins to break down the binary relationship of the stained pages or the chatroom begins to break down the binary patriarchal relationship of instructor and student. The blank page, to Gubar, does not simply signify allegiance to the patriarchy as the stained pages do; it can (and does) signify many things at once. All of these signifiers simply point to the page as "not stained." When the relationship between signifier and signified is not simply binary or one-to-one, we start looking at patterns of non-meaning, we start looking for what the signifier does not signify.

The language game of the computer-aided classroom becomes fairly convoluted as participants must negotiate new media of communication. We see several conversations taking place over and among one another, collapsing language game upon language game. Wittgenstein states in Part One of the Philosophical Investigations:

We can also think of the whole process of using words as one of those games by means of which children learn their native language. I will call these games "language-games" and will sometimes speak of a primitive language as a language-game. And the processes of naming the stones and of repeating words after someone might also be called
language-games. Think of much of the use of words in
games like ring-a-ring-a-roses.
I shall also call the whole, consisting of language
and the actions into which it is woven,
the "language-game" (7).

If everything, from games to ordinary conversations to language
itself, is a language game, in what context and in which language
game does a discussion or examination of the relationships of
signifiers with their respective signifieds become relevant and
useful? For example, what is the point of muddling through the
passage described in Chapter 3:

<Guest30621> marchioni, check out your your/you’re
relation. . .
<melon> I didn’t read at all, I forgot about it :((
sorry
<Da> lol
*** Danny has quit IRC (Killed (quantum-
r.ny.us.dal.net (netcom-r.on.ca.dal.net ->
gis.md.us.dal.net[207.114.41.10])))
*** Da is now known as Guest29072
*** Val is now known as Guest16408
<Guest29072> this sucks

When does it become necessary and feasible to discover the
signified meaning behind the phrase "this sucks"? In the midst of
the IRC protocol killing off users and other random notifications
that users are changing their names at almost obsessive speed,
when and how do we find signification for "melon’s" pronoun "it"?
Is she referring to "relation," the logical, grammatical
antecedent if we read the transcript as a conversation? Does it
refer back to something more complicated and convoluted?

The chatroom illustrates both brilliantly and
simplistically what Henry Staten points out about language—we
hover somewhere between the "explanation and the act":

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And so long as we do not look too closely, we give ourselves the impression that we are here indicating the beyond of language—when all we are doing is making signs. And there is no sign whose signification is "that which is beyond signification" . . . How could it even occur to us to think that it is possible to signify what lies beyond signification?" (70-71)

In a sense, we have been trying too hard to pin down and solidify the relationship between signifier and signified when, in the big picture of language, they are merely arbitrary signs themselves. When read at the fast pace of the written conversation, the importance of "melon’s" referent seems to slip away. Language, as the limit of our world, cannot delve beyond its own realm of reality. The language game, or the context of the rules and free play where language is used, must determine the relationship of sign to signified and overall meaning. However, this is too simplistic for Wittgenstein because the word "meaning" finds itself subject to the same language games as does every other word. The "rules" for each individual language game vary and although meaning stops at "usage," we must be careful not to privilege the position or the importance of rules. For example, Wittgenstein discusses the necessity and approachability of rules to a tennis game. Although rules are important to the understanding of the game, there is a sense of freedom and play within the boundaries of those rules. The language games we play are "not everywhere circumscribed by rules; but no more are there any rules for how high one throws the ball in tennis, or how hard; yet tennis is a game for all that and has rules too" (PI 68). Moreover, the rules of tennis are learned from different
angles and positions, from different teachers and in different environments, making each person's understanding of each rule somewhat different. Paraphrasing Joseph Williams' argument from Chapter 1, students in the chatroom transcript approach the "rules" of the computer-aided classroom from different localities—their physical location and the space of their virtual conversation. They also approach the context of the classroom from different experiences: the experience of the first-year composition student, struggling to maintain composure while entering a new academic discourse community; the experience of the reader and writer discussing writing (Murray's article or the writing assignments); and the experience of the student, trying hard not to let her real feelings get in the way of what she thinks the instructor might want to hear.

Susan Gubar's example of the blank page presents another way of looking at the seemingly unsurpassable constructions, hierarchies, and rules established by the patriarchy. However, by examining patterns of non-meaning similar to the chatroom or Wittgenstein's example of the tennis game, all possibilities must signify. Hence, when the page is not stained, all of Gubar's questions and theories of Dinesen's unnamed woman must signify:

Was this anonymous royal princess not a virgin on her wedding night? Did she, perhaps, run away from the marriage bed and thereby retain her virginity intact? Did she, like Scheherazade, spend her time in bed telling stories so as to escape the fate of her predecessors? Or again, maybe the snow-white sheet above the nameless plate tells the story of a young woman who met up with an impotent husband, or of a woman who learned other erotic arts, or of a woman who consecrated herself to the nun's vow of chastity but

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within marriage. Indeed, the interpretation of this sheet seems as impenetrable as the anonymous princess herself. (305)

The blank sheet is only that which it is not; however, this "only" opens up more possibilities than it closes off. Each possibility is as impenetrable as the next. The notion of the traditional composition classroom (like the virgin) as previously penetrable (students as female, instructor as male) brings up another problem with Gubar's presentation. What are we doing, or what is any feminist doing, that is different from what our academic, male predecessors have done to students and their writing? Are we penetrating students' texts via our responses? Are we simply perpetuating the binary relationship?

I think the problem is more complex than our typical "either/or" answers would lead us to believe. It seems that responding to student texts depends upon a sort of interpenetration with and by each text. This interpenetration is something different from the binary penetration of male-authored texts and is what Derrida refers to as the hymen, or the infinite regress. It is the "either/or" between and amidst the "either/or." As Jim Powell explicates in Derrida for Beginners:

"Hymen is (n)either virginity (n)or consummation (n)either inner (n)or outer. . . So the fold, the hymen, and the blank and spacing are not things. . . but the process of meanings always folded over. Of meanings dissolving in the spacing of these syntactical shifts" (92-97). What this means to us is that the "pen disseminating the hymen" means everything but just that. It
does not mean the male depositing the female form, but something
much more complex.

Just as Gubar's infinite regress on the symbolism of the
"blank page" opens up the possibility for many other
interpretations of the page than do the symbols on the stained
pages, so does Derrida's notion of the hymen open up many more
possibilities for students and writing as non- and inter-
penetrating than simply penetrating. Each question asked of the
blank page can be asked of the composition classroom and its
relationship to its instructor and/or first-year writer. Is the
classroom not pure? Is the chatroom tainted? Does it evade
penetration or complete understanding in favor of asking the
reader/writer to bring something to the marriage bed (to the
academic setting or university)? Maybe the classroom is not
evasive or unapproachable, but maybe the writer is impotent,
unable to bring anything to the environment. Maybe the instructor
is impotent, unable to bring anything to the students. Maybe the
classroom is fooling us, pretending to be true and unreachable.
Maybe the classroom is just telling stories to escape the fate of
penetration. Maybe the students are perpetuating those stories to
evade interpenetration. Maybe the classroom can remain somewhat
pure even though its reader/writer engages with it. Maybe it
retains something outside that relationship.

Gubar's questions regarding the context that opened up
several meanings behind the blank page and behind the text/reader
relationship serve almost every function except to close down
meaning-making processes. Her repeated questioning of the context
explodes the signifier, allowing it to express itself in a most
powerful way. Similarly, the chatroom-exploded context de-centers
the I/eye from the text of the conversation, as it (I/eye)
becomes lost in the randomness of the numerous conversations
taking place.

This randomness, however, begins to find reconstruction and
validation in the slower-paced environment of the asynchronous
discussion. Again, the student writers are much more responsible
for creating this context than I am as the instructor. One
important difference between the asynchronous chatting and the
synchronous chatting is that students have more time; text is not
scrolling before their eyes at a rapid pace. Norton Textra
Connect, the environment we use for asynchronous chat, opens up
two screens; one of them contains the writing they have chosen to
read. The second screen is a blank message box, a literalization
of Gubar's metaphor, that they can deposit text into when they
have a question, a response, or a statement to make. The
responses displayed by the transcript, then, are the hypertextual
readings and responses to writings. By "hypertextual" I mean that
certain questions and responses pertain to spatially
corresponding passages. That is, a reader's first questions will
correspond with a passage toward the beginning of the reading;
the last question or response will address a passage toward the
end of the reading, and so on.
The Philosophical Investigations develops this idea of the language game as it becomes an effective method of dissolving the binary function of language, or the relationship between signifier and signified. Similarly, the language game of the chatroom deconstructs the idea of the self: "I" is a word like any other, merely pointing to the constructs and contexts "that create 'ordinary' selves" (Perloff 73). This social construction of the "self" is the reason behind the illusion of our control over language, which—due to ethnicities, cultures, classes, genders, professions, and histories—can change any moment, leaving the "self" under the control of the language game (78).

Donald Murray writes about the schizophrenized selves present in the writing process in "Teaching the Other Self." The key to teaching writing effectively, he argues, is not to conform students into practicing models of their instructor's process, but to listen to what process creates the students' drafts: asking what their time constraints are, how they draft, and what voices they are listening to as they write:

When the student speaks and the student and teacher listen, they are both informed about the nature of the writing process that produced the draft. This is the point at which the teacher knows what needs to be taught or reinforced, one step at a time, and the point at which the student knows what needs to be done in the next draft. (52)

Several assumptions about writing are being made here. Murray assumes that the writers know what good writing is and what steps they must take to make their drafts into "good" writing. He assumes that all that a writer needs is a listener, a sounding
board for her ideas about her writing, her writing processes, and her drafts. This listener may be a teacher, a peer, or a workshop group. Kenneth Bruffee argues that "collaborative learning is an arena in which students can negotiate their way into [the conversation of writing]" (92).

As we look at the asynchronous transcript in Appendix C, we begin to see how a peer workshop group begins to reconstruct itself. The individuals negotiate their responses as readers with their roles as writers. Kyle's response to Nick is always the most convincing to me, as the instructor of this class, as to why the asynchronous environment works so well. Kyle was a student who sat in the back of the class, never speaking, and nearly always sullen. Most of his comments in class were spoken only when he was directly addressed, and I could never seem to get him to take off his ugly fishing hat that constantly reminded me of "Gilligan's Island." He was always quick with the "I'm only here because I have to be" comments, and his writings reflected the same attitude of mild rebellion. However, through the impersonal environment of the asynchronous chatroom, the fact that it followed the contextlessness of the synchronous chatroom, and his group's positive, nurturing tone, Kyle opens up. He reacts to Nick's paper on "manliness" as it is perceived in our society, and tells his group about what really affected him the most in Nick's writing. I remain convinced that if left to traditional groupwork with face-to-face conversations, Kyle would have never
had this sort of reaction to Nick’s writing—at least he would not have admitted to it.

In response to my question regarding the asynchronous chat environment, Kyle writes:

Okay heres the deal. I loved this format emensly. It helped me greatly. I have never done well in an english class, but you are making this class "fun"(for school). So I thank you. This assignment did open up some past memories that made me think of my life as a whole and find that it wasn’t too shabby. I loved the assignment. Thanks. (Appendix D)

However, it is obvious that my few comments inserted into the conversation in Appendix C are too few and too critical to be considered “fun.” My two comments include a discussion of paragraphing with Jessica as well as with Kyle, asking him fairly serious questions about his intent as the writer of his particular piece:

kyle, this is coming along nicely—I was a bit concerned with your first draft and where you would take it, but I like this. watch your use of paragraphing with the dialog with the cop--each time someone else speaks, it’s a new paragraph. can you do anything more substantial with your waiting in the longest line? can you incorporate more of your conclusion into the rest of your paper, rather than having images of the many lines you endure? Have you seen the new Snickers commercial? does this make sense or does it destroy your purpose?

He is responding to an environment that he and his group members are creating. He never responds to my questions, but helps create, with the aid of his group, a different, more positive and nurturing context for their discussion of writing. Kyle and his group members are creating a writing context out of the
contextual deconstruction of the chatroom that fosters a positive yet critical support network for themselves as writers.

Writing is an experience that cannot be taught, no matter how many influential and eloquent lectures I give on the subject.¹ As David Foster states in *A Primer for Writing Teachers*, "Because language is the means by which we construct our world, teachers should make students conscious of their rootedness in language and devise settings which enforce knowledge-making through social discourse" (77). The need is not to cram writing down the students' throats but to open them up to the discourse of composition, not through coercion and threats, but through dialogue and social contact. As Gregory Clark argues in *Dialogue, Dialectic, and Conversation*,

The process of making knowledge begins when people recognize that they need each other, that they must cooperate. In order to cooperate, they begin to define common interpretations of experience that they can treat as their collective reality, a reality constituted in terms of the shared needs, values, and purposes that are the foundation upon which they can sustain the cooperation that maintains their community. (7)

Clark further states that "a word is not an expression of inner personality; rather, inner personality is an expressed or inwardly impelled word," that "language... lies on the borderline between oneself and the other," and that "the word in language is half someone else's" (Bakhtin qtd. in Clark 9). This dynamic of language is most easily addressed in small groups who are striving to construct meaning within the boundaries of these groups.
Robert Brooke argues that three important facets of writing are accomplished by using these small groups: writers enter into a community of fellow writers where writing is valued; writers can see, first hand, the reaction that their writing has on others; and responses to their writings help writers see new possibilities and potentials for their writing and their writing selves (23). “Small groups, then, . . . are an essential method, an integral support to the elements of time, ownership, response and exposure” (23). Ann Hill Duin and Craig Hansen in “Reading and Writing on Computer Networks as Social Construction and Social Interaction,” look to Kenneth Bruffee, Clifford Geertz, Thomas Kuhn, and Richard Rorty for the basis of this social construction of the self with respect to composition:

The basic idea of social construction is that groups of people, bound by shared experiences or interests, build meaning through an ongoing process of communication, interpretation, and negotiation. Facts, beliefs, truth itself result from a social process of conversation and consensus building. (90-91)

Based upon the deconstructed, decentered context of the computer-aided classroom, students are forced into a relatively contextless environment in which they must rely on each other to create, define, and perpetuate meaning.

Students must quickly learn to rely on these groups when such plagues as macro viruses, transferring files, relative computer illiteracy, power outages and/or server outages in the middle of class disrupt our classroom. On any given day, I must be prepared for work both on and off the computers. These
technological problems add a bit of chaos to the community of the networked classroom that is already struggling to negotiate the contexts in which it now finds itself. This chaos fosters new and constructive communication: making the students rely more heavily upon communication with each other and with the instructor. Most importantly, however, is the idea that in order to acknowledge, participate in, and learn from the carnivalesque atmosphere, one must realize the reversal from the "actual" that takes place. That is, in order for the class to benefit from the disorganized and unfamiliar chatrooms and from the chaotic and sometimes frantic technological difficulties, we must realize that these events are "different" and negotiate from there.

These dynamics, argues Charles Bernstein in Content's Dream, are set into motion by the act of constructing writing using "radicalities or extremes of compositional strategy that tend to increase the artifactual, non-naturalistic sense" (Content's Dream 73), such as the chatroom as a virtual conversation. Bernstein, a leader in a postmodern poetic movement dubbed "LANGUAGE poetry," uses drastically artificial methods of composition, including dice throwing, mathematical patterns, and computer generated word lists, to create his works. He argues that first-year composition students should utilize other artificial and constructed systems of composition. The idea behind using these techniques is to remove much of the self referentiality and the personal from the writing and to create a
structure that collapses "content" and the "experience of reading" upon each other (CD 69):

Desire: To make language opaque so that writing becomes more and more conscious of itself as world generating, object generating. This goes not only for making palpable the processes of the mind and heart (inseparable) but for revealing the form and structure in which writing occurs, the plasticity of form/shape. (71)

With the deconstruction of the classroom and the contextual disappearance of the instructor in the chatroom space, students rely on their groups to reconstruct language and context—the structure of the class. The fact that this reconstruction takes place in a social setting, or, at least, a social space, is imperative, writes Bernstein: "[Writing] is a private act in a public space—the public place being both 'the language'—which is shared by all—and the page, open as it is to reading and rereading (by oneself and others)" (CD 77). I am reminded here of what Janet Emig points out in "Writing as a Mode of Learning":

Writing through its inherent reinforcing cycle involving hand, eye, and brain marks a uniquely powerful multi-representational mode for learning... a unique form of feedback, as well as reinforcement, exists with writing, because information from the process is immediately and visibly available as that portion of the product already written. (126-27)

Writing in the computer-aided environment seems to only enhance this multi-representation as bits and pieces of conversation can actually be lifted off of one written conversation (or the chatroom) to another (student writing). Even discussions are now immediately available for revision.
In the article, "A Conversation with Charles Bernstein," Bernstein advocates these same deconstructive and 
(re)constructive mechanisms for the composition classroom:

In a pragmatic way, anything that breaks down hegemonic authoritative discourse structure is positive even if it is also a wrong argument. If there is one alternative, that’s better than if there’s none, because then you can at least make a contrast. . . . People don’t need to be taught to have their own voice, they’ve got it, you know, the idea that knocks it out of them and makes the people feel stupid for speaking the way they do and that’s why we feel like what we’re trying to do is restore a sort of pride. (49)

Students come to the composition classroom with a very indoctrinated sense of their inadequacies for writing at the university level. They are very aware, perhaps more than we, of the fact that, at the point of evaluation or critique, suddenly their writing becomes more the instructors’ or their peers’ property and less “theirs.”

However, with the reconstruction of a peer group’s social collaboration as seen in Appendix C, this does not occur. What impresses me about this particular group’s dialogue is the way they set up a very positive responding technique that also includes incredibly critical comments. Every response begins with a specific, positive comment: “I liked the humor,” “I like . . . the repetition,” “This was so sweet!!” to “I totally love your idea about using the song as a format . . . I really love how your last paragraph comes from the song” (Appendix C). Not surprisingly, all of the members of this group responded very positively to the asynchronous environment and left the session

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feeling much more positively about their own work. This is evidenced by the "thank you" session initiated by Nicholas toward the end of the transcript.

Not only do all of the responses begin with a positive statement, each quickly digs into a respective writing and gives some critical feedback. Kyle gets several questions regarding a serious time discrepancy in his writing. He also receives several ideas for how he might overcome this missed time period: "Is this all in the same day?" "Why the transition to the bank, another example or did you need money for the ticket," and "Then you go from 8am to almost 5pm. Did you need cash for your ticket?" All of these questions arise in a non-threatening tone and from a genuine sense of curiosity. The students are engaging each other’s texts in an invested and interested manner. Kellie is encouraged for her use of dual perspective on her essay on sororities and fraternities. She is also given some options on how to make her own opinions more clear: "You might want to include a conclusion at the end explaining this, however, you might want to leave it the way it is so the reader has a question in their minds forever." This response cuts to the heart of authorial intent versus audience response. Kyle lets Kellie know about his reactions, but leaves the decision up to the writer about how to affect her audience. Nick responds to her transition between the two perspectives in her piece: "also your transition from bad to good is rough. it was like ‘oh no look at the tornado, lets have some tea.’" Nick is highly praised for his
effective use of repetition in his piece, but is asked for more
detail in specific places: "You should go more into what you were
thinking when he called you up crying."

As we can see, the attitude that first-year composition
students display over their "death" as writers can serve two
purposes. The fact that they see their writing as less their own
and more possessed by their instructors or their groups,
resulting in their "deaths" as writers, may discourage writing
through an emphasis on product, or encourage a play with this
phenomenon in terms of examining process, context, and meaning.
What fits well with this discussion is Barthes' idea of writing
described in "The Death of the Author":

In the multiplicity of writing, everything is to be
disentangled, nothing deciphered; the structure can be
followed, "run" (like the thread of a stocking) at
every point and at every level, but there is nothing
beneath: the space of writing is to be ranged over,
not pierced; writing ceaselessly posits meaning
ceaselessly to evaporate it, carrying out a systematic
exemption of meaning. (Barthes 147)

Wittgenstein's infinite regress on the idea of rules and meaning
goes well here; however, how do we get our students involved in
this multiplicity of writing? How do we get them involved with
engaging the context of the composition classroom and the context
of writing itself?

Linguistically, the author is never more than the
instance of writing, just as I is nothing other than
the instance saying I: language knows a "subject," not
a "person," and this subject, empty outside of the
very enunciation which defines it, suffices to make
language "hold together," suffices, that is to say, to
exhaust it. (Barthes 145)
However, in Foucault's answer to Barthes, "What is an Author," this gap between Wittgenstein and Barthes is lessened via Foucault's sense of the language game involved in composition:

[Writing] is an interplay of signs arranged less according to its signified content than according to the very nature of the signifier. Writing unfolds like a game (jeu) that invariably goes beyond its own rules and transgresses its limits. In writing, the point is not to manifest or exalt the act of writing, nor is it to pin a subject within language; it is, rather, a question of creating a space into which the writing subject constantly disappears. (102)

Furthermore, Foucault proceeds to combine elements of Barthes, Wittgenstein, and Derrida: "Instead, we must locate the space left empty by the author's disappearance, follow the distribution of gaps and breaches, and watch for the openings that this disappearance uncovers" (105). In short, the reader must actively create and engage a context for the text and must derive meaning out of this context and usage (both real and perceived).

Jay David Bolter argues that this type of environment, where both writer and reader are engaged in the meaning-making process by creating a mutual context, is exactly what the computer-aided classroom engenders: "The conceptual space of electronic writing . . . is characterized by fluidity and an interactive relationship between the writer and reader" (11). He states that this fluid relationship is maintained by writing and reading groups known as "newsgroups":

When one subscriber in a newsgroup "publishes" a message, it travels to all the . . . others who belong to that group. The message may elicit responses, which in turn travel back and forth and spawn further responses. . . . The transition from reader to writer is completely natural. (29)
These newsgroups are another form of asynchronous chat. Using Norton Textra Connect, students in my classes formed their own newsgroups (also their peer workshop groups) of three to five students each. For each written assignment, writers could post their drafts to the network, read their group members' drafts, post newsgroup messages to each other regarding those drafts, and respond to each newsgroup message.

When asked, students gave specific reasons for why they preferred to respond to each other's writing in the asynchronous environment as opposed to the traditional, circled face-to-face environment. Jessica writes:

I like this format alot better than just open dicussions becuase I can get more into depth about things. Like on Kyle's paper at first I felt kinda bad because I thought that I was nit picking, but then when he sent me a response back saying thank you I thouht that that was really nice. (Appendix D)

She was most impressed with the fact that her responses were responded to. She needed to hear that her criticisms were being met with appreciation from the writer, and she needed the feedback that her responses were not too critical. Jessica had a great deal to say in Appendix C, so much so that she sacrificed a certain level of self-editing to get all of her questions and responses into a 75 minute workshop. Another student, Jennifer, responds to the same aspect, the fact that the writers could immediately respond to her responses: "it helps to have an audience who can relate." Bolter refers to this as the "end of authority" for authors: "The author is no longer an intimidating figure, not a prophet or a Mosaic legislator in Shelley's sense"
Within the limits prescribed to the writer of an electronic text, the reader is allowed to play. The reader is allowed to respond, and is even allowed to expect a response back from the writer.

Nicholas likes the impersonality of the environment: "it is easier for [him] to respond if [he knows] the person is not directly listening to [him]." In the relatively fast pace of the asynchronous environment, a writer is not waiting for a response from her audience. No reader is put on the spot for a response, whether critical or encouraging. The reader is free to respond to what she wants when she wants. Since no one is waiting for someone else's paper, the workshop moves smoothly as any group member can call up any paper at any time. A participant can be reading a text, reading others' responses to texts, writing a response to a text, or writing a response to a response. Multi-faceted modes of process can be, and usually are, taking place at the same time. Finally, Jane reacts to the social nature of the environment: "What worked in today's class for me was establishing more identity with the class."

What Wittgenstein, Derrida, Freire, Faigley, and other theorists greatly contribute to composition studies; however, we as instructors and as writing classes need to take their ideas further. What I am proposing is nothing short of student engagement with the ideas found here. First-year composition students come to the table with a good working knowledge of the rules and regulations of the academy; whether or not this
knowledge is what the academy will expect from them is another matter. It is up to us to forge new ground and allow them to play with those rules, and, more importantly, to play with the structures and contexts in which they find themselves and their language. The computer-aided classroom offers unlimited possibilities to these challenges as it offers the incredible advantage of being an un-contextualized space, where student-to-student negotiation with context, meaning, and (re)creation is a necessary part of their daily participation in the class. The new, fast-paced orality offered by chatrooms and networked discussion offers a voice for divergent ideas and a context in which to explore the possibilities of opening up language and composition from the students' perspectives.
In "Writing Can be Learned but it Can’t Be Taught," Roger Sale argues that, "Writing cannot be taught, because it is not a teachable series of actions or patterns. . . . When the relationship [between teacher and student] is one of real question, real answer, and real possibility, writing cannot be taught at all. But it can be learned" (58). In this article he summarizes what I believe my role as an instructor of first-year composition to be: "What teachers can do is ask questions, to praise and to criticize, to offer alternate ways of thinking about things. They get someone started, or help [her] along, in a process of [her] making [herself] be careful about [herself] and the way [she] speaks and writes" (56). In short, he favors a student-centered pedagogy that is concerned with the student’s ideas of process.

As Stuart Hall states: "Bakhtin uses ‘carnival’ to signal all those forms, tropes, and effects in which the symbolic categories of hierarchy and value are inverted" (6). The dialog of the computer-aided classroom often includes comments such as "Hey, my paper won’t post," indicating a network connection error; or "Why does my paper have the word ‘wazzu’ written in random places?" indicating a virus-infected file; or "This computer still won’t boot up," indicating any number of problems. These comments find expression in between, over, and under the other discussions about writing that are already taking place, creating uniquely heteroglossic conversations. However, as Linda Hutcheon points out, "the recognition of the inverted world still requires a knowledge of the order of the world which it inverts and, in a sense, incorporates" (99). Woven into the comments about the problems of using technology, there is an implicit awareness that these problems should not be occurring. By working in groups to overcome these numerous difficulties, writers incorporate the carnivalesque into their daily interactions in the computer-aided classroom.

Notes

1. In "Writing Can be Learned but it Can’t Be Taught," Roger Sale argues that, "Writing cannot be taught, because it is not a teachable series of actions or patterns. . . . When the relationship [between teacher and student] is one of real question, real answer, and real possibility, writing cannot be taught at all. But it can be learned" (58). In this article he summarizes what I believe my role as an instructor of first-year composition to be: "What teachers can do is ask questions, to praise and to criticize, to offer alternate ways of thinking about things. They get someone started, or help [her] along, in a process of [her] making [herself] be careful about [herself] and the way [she] speaks and writes" (56). In short, he favors a student-centered pedagogy that is concerned with the student’s ideas of process.

2. As Stuart Hall states: "Bakhtin uses ‘carnival’ to signal all those forms, tropes, and effects in which the symbolic categories of hierarchy and value are inverted" (6). The dialog of the computer-aided classroom often includes comments such as "Hey, my paper won’t post," indicating a network connection error; or "Why does my paper have the word ‘wazzu’ written in random places?" indicating a virus-infected file; or "This computer still won’t boot up," indicating any number of problems. These comments find expression in between, over, and under the other discussions about writing that are already taking place, creating uniquely heteroglossic conversations. However, as Linda Hutcheon points out, "the recognition of the inverted world still requires a knowledge of the order of the world which it inverts and, in a sense, incorporates" (99). Woven into the comments about the problems of using technology, there is an implicit awareness that these problems should not be occurring. By working in groups to overcome these numerous difficulties, writers incorporate the carnivalesque into their daily interactions in the computer-aided classroom.
<mvmv> hola
<melon> I like trying to write about writing, it makes me think about things I had never thought of before.
<miyo> hi
<dandan> how many drafts can you write about a single exercise? I have a limited amount of brain space, ya know!
<Elwood_Blues> aloha
<Perk187> think of a new topic to write about?
<Guest32541> I think you amy have thought of them before, just never truly expressed it.
<mensahib> good, melon, like what? most people have not had to think about themselves as writers!
<Elwood_Blues> Dandan use the reenvisioning exercise. it helps
<mensahib> good, 32541, do you have an example?
***mvmv is now known as dolphin
<mensahib> anyone else have suggestions?
<dandan> i guess it comes down to whether or not i like the subject i am writing about.
<dolphin> I think you should think of a new topic to write about.
<melon> it kind of helped me to think about what i am doing wrong in writing and expanding what i could do instead and so I have found it easier to get more out of my writing every time i do it.
<dolphin> oops topic
<Perk187> What if your 1st draft is as good as its going to be
<Elwood_Blues> make the topic something you do want to write about
<Guest32541> well, like when I was reading this paper. I knew all of that stuff and had discussed it before in a class, but it just wasn't at the front of my mind.
<mensahib> dolphin, who should think of a new topic?
<dandan> we don't just get to pick the topic. it is assigned to us.
<dolphin> you
* * * dolphin is now known as Guest80789
<mensahib> good 32541
<Guest32541> The first draft is never "as good as it can be"!
<mensahib> dandan, do you really think writing about writing is that limiting?
<melon> exactly
<Perk 187> call me flipper then
<mensahib> especially in light of what other people are doing in
the class?
*** Guest80789 is now known as dolphin_VM
<mensahib> i think you can really take these assignments
anywhere!
<miyo> In murrays' article he does say information is important
<Elwood_Blues> I make every topic somethin I want to write about
its not that hard
<Guest32541> He doesn't jsut say it....he focuses on it.
<dolphin_VM> how about descriding a life as someone else as a
topic
<miyo> If we have enough information or know where to go to get
it then the essays can really expand
<mensahib> i understand what you are saying, but I tend to
disagree....
<Elwood_Blues> with what
<mensahib> dandan
<Perk187> im lost
<Elwood_Blues> okay
<Perk187> fill me in
<Elwood_Blues> Im found
<dolphin_VM> even if we make up the story, lets make one
interesting
<Guest32541> I have afeeling that you have been for a long time.
<dandan> well, the only writing i know about is my own. i'm sure
i could interview some people about their writing process and
skilss, but that is not what i want to get across as my point. i
want you to know me as a writer, not some joe bio
<mensahib> BTW, in these assignments, it's okay to disagree. you
can take an opposite point of view
<Elwood_Blues> make it fun
<melon> going back to perks comment about the first draft, i
liked what tolstoy said about it is only finished because of a
dead line.
<Elwood_Blues> This class is fun (except for Perk, hes boring)
<melon> i don't know i was a little lost in the conversation, who
ever they were talking about.
<dolphin_VM> so everytime we we signon we have to type in the
same name. its not saved or anything
<dandan> i don't know if someone is talking to or about who or
why and what not! to:mensahib
<mensahib> i get lost too; however, it's the fast paced nature of
the conversation that I like
<Perk187> get a clue
<Elwood_Blues> no it doesnt save it
<mensahib> i don't want to stand in front of the class and ask
questions that don't get answered....
<Perk187> save what
<Elwood_Blues> just read Perk
<dolphin_VM> the screen name
<melon> this is easier to talk in because i am shy
<mensahib> just read and respond to what you want to dandan. . .
it doesn't matter who wrote it!
<melon> you know what i mean
<dolphin_VM> it is especially if the do not know who you are
<dandan> i guess some people are a little more comfortable
answering questions in this setting.
<mensahib> i understand how it can be disorienting though
<Perk187> melon please identifiy your self
Appendix B

<Guest30621> marchioni, check out your your/you’re relation. . .
<melon> I didn’t read at all, I forgot about it :(! sorry
<Da> lol
*** Danny has quit IRC (Killed (quantum-r.ny.us.dal.net (netcom-
    r.on.ca.dal.net <-qis.md.us.dal.net[207.114.41.10])))
*** Da is now known as Guest29072
*** Val is now known as Guest16408
<Guest29072> this sucks
<Guest30621> who did read for today?
<moyo> I liked the fact that Murray tells us to be suspicious.
<Guest32541> I did
<Guest30621> suspicious of what
<Guest30621> why do we want to be suspicious?
;moyo> Of the praise
*** Guest29072 is now known as Rza
<Guest30621> what praise moyo? can you be more specific?
;moyo> and not so so suspicious of criticism
<Guest32541> I questioned the amateur and professional writing thing.
*** Rza is now known as Guest76575
*** Guest 16408 is now known as mad
<Guest30621> okay, i’m still unclear, what are we supposed to be
    suspicious about and what are we not?
<Guest30621> talk about this questioning 32541. . .
<Guest30621> why do you question this?
*** SMarchioni is now known as SHM
*** Guest76575 is now known as Ghost
*** mad is now known as Guest97561
<Guest30621> um.......... this is boring....
<SHM> I agree with you Ryan
;moyo> Of getting a false praise and allowing the praise to
    inflate our balloon only to find out that it wil pop
*** Guest97561 is now known as MAD
*** MAD has quit IRC (Killed (toronto.on.ca.dal.net (netcom-
    r.on.ca.dal.net <- cic-r.il.us.dal.net[131.103.1.116])))
*** Ghost is now known as Guest27794
<Guest32541> I felt that he did not completely define the
difference. I mean he stated it basically as someone in
school to someone who is not.

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<Guest30621> oh, miyo, you mean praise that isn't real!! like when your colleague says "Yeah that's really good, but you still get a "C"?  
<Guest32541> I feel that the break cannot be really defined there.

*** Guest27794 is now known as Flava

<miyo> you got it

<Guest30621> where can we define the break between amatuer and professional writing?? anyone??  
*** Flava is now known as Rage

<Guest30621> do you agree miyo? from what experience do you base your response?  
*** Danny (nightweb@fdh23.unlvlabs.nevada.edu) has joined #composition

<Guest32541> I loved the part when he talked about writers reading their work out loud to themselves. I thought I was a little off because of that.  
<miyo> The proffessional will be willing to re read their work over and over to improve on it.  

<Rage> So what's going on

<Danny> ha ha ha!!! You cannot get rid of me! i'm invincible!!  
<Guest32541> I feel that my work is almost revised to it's best when I do that.  

*** Rage is now known as Guest93975

*** Danny is now known as Guest81430

<miyo> The amatuer is not always to commit the time and effort to the work in progress/  

<SHM> Some one who does writing as a job better read there work over and over and over  

<Guest30621> why did you think you were off 32541?  
<Guest30621> who reads their writing out loud?  
<Guest81430> i even got my name back, nevermind ixnay on that comment  

<Guest30621> i do!  
<Guest32541> So, you are saying that I am not?  
<Guest30621> no, i'm wondering why you felt off base?  
<SHM> I read my writing out loud to another person.  
<Guest81430> i'll just sign my name to my most noteworthy and appreciated comments! :) danny  

<Guest30621> to whom do you read your writing shm?  
<miyo> As for reading aloud I find it very important  
<Guest30621> good for you danny!  

*** m(gonzalv1@fdh09.unlvlabs.nevada.edu) has joined #composition

<SHM> To who ever will listen  
<Guest32541> I think when you read your work out loud it helps to hear if writing actually sounds interesting. I mean even though the grammar is correct does not mean it is good.  

<m> hello  

<melon> just so you know i'm trying to read this really quick  

*** m is now known as Guest 11541  

*** Guest 11541 is now known as m
<Guest32541> From my experience it does not help to read to others, because I feel that they say it is good no matter what. <miyo> I read aloud
*** m is now known as vale
*** Guest30621 is now known as bob
<bob> no one needs to listen
<bob> what do you do then 32541?
*** Guest93975 is now known as Perkl87
<bob> why not miyo?
<Guest81430> i don't think reading your writing out loud helps as much as someone else reading it out loud back to you
<bob> why is there only like three people typing?
<miyo> 41 Your right it helps us hear the writing
*** vale is now known as Guest32155
*** bob is now known as Guest11423
<Guest11423> okay, good 81430, why? how does this help?
<Guest32541> I feel that people can be more critical on paper, which is why I like peer response.
<Perkl87> right on
*** Guest32155 is now known as mvmv
*** Guest11423 is now known as mensahib
<Guest81430> i like the originality of your name "bob"
<Perkl87> whos 81430
<mensahib> what do you do if your readers are not critical enough?
<SHM> I feel that reading out loud to another person because it helps you catch all the mistakes
<mensahib> what do we do in this class if your fellow students are not critical enough?
<Guest32541> It frustrated me, because if I am asking for the help it is because I want/need it.
<miyo> I if it is my writing I do not need to share it. The writing is just a way to get extra feeling out/
<Guest81430> i saw a modern day hunchback of notre dame move where quasimodo named himself "bob" I kinda see see a resemblance there, bob
<mensahib> but, people do not want to hurt your feelings... how do you let them know they won't?
<Perkl87> good example
<SHM> You tell them to be as honest as possible with you
<mensahib> does that work shm?
*** SHM is now known as Elwood
<Guest32541> Who cares.....if they hurt your feelings. If they do then, you have been living in a different world for too long.
<Guest32541> I mean it is a CRUEL world... move on.
<mvmv> but people should know how to say things and how not to say things
Appendix C

Group 2's Discussion for Assignment 12

FROM: Ryan Moeller  TO: Group 2

jessica, a couple of ideas. i like your use of dual perspective for between your father and you; however can you make the perspectives more obvious? for example, in your use of paragraphing, i think it's fine for "your" selection to not be broken up, but shouldn't your fathers be a little more broken up into paragraphs or main ideas and a little more organized? what do the rest of you think?

FROM: Kellie Rogers  TO: Group 2

Kyle,
I really enjoyed reading your story. I liked the humor in it, it was not too much but just enough to make me laugh. I like the way you went about doing this assignment as far as using the repetition. The only questions I have for you is what happened after you got in the car accident? What did your parents say since it was their car and you were ditching school? I got kind of lost from the part of "I get in a wreck and end up with a smashed car and a humongous ticket," to the "My account is empty." Is this all in the same day? Did you need money for your car accident? Other than those questions I really enjoyed reading your assignment 5.

FROM: Jessica E Lindelow  TO: Group 2

Nick,

This was so sweet! ! I really liked it. At first, I thought that you repeated I am a man to many times until I remembered the assignment. Very tricky! ! One idea is in the second paragraph when you said that society taught you to be man, you could give an example of how society shaped you into being man. Side note, how (or why) did you stick your tongue in a light socket? How did that happen? Then when you said that if you were not the best it was because of a manly injury. Is that like a pulled groin muscle or what? And how did you come to terms with your manhood in high school? Give a specific example. I liked the phrase "for extra
menly bonus points"!! I think that the transition between ... something was wrong to telling about your best friend was a little weak. I'm not sure how I would change it but...? I liked the detail about the King of the Hill. You should go more into what you were thinking when he called you up crying. Give more detail. And why is it hard to carry on a manly relationship? And why did you not have a problem hugging your other friends when they left? Were they girls or not close friends? I think that your last paragraph could go into more detail also. Have you talked to or seen your best friend since he left? Do you talk about emotional stuff now? Overall, very good paper!

FROM: Ryan Moeller  TO: Group 2

kyle, this is coming along nicely—I was a bit concerned with your first draft and where you would take it, but I like this. watch your use of paragraphing with the dialog with the cop--each time someone else speaks, it's a new paragraph. can you do anything more substantial with your waiting in the longest line? can you incorporate more of your conclusion into the rest of your paper, rather than having images of the many lines you endure? Have you seen the new Snickers commercial? does this make sense or does it destroy your purpose?

FROM: Kyle G Aten  TO: Group 2

Kellie,

I have just finished reading your paper and I loved it. I have used this method in many of my writings to get a point across. I was totally convinced that you felt that sororities were bad the whole time that I read the first part and then I was totally convinced that you felt that sororities were the greatest thing on earth the whole time that I read the second part. You totally made me think, which is what the assignment called for. One thing that I was interested in was which idea is truly yours? You might want to include a conclusion at the end explaining this, however, you might want to leave it the way it is so the reader has a question in their minds forever.

Since I really don't know anything about sororities or fraternities, except for the bigoted ideas that come from the media people, it is difficult to help with ideas for the content of this writing. Therefore, I am going to use the questions on the board to help me with the rest.
1. I think that your ideas are organized in a logical manner and I think it worked tremendously for your ideas to get across.
2. The main idea of an argument between the good and bad sides of sororities and fraternities was a good one to pick because it is a widely argued one so many people have a knowledge of it already. All of your ideas do relate to your topic as well.
3. Again, since I don't know anything about fraternities and/or sororities, I can't help on this topic.
4. I did not find any irrelevant ideas in the paper.
5. I found two main ideas of the paper in the two sides of the argument. They were just the good and bad sides fighting it out.
6. You have used many examples since you have the knowledge because you are in sorority, so I think they are effective.

All in all, your paper was great at making me think and helping me to understand the arguments that have gone on between the dueling ideas.

FROM: Nicholas La Puma TO: Group 2

Kellie,
i like your choice of topic, there is so much you can write on. you should write more about what is wrong with greek life. you can add things like...well i do not have a clue, but i am sure you do. also your transition from bad to good is rough. it was like "oh no look at the tornado, let's have some tea." do you understand? also you should explain why your sisters are like sisters, because people like me do not have a clue how this works. more bad stuff - you could say how greeks promote cheating by having copies of tests and papers on file. this is also another way they take away from education. why can't you wear your letters if you drink? and how can they help you throughout your life? are their any types of hazing besides drinking? if you do not drink what do you do as an alternative? great point about individual minds. great job so far, keep it up.

nick

FROM: Jessica E Lindelow TO: Group 2

Klye,
I liked your paper. I chuckled a few times because it sometimes it seems like no matter how far ahead you get, you are still in the back of the line. Go figure. When you are leaving Sav on you should say something like as I am leaving the parking lot in my parents hot little ...(whatever kind of car they have). Because I didn't at first know that you were leaving in your car. That sounds lame but... And then you go from it being 8am to almost 5pm. Did you need cash for your ticket? Was there a line at your first bank? I'm not sure what kind of example you could use but maybe something like... You had to take your parents car to the insurance company and you had to wait in another line to get to talk to some one and then a nother line to get an estimate done on it. Oh even better, I'm not sure you could use this because you are a guy, but waiting in line to go pee. That line takes forever!!

FROM: Kellie Rogers TO: Group 2
jessica, i loved reading your assignment 5 and thought that it was so cute! you did a really nice job telling the first perspective through a 7 year old's eyes. i agree with ryan in that your dad's part can be a little more organized with the main ideas. paragraph separation would help. i think that you did a great job in being specific throughout the entire paper. maybe being 7 years old and all you could add some (not very many) irrelevant thoughts because young kids always have wandering minds. other than that, i think that it was very well written and i look forward to reading your final copy.

kellie

FROM: Kyle G Aten  T0: Group 2

Nick,

I enjoyed your paper emensely. I used the same repetition form and reading your made me want to piss on my paper. I think that you had some very valid points about our society that we see every day, but never address. They need to be addressed, so our children don't have to go through the same shit we go through. You had so many examples in your paper that you got your point across very effectively and made me think a lot. I have done the same things in my life, so I know how you feel. Also, i am now a different person. I like how you went from telling hgow much of a man that you were, while somewhat lying and then at the very end, told us the truth. It kept me in suspense. I think that there are amny examples that you could add, but they might dtract from your paper if they are not examples that happened to you. That is why I am stuck on my paper. I didn't find any irrelevant ideas in your paper. I think that the part that most impacted me was where you told us that you cried when your dog died. This was a great example for all people, but even more so for me because I have been around pets all of my life because my dad is a veterinarian and I have. I have seen many of his animals die and I have seen many of my animals die. I cried as well.

Great job.

FROM: Nicholas La Puma  T0: Group 2

kyle,
i totally love your idea about using the song as a format (it is one of my fav nofx songs) i really love how your last paragraph comes from the song. the only rough spot is between the accident and the bank. you should add more about the accident. was their a line to get the car repaired? why the transition to the bank, another example or did you need money for the ticket. if it was another example you could tie it in with the accident. if you are going to go into the line at the courthouse you could talk about how people in line with you were probably snorting lines? who
knows. overall great paper and great use of repetition, not too much - just right. it was also funny. great job

FROM: Nicholas La Puma  TO: Group 2

i would like to thank everyone for your comments. i thought my paper was crap, but i guess it is not so bad. thanks again. i really appreciate ya'lls help. thank you

FROM: Kyle G Aten  TO: Group 2

Your welcome nick and thank everyone for doing mine as well, yet I still don't totally like mine.

FROM: Jessica E Lindelow  TO: Group 2

Kellie/ Ryan

I know that I need to do more on my dad's part. I'm in part trying to do this as a surprise for my Dad but whenever I am on his computer he always looks over my shoulder so for the first draft his part was alittle short. I already have a couple of ideas for him. Thanks for the comments!

FROM: Kellie Rogers  TO: Group 2

Thank you everyone for responding to my paper. I have a lot of ideas, it is just hard to incorporate all of them. Thanks for all the help!!
kellie
FROM: Jessica E Lindelow  TO: Teacher

Ryan,

I like this format alot better than just open dicussions becuase I can get more into depth about things. Like on Kyle's paper at first I felt kinda bad because I thought that I was nit picking, but then when he sent me a response back saying thank you I thougtht that that was really nice.

So in short... 2 thumbs up!

Jes

FROM: Ryan Moeller  TO: Jessica E Lindelow

thanks siskel and ebert!

FROM: Kyle G Aten  TO: Teacher

Okay heres the deal. I loved this format emensly. It helped me greatly. I have never done well in an english class, but you are making this class "fun" (for school). So I thank you. This assignment did open up some past memories that made me think of my life as a whole and find that it wasn't too shabby. I loved the assignment. Thanks.

Kyle

FROM: Ryan Moeller  TO: Kyle G Aten

cool. kyle thanks—I'm glad you're engaging this stuff!! I knew you could.

FROM: Jennifer Adams  TO: Teacher

Today helped me a great deal. I know that when I was writing my paper I had questions and Jennifer answered them. I like the way we commented on our peers writing. It helps when you have an audience who can relate. It would have been easier if I wrote my paper on Word and transferred it to this program though!

---------Jennifer Adams---------
FROM: Nicholas La Puma   T0: Teacher

i liked the impersonality of it. it is easier for me to respond if I know a person is not directly listening to me. also it is a quick moving system, more than one person can read and respond to your paper at the same time

nick

FROM: Jane T Doran   T0: Teacher

Assignment: Assignment Two

What worked in today's class for me was establishing more identity with the class. As we discuss ideas, questions, etc. and become more familiar with each other in our assignments, it becomes easier. This works well.
Appendix E

Human Subjects Protocol Approval
DATE: October 9, 1998

TO: Ryan Moeller (ENG-5011)

FROM: Dr. William E. Schulze, Director
Office of Sponsored Programs (X1357)

RE: Status of Human Subject Protocol Entitled:
"Language Games and Computer-Aided Composition"
OSP #105s1098-100e

The protocol for the project referenced above has been reviewed by the Office of Sponsored Programs and it has been determined that it meets the criteria for exemption from full review by the UNLV human subjects Institutional Review Board. This protocol is approved for a period of one year from the date of this notification and work on the project may proceed.

Should the use of human subjects described in this protocol continue beyond a year from the date of this notification, it will be necessary to request an extension.

If you have any questions regarding this information, please contact Marsha Green in the Office of Sponsored Programs at 895-1357.

cc: S. Taylor (ENG-5011)
OSP File

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Degree:
Bachelor of Arts, English, 1996
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Special Honors and Awards:
Tracey T. Schwarze Teaching Award, University of Nevada, Las Vegas Composition Committee, 1998-1999

Research Grant, University of Nevada, Las Vegas Graduate Student Association, Spring 1998

Sigma Tau Delta Honor Society, Epsilon Rho Chapter, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 1997-Present

Golden Key National Honors Society, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 1995

Publication Activity:
In-House Publications:
Writing Center
• Writing Center Handbook, Co-Authored orientation handbook.
• Anthology of Student Writing, Edited collection of student works with Preface.
• APA Style: A Writing Center Workshop, Edited guide to the APA Style Sheet with introduction.

Writing Program

Works In Progress:
"Language Games: Context and Language in the Networked..."
Conference Papers Delivered:


Professional Experience
Assistant Director of the Writing Center, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 1997-1998

- Organize new staff orientation and training, incorporating student texts and Writing Center policies.
- Oversee day-to-day activities of the Center, coordinating between staff and the Director.
- Organize and plan regular staff meetings.
- Develop and maintain computer lab and on-line website.

New Graduate Teaching Assistant Orientation and Training Sessions, University of Nevada Las Vegas English Department.

- Assist in orientation of new English Department graduate teaching assistants, August, 1997 and 1998.
- Duties include participating in panel discussions on teaching for the first time and facilitating small group discussions on a variety of pedagogy-related issues.

Graduate Teaching Assistant Mentor, Fall, 1998.

- Serve as mentor/support contact for two new English Department Teaching Assistants.

Research Assistant to Dr. Susan Taylor on two textbook projects, Fall, 1998.

- Duties include collating, reviewing, and selecting examples of student texts; organizing, formatting, and
editing manuscripts; and developing web-pages appropriate to the Writing Program and its Director.

- Training instructors new to the computer-aided teaching environment and to Norton Textra-Connect.

- Workshop discussing the APA style manual for interested parties.

- Workshop discussing patterns of effective and ineffective sentence structure.

Thesis Title: Language Games and Computer-Aided Composition

Thesis Examination Committee:
Chairperson, Dr. Susan Taylor, Ph.D.
Committee Member, Dr. John Bowers, Ph.D.
Committee Member, Dr. Evelyn Gajowski, Ph.D.
Graduate Faculty Representative, Dr. Rebecca Mills, Ed.D.