

# A Politics of Composition and Technology: Institutions and the Hazards of Making New<sup>1</sup>

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## Click One

The Second Computers and Writing Conference in 1985 took place at UCLA under the aegis of a remarkable and generous colleague, Lisa Gerrard, and other notables with whom she worked, all pioneers indeed in computers and composition. Young and impassioned, always willing to fight the good fight, I presented a paper called "The Politics of CAI and Word Processing: Some Issues for Faculty and Administrators." An entertaining, rather spirited bit of juvenilia, chock-full of opposition, the presentation transformed became an essay in Gerrard's edited volume, *Writing at Century's End: Essays on Computer-Assisted Composition*. The title and focus of the essay certainly seem quaint to me now—CAI and word-processing seemed all there was to worry about. With CD-Rom, the Net, Moo's, IRC, and the web mere twinkles in most educators' eyes, I wrote:

Where are we now with computers and writing? It's not news to report that the practical problems of finding, implementing and developing CAI or word processing packages can still frustrate and hinder the efforts of capable, inventive faculty. However, many colleagues across the writing curriculum who have rushed to participate in this quickly changing discipline now face issues for which they are unprepared: the political repercussions of technological interests within English and humanities departments. In the humanities, the decision to include computers in the curriculum has added a new dimension to the traditional, if unfortunate, political battle between writing specialists and literary specialists. (122)

Have fertile grounds of contention sprouted among rhetoric, composition, and technology specialists as any of us, accepting empowerment through existing hierarchies, forget to bring our colleagues along? I'm reminded of a comment of mine that got a good laugh in that 1985 presentation—a comment unfit for the published essay—that technology specialists in composition often seemed to be the "creme de la scum" not only of English programs, but of composition programs.

I go on in that essay to relate briefly the story of an assistant professor who pays a price for his personal relationship with technology. After relating the kudos received by his institution for his popular software development work, I ask this:

At tenure time? This assistant professor. . . has been scrupulous in collecting tenure letters, wisely finding those referees who can legiti-

mately testify that, yes, developing good software can be akin to scholarship in its most traditional sense, and who can legitimately contend that the publication contracts themselves testify to the software's significance. . . . Obviously, the best research and teaching faculty in the humanities will have to abandon potentially ground-breaking, computer-related work unless they can reap rewards of promotion and tenure. . . . (122-123)

Two distinct scenarios demand that I go back to think about 1985. What follows are two very distinct stories, one mere anecdote, the other a contemporary story of an academic life. As I attempt to reconcile the economics and politics of technology in 1996 with interests of pedagogy and scholarship, and particularly as I began to review an embarrassment of riches—the wide-ranging topics of the successful abstracts submitted for Twelfth Annual Computers and Writing Conference—the Gerrard volume was new once again in its significance for me. Must we devalue existing technologies of literacy as we encircle “the new”? Paradoxically, must we devalue those who dare to academically conceptualize or make concrete “the new”? Perhaps, I hope, some things have changed.

## Click Two, Scenario One

I walk into my office one morning. It is probably 1994. I enact the usual first-thing rituals: stumble on essays slipped under my door, after hours; turn on the computer; cast a jaundiced eye towards the message light flashing on the telephone; immediately forget the list of things I need to take care of as I walk to the chair behind my desk. My colleague Hugh Rank (we call him “Duke”) appears at my door, waving a copy of that morning’s *Chicago Tribune*. Before I can say “good morning,” he asks this: do you know the opening lines to the song, “Will You Still Love Me Tomorrow?” Throwing caution to the wind, deliberately ignoring the potentially gender-biased punch line that might greet the completion of this apparently bizarre, if indirect request, I forget my nanosecond of hesitation. Squaring my shoulders, looking straight into his intense, cold blue-eyed “I dare you” gaze, I take the challenge, an adolescent sneer morphing my features. My delight quickly overtakes my calm, cool veneer. I recite as follows, my voice modestly tempered by rising passion and a growing, arrogant certainty of verbal ownership, an hegemony of utterance:

Tonight you’re mine completely  
You give your love so sweetly  
Tonight the light of love is in your eyes. . . .  
But will you love me tomorrow?

Ever the overachiever, I continue, as my colleague gasps, voice ringing with a peculiar pride, “They’re right! It’s true! This article in the *Trib* said any woman worth her salt over forty would know these lyrics!”

Is this a lasting treasure,  
Or just a moment’s pleasure?  
Can I believe the magic of your sighs?  
Will you still love me tomorrow?

(There really is a relevant point here. Hang on.) Yes, perhaps I celebrate through that anecdote a reasonably good long-term memory that belies a pre-adolescence persistently and unreasonably attentive to popular culture. But my point is not that I'm over forty (and was over forty in 1994); it's not that I'm particularly obsessed with songs about a certain kind of initiation and a certain, inevitable kind of abandonment. But for our purposes, I ask that you keep in mind the Shirelles' slightly varying, but consistently haunting refrain: *Will you still love me tomorrow?*

## Click Three, Scenario Two

This is a story about a colleague in composition. This is a story of evolution and change. While I will do all I can to mask her identity, some of you will know this colleague. You must know that this is a true story inasmuch as any story can be completely true and that the central figure in the story has given me permission to speak about her. In 1993, our colleague, let's call her Simone, received a letter from her department chair in this alternative college within a fairly traditional university. Simone had been awarded the 1993 President's Award for Excellence in Teaching.<sup>2</sup> Among other things, the chair wrote as follows:

The President's Award for Excellence in Teaching, awarded this year to only six faculty, is a highly prestigious award that honors Simone, the \_\_\_\_\_ Program, and the College of \_\_\_\_\_. . . . It is, moreover, the eighth time in only eight years that a faculty member of our program, and our College, have been honored in this manner. Simone, we are extremely proud of your wonderful achievement. . . . Above all, we appreciate your fierce devotion to teaching and to our students, and the special dedication of your vision, creativity, knowledge, and skills to interdisciplinary education and critical areas of learning, especially writing-across-the-curriculum.

Unmentioned in that citation is the additionally significant fact of Simone's also having secured a major grant from a major government agency to implement a WAC- and-computer-based distance learning project, called "Creating a 'Campus' Through Writing: A Three-Year Computer-Supported Writing Project in Watsamatta U's Interdisciplinary Writing Program." To have received a grant in 1992 for computer-based work is not insignificant; a later, retention grant from the same agency is but small indication of the project's vast success. Why is the project significant and particularly successful? The principal investigator, Simone, is almost prescient, having anticipated a national "highway" linking computers in primary, secondary, and post-secondary schools. And she has been determined to link faculty and students alike through difference and interdisciplinarity, to make faculty and students alike feel that this is "their" project, that overused but evocative term "ownership" here illustrated with greatest relief and clarity. Technology becomes here the empowering mechanism to dominate the complexities of distance learning, of WAC, to grapple construc-

tively with issues of adult learners, to secure the achievements of those students often called non-traditional, to reconcile issues of teaching, interdisciplinarity, collaborative teaching and learning, ownership and publication of student texts. In short, this is a thickly cross-sectional, thoughtfully comprehensive endeavor that takes as its concerns many of the issues central not only to composition studies in particular, but to higher education in general. And technology is the pivotal point upon which all will rest. As is appropriate, technology becomes the means, not the focus, of the work itself (this, too, a vast change over the predominantly technology-centered work of 1985).

Simone and her staff overcame the inevitable technical difficulties of an older building, older equipment. Simone through sheer determination, armed with persuasive tools of pedagogy and scholarship in composition and in composition and technology, overcame a faculty version of the double-bind effect: that is, trying to convince multidisciplinary faculty of the value of, first, writing, and then, second and simultaneously, of the value of technology for the teaching and learning of writing. In her brief abstract, Simone summarized the purpose of this collectively-based project as follows. (You'll note that "virtual" as an online descriptor had not as of yet been popularly coined, so the word "campus" is in quotes.)

This three-year computer-supported writing project in an interdisciplinary studies program for adults is designed to create and strengthen a "campus" around writing for both students and faculty. The project includes 1) computer conferencing for all courses; 2) a graduate student in composition to provide "writing center" consultation on computer conference; 3) faculty team teaching and collaborative- classroom research through computer conferencing; and 4) publication projects from all courses to be distributed to students of the subsequent semester.

And as Simone wrote elsewhere in the grant materials, "We are prepared to prove that our activities will create a 'campus,' where writing improves because it is valued."

Exemplary in many ways, the project components prefigure web- and net-like strategies, with the assertion that grant-supported writing and technology "activities will naturally lead to others." Simone fully plans for technology to thoroughly embrace the best and most significant of on- and off-line literacies and delivery methods while responding to the following questions:

Can writing create an informal campus community among undergraduates scattered throughout an urban metropolitan area? Will that community act and act collectively to encourage better writing from its members? Will collaborative teaching and writing among faculty also contribute to that community? Will collaboration help faculty become better teachers of writing?

Twenty-four faculty and 1,000 or more students directly benefited from the project, not counting, of course, the many who could subsequently benefit from the project's dissemination. Lest we forget, this proposal was conceived,

delineated, and written just before the populist onslaught of online services, even of prevalent Internet access on most campuses and the communities that have sprung from them. Simone, it appears, *was* prescient.

What's different in 1990 or 1991, when this proposal was written for 1992-1995, and 1985? Simone's project merges the best of composition theory and practice along with the technology available to her and which she could make available to her students. Reams of carefully and well-written, rhetorically sophisticated documentation from within and outside the actual program—from student evaluations on and off-line to outside evaluators to feedback from participating faculty—all of these indicate that the program was evaluated self-critically, thoroughly, and positively in an ongoing fashion. Rounding out the project's usefulness for its various and complex audiences, guest speakers came to campus for both students and faculty. As the Dean of Simone's college wrote in 1992 to government proposal reviewers, in addition to its pedagogical and practical importance, the grant is administratively "very valuable in accomplishing the academic objectives of our program: retention of students through viable instruction; increasing students' ability to handle prose composition; fostering acquisition of thinking and communication skills; and emphasizing written language as the foundation of the educational process." While the grant became her life (as such commitments often seem to) along with directing the WAC program in her college, Simone nonetheless managed also to meet her own needs as a scholar, and, along the way, to meet what she perceived to be the strategies for success in securing tenure. She continued to publish in more traditional areas of rhetoric (in addition to publications about the project), to present at conferences, to secure a book contract for a manuscript she is working on, I suspect, as I revise this essay. She has, as it is said in those useful baseball metaphors about life, covered the bases: service, teaching, scholarship, contributions not only to her institution but to the profession at large. She has helped her *administrators* meet their academic and budgetary needs. And, needless to say, she has, through her other work and through the grant, brought her institution considerable, positive notoriety.

In 1985, our exemplary assistant professor spends all of his time developing software with what he assumes is the tacit approval of the institutional hierarchy and suffers at what reveals itself to be the hand of traditional academe. In 1996, Simone, well beyond the facile 1985 question of word processing versus CAI versus software development, illustrates technology's vital role in embracing literacies, so-called non-traditional students, enacting through technological advances composition's professed celebration of interdisciplinarity, of collaboration, of empowerment. Simone's work even supports the usually suspect goals of the administrators to whom she is responsible. Oh, yes, and she manages a project office staff, from whom she sincerely and skillfully exacts loyalty and fine work. Better yet, she is at the forefront of discovery while still publishing good work in traditional academic forums.

The Shirelles and their refrain crescendo in the background as the envelope arrives. It is 1996. Simone does not get tenure. We are reminded now

that "click" (as in "click here") echoes the epiphanous "click" of early feminism—the point at which various pieces of the psychological and real-time puzzle come together to make one realize that she's been had.

## Click Four

Many of you have undoubtedly read Yancey and Spooner's excellent essay in the May, 1996 CCC. The inevitability of hierarchy, only one of a number of crucial, salient issues that they so astutely articulate, is readily apparent online. In 1995, I spoke at the CCCC as a respondent in a session about the *Pre-Text List* ("Hyperizomatics"). I also spoke about moderated lists, one in particular (I'll call it "List A") in which whatever participants write is filtered through and approved by the moderator. And as became apparent during the ensuing conversation during the conference session at the Washington Hyatt, the posts are "judged" as to their fitness, not only by the moderator, but by the readership; one tenured professor at an institution geographically close to my own made it frighteningly clear that he felt something of what, in his terms, seemed to be a moral obligation to judge the academic viability of even the most casually-intended and posted comment. A visible shudder passed through that room—the filled room with over half its population made up of very astute, hip-looking grad students in dark clothing—as does a wave through a grandstand during a Cubs' game.

Given the occasional problems one encounters on the Net in accurately assessing a writer's tone and intention, our online conversations are decidedly less conversational, less inherently free (more potentially damaging?), say, than the one we had in the meeting room in Washington. No matter how we choose to categorize, genre-ize, or anti-genre-ize the writing and reading that occurs online (e-mail as genre, of course, having been the starting point for Yancey and Spooner's wide-reaching essay), we on Lists have to grapple with additional ramifications of hegemony and empowerment. More often than not, we want to assume the ethical, moral, and political sensibilities of the moderator—or those we would like him (in that particular case) to have.

In stark contrast to "List A," "List B," to which I also belong, allows the user to freely use the "reply" function to post immediate and even ill-considered contributions to the list. To what extent does the hierarchy of knowing when to post, how, and to whom counter the "freedom" of the Net and that which is at least implied by the List "conversations?" To what extent are we aware of "List A's" side-conversations—admittedly privileged discussions with the moderator that go unbeknownst to the rest of the List's participants? Why indeed choose to directly moderate a list in a type of Victorian, intrusive, omniscient, quasi-Thackeray-an form? The implications are implications for real life. Unlike George Burns who, while playing himself in the Burns and Allen program, had the ability to turn on an imagined kind of dedicated television set in his home, a fantasy-technology of his 1950s moment, and "see" in omniscient, visionary

fashion exactly what was going on next door, the moderator of "List A" has such a lens. He and others like him quietly control and manipulate forms of academic life under, it would appear, the guise of actually not doing so. What ethical issues are involved in these choices and actions? How might this all fit into what Jeanne Gunner calls (and you knew he'd come into this somehow) the "Foucauldian notion of power and our multiple modes of existence within the web of institutionalized power structures" (1)? Gunner, here, refers to offline webs, although the other easily holds true as well. In the case of moderated lists, how are we implicated in our support of a replicated power structure that is created, ironically, in the name of not doing so?

Even on the free-form, comparatively kind and gentle "List B," as Gunner nonetheless notes, we can "see the colonialist imperative at work—the attempt to expand the power of those who control the field, to expand control over its members and to contend with other 'powers' in an effort to justify the field's existence, agenda, and methods" (6). The formally moderated "List A" offers even stronger evidence of colonialism in the guise of vocational practice; the moderator can't simply pretend that he, in this case, is merely a neutral clearing-house for messages. But even by participating in more accessible lists such as "List B," Gunner would suggest, "our positions force us into stances that serve interests other than those we may assume we serve" (8). As I noted in my CCC response to Yancey and Spooner, the Net "effortlessly envelops existing genres and communications methodologies (and anti-methodologies) and (less obviously and more insidiously) all-too-familiar hegemonic practices" (279). Not surprisingly and most fittingly, then, we inform our thinking about technology with the best (one hopes) of our composition-related contexts, and, quite often, our interdisciplinarity comes to the fore. And as we embrace technologies and equate them with our multiple, sometimes *competing missions* as writing instructors, the questions we ask become still more complex, more open to critique within our discipline and certainly by those outside of it.

As a Keynote Speaker for the Twelfth Annual Conference on Computers and Writing, I was provided beforehand with the mostly single-page abstracts for the Conference through the generosity of Christine Hult, Conference Organizer, so that I might then include reference to selected presentations as part of my own.

When I shared some of the abstracts for this conference with several technologically-immersed colleagues in the humanities (in the spirit, I thought, of our new WAC program), one colleague, an artist who also specializes in Web page design and who has taught Net courses in art criticism, sharply questioned whether teaching Interface design is *appropriate* in the *writing* classroom. When, he asked, is designing Web pages *writing*? His response to the title of another presentation indicated that he thought we were a small bunch of rarefied, privileged people with unlimited technological access, unlike, in his view, the situation at most institutions of higher learning in this country. Interesting, isn't it, for many of us who for years have felt on the margins of our programs or departments to be viewed as privileged, narrow, overspecialized—the way we as

compositionists often type those Arnold-loving (read "narrow" and "elite") literature people.

Indeed, the conference program legitimately seemed to stretch the gamut from, possibly, those in the rarefied air of technological privilege to others working wonders with far less. But another colleague, in film, exploded at the thought expressed in one proposal that "Students already possess expertise in understanding and interpreting images, musical and other sounds, and video materials" and therefore possessed at least that form of literacy if they couldn't write. Even I believe this to be an overstatement, but my colleague retorted as if in conversation (in which we weren't), "Does watching MTV mean that students are expert at interpreting images the way I might erroneously assume that they can interpret *texts* just because they can scan *Rolling Stone*?" "And," she continued, "how can this other person describe her students' web pages as a '*lasting product*' when web pages are alive, ever-changing, ever-linking?" Ouch. It would have hurt more, though, if she'd known to say, "You say writing is a process; web page design and maintenance is one, too, like multiple drafting, and you never even get to 'best yet,' the way your students do with essays." Her point was well-taken. Technology does not implicitly allow us as compositionists to take on destructive assumptions about other disciplines. By its essence, technology (as Simone illustrates effortlessly through her project) becomes as interdisciplinary as we hope composition studies to be in general.

In another vein, or, if you wish, another link, George Rhinehart and Vivan Rice of Syracuse University noted that their presentation would suggest issues "that hypertext raises for teachers by examining the use of hypertext in a number of writing courses and the theoretical positions put forth by Nelson, Landow, Bolter, and others who have written about the implications this technology has for readers and writers." They ask, among other things, "what is good hypertext writing? Which of our values for good writing will we be *permitted* to keep?" (my emphasis). I find the possibly deliberate phrasing of the last question most interesting: *who is doing the permitting? Do we assist in our own demise?*

Rhinehart and Rice perhaps inadvertently have raised in their presentation abstract an issue that was the subject of an essay in the June 1996 *Harper's* magazine, an article that I suspect would attribute that "permission" and the power to give it to the economic forces of capitalism and not to the rather cheaply-held academic marketplace that we hope, at least, trades in forms of good judgment and judgments.

In that *Harper's* essay, "Virtual Grub Street: Sorrows of a Multimedia Hack," Paul Roberts notes that "If the emergence of the so-called new media [—CD ROM, for instance—] has clarified anything, it's just how malleable literary standards and professional expectations are, how quickly they can wither or mutate or be ignored altogether in the presence of powerful novelty and cold cash" (72). Later in the essay, he asserts,



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To be fair, if a multimedia writer has the technical expertise and the financial resources to control the entire storyline process [of a CD Rom], some interesting literary and journalistic forms are possible. Allowing readers to choose their own research paths, or in the case of nonlinear fiction, to choose among multiple outcomes, probably qualifies as a genuine step forward in literary evolution. The reality, however, is that most multimedia writers are not in control of the entire process or even a large chunk thereof. Multimedia is the epitome of corporate production. . . . (76)

When we think, then, about the pleasures and challenges of the non-linear narrative, of truly evolving to the natural outcomes unenvisioned even by reader response, what are we advocating? Roberts says this: "Nonlinearity advocates often claim that a conventional writer's frustration with this new form stems from the loss of authorial control. We are angry that readers can pick and choose among our ideas or mix our texts with information from entirely separate sources. Mostly, though, we are threatened by the new kind of mind such writing requires" (76-77).

Roberts quotes Jay David Bolter as writing that "A philosophy of mind for the coming age of writing will have to recognize the mind as a network . . ." (77). Elsewhere I've called Bolter "a noteworthy muse" ("Technology" 594). But as reasonable people, should we join Roberts in asking if frustration over the possibility of losing control is indeed so selfish or authoritarian? Roberts answers the question: "We can hardly expect musicians or sculptors to allow their work to be pulled apart and reassembled with bits and pieces from other artists. We writers are no less invested in our work and cannot be expected to delight in the prospect of merely contributing to a collective, egoless supertext" (77). I am touched and taken, then, by our colleagues' use in their abstract of the word "permitted," particularly when I read Roberts's conclusion. The bleakest irony of the digital revolution, to quote him again, is "that we so willingly took part in our own extinction" (77). Echoing the Armageddon-like fears that Ellen Strenski described during the conference as expressed by her literature and composition colleagues, Roberts attributes this extinction less to decision making on the part of good writers and readers, but to economics, to the forces of the marketplace.

Elsewhere in the conference program and in a decidedly different vein, Patricia Ericson of Dakota State University explored the new avenues afforded by on-line research with regard to peer tutoring, attempting to determine why one on-line tutor in particular was as effective as she was and was requested most often as the on-line contact person for students looking for assistance with writing. Anne Wysocki legitimately questioned the forms of subjectivity implied through standard academic formatting of text that encourage the precise forms of thought we work so hard to break apart; to her credit, rather than argue for the abandonment of print, Wysocki then suggests in her abstract that we might find still "new forms for thought and agency in the shape of our marks on the page." Her view contrasted starkly with another proposal in which conventional forms of belletristic prose were dismissively and inappropriately labeled as "mori-

bund." But Joan Latchaw's presentation abstract asked one of a number of possible and healthy questions. Her title, "Online Discussions: Help or Hype?" asks, among other things, "Of what real use is a student information bank?" What accounts for different levels of interaction among online groups and the work each accomplishes? Latchaw's abstract shocked me into a type of intellectual, pedagogical, and critical vigilance; she implicitly demands that we look at technology-related claims and examine whether or not many of these claims also hold true for offline methods of teaching and learning and for more linear forms of texts.

Print space, of course, prevents my engaging in the Whitmanlike catalog I'd hoped to give regarding the truly excellent conference abstracts I was privileged to read and presentations I was privileged to hear. Conference attendees heard a searing hope versus reality piece by Krause and Clark, a significant progress report on a noted English program-wide effort by Myron Tuman and colleagues; Bar-Natan and Hertz-Lazarowitz on children creating community despite distance; Donna Reiss on poetry and cyberspace; Kemp on Moos, Linda Myers on Moos; Batson, Gruber, Gerrard, Love, Sullivan, LeBlanc, Crump, Condon. The record of this collective program, Whitmanlike, embraces online dissertation defenses, burnout, electronic discourse as dialect. The theme of convergences threaded among many presentations, offering recurring links, albeit to different places. How do we create the larger community to evolve the hierarchies that ground us? Is this even possible—or can cyberspace at best make us more *attentive* to the ways in which we inevitably replicate these hierarchies? In addition to salient issues of access, class, race, and power, of course, comes gender; as conference-goers heard from Gail Hawisher in great detail, women persist in e-space and are certainly not solely its victims as the popular press would have us believe.

In the end the conference raised many more questions than it could possibly answer, questions about composition, technology, institutions, and people. How do we link in a larger political alliance to influence decisions regarding tenure, decisions in which glass overlays the glass ceiling that restricts even off-line WPAs? How do we embrace all that has come before the Net not to destroy, but redefine? Can we make new the inevitable hierarchies that, in one, denies tenure to our colleague Simone and, in another ascribes in its variant forms canonical status to "Will You Still Love Me Tomorrow?," our motto-of-warning for those initially celebrated by institutions in 1996 as in 1985 for technologically-related work but whose tangible rewards are ultimately denied? What can we, linked, do for the Simones of our professional acquaintance, whose tenure decisions at non-technical institutions may have a good deal to do with the relative value of their technological interests?

Can we foster a technological ethic of care to guide departments that only pretend a favorable climate until the inevitable abandonment of tenure time? Simone's institution, in fact, abandoned the online campus program despite its documented success when the grant money ran out, the project's having been,

indeed, a moment's pleasure, not lasting treasure. Are the most powerful among us merely infatuated with technology, the equivalent of a one-night cyberstand?

Another question, one that also demands our immediate attention: what are the additional implications of these issues for WPAs? First and foremost, WPAs must add to their inevitably overburdened intellectual and administrative demands yet another: an appreciation and understanding of the concerns and issues surrounding technology and composition. For instance, how should a WPA respond when the chair or dean demands (ill-advisedly, in my view) that all sections of composition take place as often as feasible in a newly-acquired (and expensive) computer laboratory? Even this relatively simple, ubiquitous situation requires that the WPA assert that, while one can point to a variety of bad ways to teach writing, there are certainly numerous good ways—several of which, of course, can be implemented without frequent (if any) in-class computer use. How does a WPA's response to this direct issue and others regarding technology—tenure of computer-immersed faculty, issues of student access, and so on—potentially complicate and exacerbate existing concerns about the limits of a WPA's authority? Or concerns about the still-prevalent practice of hiring untenured faculty to suffer the dynamics of highly politicized writing programs—a difficult job with or without additional concerns about technology? What alliances must a good WPA secure to successfully traverse the inevitable hierarchies not only within English departments and universities in general but within composition programs themselves? As WPAs we must confront misguided thinking about technologies (as if misperceptions about the worth of work in composition generally are not trouble enough).

We legitimately concern ourselves with hegemony and empowerment among our students. How do we enhance awareness that these hierarchies replicate themselves not only online, but in our own offline communities of scholarship and practice within composition—and as colleagues who choose to be either inclusive or exclusive of the Arnoldians *and* the technology-based humanists? Will we through our technological works become like Walt Whitman—large, containing multitudes? How can our ethics be enacted, then, for those who feel they must mask their identities in cyberspace to be treated fairly? (Or when well-intentioned composition instructors encourage students to mask their identities for a skewed version of “freedom?”) When will we start talking more about *race*? About ethnic and religious identity and difference—when we cannot “see” these differences and therefore assume an impossible, ideological neutral?

As Homi Bhabha writes in *The Location of Culture*, “there is no given community or body of people whose inherent, radical historicity emits the right signs” (27). “The image of human identity and, indeed, human identity as image . . . are inscribed in the sign of resemblance” (49). When we misguidedly speak of utopian communities, then, we might well evidence the desire, in Bhabha's terms, of “the desire for an originality which is . . . threatened by differences of race, colour, and culture” (75). In *The Politics of Meaning: Restoring Hope and Possibility in an Age of Cynicism*, Michael Lerner invokes the philosopher-ethicist

Emmanuel Levinas, who believes that an ethical act potentially occurs through our capacity to see the face of the other; it is precisely this capacity to *recognize fully* the sanctity of the other that generates any sense of caring and ethical obligation (214). These are words to consider as we encourage or encounter anonymity and masking online, as we overhear (as I did recently) well-meaning teachers struggle to conceal their ill-conceived excitement as they describe a computer-networked classroom in which one "gradually won't have to use books anymore."

Are we still very much in 1985—oppositional, exclusive—despite a remarkable upping of the technological ante? I am reminded of the corruption of Charles Foster Kane, the once-liberal newspaperman turned yellow journalist, converted by his politically conservative staff, as I reread the conclusion of Yancey and Spooner's seminal CCC essay. They warn and warn well that "Working on e-mail, constructing the messages within a pre-genre that is still being shaped itself—is constructing us, too" (278).

## Notes

1. This essay was originally presented, in a slightly different version, as a keynote address at the 1996 Computers and Writing Conference (Logan, Utah, May 1996). My original title was "The Conference Program and a Tale of Two Colleagues: A Keynote Address to the Twelfth Annual Computers and Writing Conference."
2. All quotes related to the story of Simone come from grant-related documents provided me as one of the project's evaluators. I attempt here to protect Simone's identity, the identities of her administrators, and that of Simone's (now former) institution; I cite without titles or pages.

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### **WPA Consultant-Evaluator Service for Writing Programs**

The WPA consultant-evaluator service helps colleges and universities develop and assess their writing programs. Operating on a method similar to regional accreditation agencies, WPA evaluations have several stages. WPA requests a written program self-study, sends a team of two trained consultant-evaluators to campus for interviews and on-site evaluation, and then compiles a final report. A six-month follow-up report from the campus completes the process.

WPA's consultant-evaluators are leaders in the field of composition. They come from four-year colleges, community colleges, and universities. All are experienced writing program administrators with a national perspective on composition teaching and program administering. As evaluators, their primary goal is to determine a program's unique strengths and weaknesses, not to transform all writing programs into clones of their own. They recognize that every program must retain its individual character, serve a particular community, and solve special problems.

Institutions pay the travel and accommodations cost for the consultant-evaluator team, plus an honorarium. While WPA suggests a \$1,500 honorarium to each consultant-evaluator, client institutions agree on an honorarium with the consultant-evaluator.

Applications for the service should be initiated 3 months before consultant-evaluators visit a campus. WPAs, department chairs, or college administrators may apply to:

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