Sibylle Gruber, ed. *Weaving a Virtual Web: Practical Approaches to New Information Technology*. Urbana, IL., NCTE, 2000. 325 pages. $26.95. Website: http://jan.ucc.nau.edu/~sg7/weaving/.

Review

Nuts and Bolts

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*F*or teachers working at the intersections of networked computing and writing instruction and theory, there are still very few books that we can point to as exemplars of practical information for newcomers, interested outsiders, or people interested in moving beyond using email in their writing or literature classrooms. Sibylle Gruber and her contributors in this book have gone a long way toward solving that problem. It stands in stark contrast to other books treating emerging technologies for English studies, in that it moves easily and directly to Monday-morning issues without eschewing larger questions about literacy and writing instruction. A short foreword by Gail Hawisher and Cynthia Selfe, themselves exemplars of integrated theoretical and practical approaches to emerging technologies, acknowledges how well the book "grounds itself in the theory and pedagogy that have revolutionized writing and literacy instruction over the past few decades" (ix). Gruber's preface informs readers that the book is "a practical reference" aimed at "teachers who are trying to integrate the World Wide Web into their classrooms for the first time" and ready to begin trying variations after their first WWW-teaching experiences (xv). Her introduction, "Hypermedia Technologies for the Classroom," emphasizes ways the Web can support "existing educational goals such as involving students in the learning process,

using collaboration [. . .] and creating a space for active learning, exploration, and innovation" (xvii-iii). The contributors address questions of pedagogy, planning and preparing, research, Web-publishing, and potential problems of working with the Web (xxii). I wish I'd had such a book when I began moving my courses from Local Area Network software such as the Daedalus Integrated Writing Environment to the larger field of the WWW.

     Weaving a Virtual Web is divided into twenty chapters and five sections: Planning and Structuring Web-Enhanced Courses; Encouraging Research on and with the Web; Supporting Collaboration and Interaction; Publishing on the Web; and a Resource Appendix that is also available on the World Wide Web. The appendix identifies and annotates key Internet resources for teachers of writing. Individual chapters range from very specific approaches to particular technologies, such as MOOs or websites, to more general treatments of digital technologies in the classroom, to more theoretically informed discussions of rhetoric in digital classes. Readers of *WPA:Writing Program Administration* will take special interest in Section III, "Supporting Collaboration and Interaction," which features chapters specifically geared toward general issues of writing program development

     The contributors provide sample assignments and rationale for integrating the World Wide Web in technical writing courses, ways to think about the rhetoricality and positionality of disciplinary knowledge in concert with students, and a continuous emphasis on the varieties of collaboration and cooperation that networked writing environments can provide. WPAs will likely be interested in this book for how it can help them think about the implications of emerging technologies in their writing programs—already large and protean even without distributed networks of information and discourse. To that end, chapters such as Elizabeth Burow-Flak's "From Castles in the Air to Portfolios in Cyberspace: Building Community Ethos in First-Year Rhetoric and Composition" will be most useful. Burow-Flak, an assistant professor at Valparaiso University, was trained at the University of Texas-Austin, home of the Computer Writing and Research Laboratory of John Slatin and Peg Syverson. She acknowledges many of the problems with having students design Websites, and points out their analogs in papertexts, such as improper use of sources and inappropriateness of content (177). Following moves to contextualize Web-writing in the generalized space of first-year writing, she outlines a specific assignment sequence for introducing the Web to students through search

engines and evaluation of sites, moving to production of Websites directed at specific audiences. Hers is a fairly typical chapter in the way it integrates current thinking about literacy with a discussion of specific instructional practices for Internet-enhanced teaching.

This is not a book like David Bell and Barbara M. Kennedy's *The Cybercultures Reader* or Andrew Herman and Thomas Swiss's *The World Wide Web and Contemporary Cultural Theory* to which readers interested in theoretical or social implications of emerging technologies are likely to turn. Neither is it very data-driven, like Boyd H. Davis and Jeutonne P. Brewer's *Electronic Discourse: Linguistic Individuals in Virtual Space*. Neither is it an introduction to computers for academics, such as Ira H. Bernstein and Paul Havig's *Computer Literacy*, and not even a broad-based hiply designed introduction to the Web for teaching, like Anne B. Keating and Joseph Hargitai's *The Wired Professor*. Some will grumble that Gruber and her contributors do not present a great deal of empirical evidence in support of their stated belief that "exploring Web pages and creating online voices can improve students' communication skills while at the same time contributing to a greater awareness of their audiences" (xxi). But while contributors, such as Dean Rehberger, are aware that "when speaking of the Internet, it is easy to slip into hyperbole" (195), they avoid tackling the larger social and empirical questions that are rightly beyond the scope of their book, and focus on practical day-to-day uses for writing classes. If readers grant Rehberger's contention (implicitly shared throughout the volume) that the real power of the Internet is "that it offers a portable class network that is fun, cheap, and easy to use, thus helping instructors employ the current methods of writing pedagogy" (195), then they will find crucial assistance in the form of specific assignments, clearly stated rationales for use, and a familiar frames of reference.

Works Cited

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